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Rising homeless deaths in San Diego County raise alarms

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Posted 3:51 PM, Nov 25, 2023

SAN DIEGO (KGTV) — New data shows a record number of homeless deaths in San Diego County this year, officials said.

According to the San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office, at least 550 unhoused San Diegans have died in 2023, marking the third consecutive year with more than 500 homeless fatalities. The leading causes include drug overdoses and various accidents.

"We're in a position where we're providing more services, but people are dying faster than ever on our streets," said John Brady, a local homeless advocate.

A significant contributing factor is the increasing number of people living on the streets.

"More people are living on the streets than ever before," said Brady.

Brady lived on the streets for a year before working with organizations such as the Regional Task Force on Homelessness and founding his own group, Lived Experience Advisers. He said the situation now is more dire than in 2016 when he was homeless.

"You could find a reasonably priced unit that somebody with either a starting level or lower level income, or social security, could afford and live in," Brady said. "We don't have that anymore."

For those trying to make ends meet, especially seniors and people with disabilities, the challenge has only been exacerbated.

"If you're disabled, which is a majority of people on our streets, and you've spent more than a year on the streets, you fall in a category of people who lose an average of 17 years on their life. They will die prematurely," Brady said.

He said the same reality also applies to those in shelters or any place that is not home.

"Yet we have not provided a solution. Homelessness ends with a home. All the rest of it is interim," said Brady.

"That's why we're also focusing on rent subsidies, particularly for seniors. Because it is far cheaper for us to keep them in their apartment than it is to have them go through the rehousing process and all the medical trauma that goes with it," he said.