

JANUS CAREGIVERS: STRUGGLING ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Low pay and soaring housing costs are hindering Santa Cruz County’s response to the opioid epidemic as addiction counselors struggle to get by

In November 2017, 84 workers at Janus of Santa Cruz voted to form a union. They are negotiating their first contract to win higher wages, better health benefits, and improved working conditions. Despite being front-line service providers, Janus’ workers struggle to make ends meet in Santa Cruz County—one of the most expensive regions in the nation, with the second-highest poverty rate in California.¹

What is Janus of Santa Cruz?

Janus of Santa Cruz is a 40-year-old non-profit substance use disorder treatment facility with programs in Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Janus is Santa Cruz County’s largest substance use disorder treatment contractor, and reports serving over 2,500 clients each year.

Who are the newly-unionized workers at Janus?

Workers are substance use treatment counselors, treatment technicians, and administrative staff. They live throughout the county, primarily in Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Many are in recovery themselves and have a deep commitment to helping others; some have benefited directly from Janus’ services. They work in the Detox Program, Methadone Clinics, Drinking Driver Program, Peri-natal and Adult Residential Programs, the Sobering Center, and the Intensive Outpatient Programs. On average, NUHW’s members have worked at Janus for less than four years; in 2016, the turnover rate was nearly 40 percent. This revolving door compromises the quality of care for clients in crisis, whose recovery depends on consistent attention from experienced staff.



“I feel everyone deserves a fair chance to start over and be heard. I’m in recovery — a little over four years clean — and I think we all deserve a second chance to reach our full potential, reunite with our families, and live a healthy life. I want to give back to my community and help others regain stability to do the same.”

*John Manley
Intake Referral Specialist*



“The low wages at Janus are simply not enough to live independently in Santa Cruz County. And the health insurance Janus offers does not cover basic medical expenses; some of my clients on Medi-Cal have access to better care than I do! I would’ve had much-needed surgery long ago if it was covered. Instead, I’ve waited until the pain is unbearable and I’ll be over \$7,000 in debt when it’s over.”

*Anthony Hong
Counselor*

What is the status of Janus workers’ wages and benefits?

According to the county’s Living Wage Ordinance, workers need to make at least \$16.21 an hour to get by in Santa Cruz County — but 75 percent of Janus’ treatment techs and support staff earn far less, some as little as \$12 or \$13 an hour. Entry-level Community Mental Health Aides employed by the county start at \$23.31, while Janus counselors with over 10 years of experience earn less than \$20. As rental prices for two-bedroom apartments in Santa Cruz rise above \$2,000 a month, more workers are moving in with family or leaving the area so that they can afford housing near work. The poor health benefits available to Janus staff lead many to forego medical treatment and medications, including routine care for conditions like diabetes. Many Janus workers take on additional jobs to make ends meet, and rely on taxpayer-funded programs like Medi-Cal.

What is Janus' role in combating the opioid epidemic?

Santa Cruz County faces an opioid overdose death rate that is 2.5 times the state average.² Janus has received millions of dollars in federal, state and county funding to reverse this epidemic by expanding treatment services along the Central Coast.

The need is acute: The Urban Institute estimates that as of February 2018, up to 1,600 residents who are ready and willing to receive medication assisted treatment for opioid use could be turned away due to a shortage of providers.³ Janus' staff provide life-saving services, and although the county invested \$4.8 million in Janus in 2016, some workers still earn just \$1 above the minimum wage.

"I'm passionate about helping those struggling with addiction, and I would like to be a part of positive change. But the low wage at Janus forces me to work a second job as a waitress to provide my family's basic needs. A living wage would allow me to focus on my passion for serving our community."



*Jammie Arterberry
Intake Referral Specialist*

Raising wages for Janus workers would have a multiplier effect for the community, reducing turnover, and offering clients the benefit of an experienced, stable workforce.

The Janus workers are currently in negotiations, and the annual cost of their proposal for fair wages would be \$350,000, a fraction of Janus' total funding from the county. The California Department of Healthcare Services estimates that untreated substance use disorders cost Santa Cruz County residents more than \$207 million each year.⁴ Bringing Janus workers up to a living wage is an investment in healthcare jobs that keep clients out of hospitals and jails, and enables them to thrive, support families, and work in the county.

1. "Just the Facts: Poverty in California," from the Public Policy Institute of California. Based on 2013-2015 average: <http://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>
2. California Opioid Overdoes Surveillance Dashboard. California Department of Public Health. https://pdop.shinyapps.io/ODdash_v1/
3. "County Estimates of Opioid Use Disorder and Treatment Needs in California," from the Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/santa_cruz.pdf
4. Draft Strategic Plan for Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Intervention Services, 2014-2019, from the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency. <http://www.santacruzhealth.org/Portals/7/Pdfs/SubsAbuse%20Treatment%20Planning/2014%20ADP%20Draft%20Strategic%20Plan%20Report.pdf>



The National Union of Healthcare Workers represents 14,000 healthcare workers in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and long-term care facilities in California. Its members include registered nurses, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, opticians, certified nursing assistants, dietary aides, respiratory therapists, and housekeepers, among others.

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