

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

Payson Community Town Hall

October 19, 2022 – Payson, AZ

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness are interrelated, but they do not always occur together. Similar to a Venn diagram, there are instances when all three are involved or one can lead to the other. For example, someone can have financial challenges that cause them to become homeless. The anxiety and trauma of being homeless and losing hope can cause people to self-medicate with substance use. Similarly, alcohol or drug use can lead to homelessness. Having one of these challenges can create a vicious cycle with all three being experienced.

While one condition may lead to the other, someone can experience just one of the conditions without experiencing the other. The more proactive we can be to address these issues with programs and resources, and by reducing the stigma associated with experiencing these issues, the more we will be able to decrease the number of people who find themselves with these conditions.

There is a critical problem with the system which has so many roadblocks for needed treatment when someone is ready to seek help. This includes a lack of local resources and challenges with using the resources that are available. For example, there might be a location for treatment but no ability to transport someone to the treatment place, or a family cannot go to a shelter because children are not allowed. Reducing these roadblocks and streamlining treatment is essential to address and correct, as are prevention efforts that begin early with our children. The more we can provide a system with warm handoffs and people who are trained with local resources, the more successful we will be in addressing these challenges. While systemic issues are important to address, we can also have a positive impact simply by reaching out and connecting with those going through these challenges.

There are many doors into homelessness, but only a few narrow ones that allow people to get out. We need to create more doors out of homelessness. This includes education of professionals and of each other so that we reduce the stigma associated with those experiencing challenges, creating more affordable and transitional housing, having more peer supported programs, and raising awareness and knowledge of mental health issues.

We need to specifically address and include the perspective and needs of veterans.

We need to address stigma and the challenges that food issues (both quantity and quality) create.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

It is important to remove barriers and maximize resources. Collaborations across business and professional sectors (such as using MOUS, referral networks, or standardized forms) are impactful and should be supported. Reducing and eliminating red tape from state and federal resources would also make a big difference in creating the best programs for our community.

A team approach is best: bring teams together to provide food, housing, services for mental health and addiction challenges, and programs and support for children. We should be providing a hand up, going the extra mile with consistency and constant encouragement. We should change systemic incentives so that they encourage providers to better help those being served instead of just having them “pass through”.

Education is critical. This includes educating our community about the scope of the problem. We need to reduce the NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) and show that these issues are in our community and must be addressed. We should start early with prevention and education in our schools. We should

also expand programs that reduce harm and create solutions by having an intervention team that responds with or prior to law enforcement arriving. We need to empower our first responders with resources and information that allow them to best respond to those experiencing crisis. We should consider having advocates who can help those experiencing these issues navigate to needed services.

Overall, we should consider a centralized location for information and services that people can go to for information and to learn how to navigate needed services. It could also be a place where organizations experiencing success could share best practices and resources and where the community (including the tribal community) could meet regularly to continue these discussions and to keep working on solutions.

Finally, we need to keep harnessing the power for good by looking for creative solutions that reduce roadblocks to success by relying on our community's unique strengths and resources to move forward together.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

Create a consolidated, consistent team effort that is incentivized to success. It would be best if this was a state or federal level program with local offices that has consistent forms, best practices, programs, and advocates who can help navigate people to services needed. However, we do not need to wait for the state or federal government; we can begin local efforts now.

We should be sure to get the input and knowledge of those with lived experiences as we develop action plans. Peer support and resource navigators are essential to these efforts.

Building on the resources we have is a start.

We need to either find additional funding or redirect the available funding in a better way. We should explore creative and new resources for programs, housing, and integrated care. Funding should be more flexible so that we can use it in the way that works best for our community. When developing funding models for providers, we should look at how to set up incentives for providers, including outcome measures.

We should have ongoing town hall discussions to monitor current efforts, maintain community involvement, and reduce the silos that exist with providers and services.

Better communication and follow-up are essential for success. This might include a regular column or space in the Payson Roundup or attending the homeless task force meetings.

We need a more robust and impactful HMIS resource that connects all of Arizona, which may allow us to better provide services to those receiving them.

We need a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), which includes certified peer support employees. We also need to get programs in our area to help certify peer support professionals.

If we really want to solve these issues, we should walk in the shoes of those experiencing these challenges. We should also support educators and social workers by paying them a living wage.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Payson Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Take my own medication every day. Do everything I can to stay on the right track and help others stay on the right track.

- Commit to continuing my commitment to helping solve the current problems associated with homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse.
- Learn more about CCBHC & the committee/taskforce that is already in place.
- Pledge to invite our legislature and ask for a commitment and legislation passed to address a protective program to reduce homelessness, starvation, substance abuse and mental health. Raise teachers' pay and social workers pay.
- Make a positive difference in my community every day.
- Discuss the topics of "mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness" with my children. Ask their thoughts and encourage discussion of solutions.
- Listen to individuals experiencing homelessness and be their voice!
- Get the word out about intercommunity meetings and the homelessness task force.
- Follow up and work with others in the community to continue to bring this issue to light.
- Start using ACES in assessment work with other agencies to support relapse prevention programs.
- Connect with the organizations that provide resources and support to those who are dealing with mental health, substance abuse, homelessness (specifically NAMI & The Warming Center).
- Communicate with town personnel to get information on the town website.
- Volunteer for veterans and reach out the homeless with resources and real help.
- Start becoming more a part of my community.
- Continue to increase integration of mental health care into primary care clinics.
- Continue to discuss the initiatives shared here and follow up with the homeless committee.
- Reach out to local contacts discussing potential options with NCHC, and personally volunteer.
- Lobby at the local, state, and federal level for increased human services funding, spread the word about program availability and services provided.
- Be more aware of the needs of the community.
- Reach out to see how we can help as my business. Come to a future follow up town hall.
- Be ready, willing, forgiving, and nonjudgmental of people experiencing homelessness.
- Continue to be a part of this community, learning and growing from it daily.
- Continue to advocate for myself and others on the importance of integrative care for issues surrounding mental health, substance use & homelessness.
- Stop and listen. Be kind—don't judge. Show that someone cares.
- Become better informed about the resources that are available within our community, so that I can better provide information to the homeless who frequent my library.
- Advocate for more resources that are greatly needed.
- Find out if we can hold meetings at HES.
- Could our team help with food?
- Crisis plan for our hospital
- Resources on our BPMC website.

- Continue to voice the need to help other interested parties come together to address the issue of substance use, mental health, and homelessness.
- Schedule another meeting in a month here.
- I will continue doing the awesome work I, and my teams do.
- Continue to plant trees that I will never sit in the shade of.
- Help veterans in crisis.
- Bring hope and connection by sharing music with people over free dinner at The Warming Center on Fridays.
- Work with the mayor to get the town council involved with solutions.
- Feel more empowered to talk about the issues and propose solutions when talking with Arizona's leaders.
- Keep moving forward.
- Try to increase my knowledge of what I can do as an individual.
- Increase the participation of my faith-based community, and all faiths in the community. Educate the community.