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Oroville spillway failure, February 2017.
CN&R FILE PHOTO BY KEITH LANDER

state level, the county, nonprofits.

“What that really boils down to is the need for collaboration—and we [in Butte County] are so collaborative. We have to have a level of trust that others haven’t had to bear witness to.”

Orme has worked at City Hall since 2013, when he was hired as assistant city manager amid budget issues. That “financial emergency” is the starting point he identified for local crises—and it’s become a factor of the coronavirus pandemic, with municipal revenues directly tied to the health of the local economy.

Sales tax, primarily, funds city services. State mandates have shuttered businesses and put residents out of work. Compounding the impact, Chico State will conduct most classes online, reducing the population of students residing locally.

As before, the city manager will recommend to the City Council options for streamlining Chico government. Orme projects a shortfall of \$7 million but will assess second-quarter tax receipts and present a revised budget in October.

Butte County Behavioral Health also is feeling pinched: State cuts affecting federal funding will cost the department \$11 million in 2020-21, nearly 14 percent of its budget. This comes, Director Scott Kennelly noted, as demand for care has risen at the local agency that offers mental health and addiction services for low-income residents—including the increasing number of unemployed.

Kennelly’s staff and clients immediately felt the brunt of the state’s stay-at-home orders, which forced cancellation of in-person appointments except for extreme cases. Behavioral Health shifted to online and phone counseling, plus launched peer support via Zoom. He, like Sakuma at BCOE, said he receives calls from colleagues across the state seeking advice.

“The unfortunate part of having three or four emergencies is you’re battle tested, and there are some things you can do very quickly because you’re familiar with that,” Kennelly said. “I think Butte County—because we’ve had so many things happen, so many disasters—has had the ability to adapt quicker than some counties who haven’t experienced any fires and natural disasters.”

Remask/recover

Along with being battle tested, Butte County also is battle fatigued. Kennelly has observed the cumulative effect of crises not only on Behavioral Health clients but also staff, who also are living through the tumultuous events.

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Enloe Medical Center CEO Mike Wiltermood.
CN&R FILE PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY