

“MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS” COMMUNITY AND FUTURE LEADERS TOWN HALLS SUMMARY

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

- Mental health, substance use, and homelessness, while not always present together, are often linked.
- To ensure the best outcomes, especially for our most vulnerable, these issues must be addressed in a coordinated manner.
- Failure to address these problems can lead to a downward spiral that continues across generations.
- Arizona’s affordable housing crisis has become even worse due to the pandemic and rapidly escalating housing costs. Individuals and families can be homeless simply due to insufficient income.
- The stigma attached to these issues prevents those who need help from seeking assistance.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

- Reduce the stigma applied to those experiencing these challenges and increase equitable treatment by educating all levels of our communities about issues and available solutions.
- Emphasize the economic and social benefits of prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, and ongoing support for individuals.
- Invest in affordable housing, shelter beds, treatment facilities and transitional housing to provide housing first. Give particular attention to keeping families together, reaching out to unaccompanied teenagers, and accepting those exiting the criminal justice system.
- Effectively connect people with needed services through multiple entry points that treat people with empathy and respect and accept them where they are when they are seeking assistance. There can be no “wrong door.”
- Develop or improve mechanisms to treat populations such as juveniles (including those aging out of foster care), veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals, and the elderly. Consider the historical trauma of specific groups such as LGBTQ+, tribal members, victims of trauma, immigrants, and people of color.
- Ensure long term services are provided for individuals with a serious mental illness (SMI).
- Reduce barriers to services by addressing challenges with language, technology, and transportation.
- Remove silos and maximize resources through dialogue, collaboration, coordination, and creative problem solving between service providers, faith-based organizations, governmental representatives, elected officials, tribal authorities, business, families, and those with related lived experiences.
- Provide training and better assistance to first responders and law enforcement in responding to mental health issues. Involve our school systems, as truancy and limited literacy put children at greater risk for experiencing these challenges. Use more peer support systems and involve those with lived experiences as mentors.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

- Get out and talk to people doing this work, those with lived experience, and to members of the community. Be open minded and listen to all concerns.
- Increase affordable housing and support the Housing First Model with wraparound services.
 - Revise state and local zoning regulations to reduce barriers to the development of affordable housing.
 - Utilize existing programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and the Government Property Lease Excise Tax to provide incentives for the development of affordable housing.
 - Establish a local housing authority/land trust to take advantage of federal funds.
 - Create more permanent funding sources for the support of affordable housing projects.
- Destigmatize and invest in mental health.
 - Educate the community about these issues and what brings people to these situations.
 - Increase education with younger generations and schools to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues. Begin at an early age to teach basic mental wellness skills as well as when and where to seek help.
 - Provide more support for schools, government agencies, service providers and caregivers, including resiliency and vicarious trauma training.
 - Build, incent, and retain qualified staff by providing funding for programming and salaries, offering a loan reimbursement program, tuition assistance, paid internships, pay incentives, and programs focused on “growing our own.”
 - Create more mental health and substance use shelters and funding for behavioral health services.
- Prioritize resources to prevention.
 - Continue examining the criminal justice system for opportunities to use prevention and intervention services to improve safety while reducing incarceration.
 - Educate students about the impacts of substance use including intellectual impairment, potential addiction, and particularly the life-threatening consequences of drugs such as Fentanyl.
 - Embrace harm avoidance programs, such as needle exchange programs, suboxone distribution to help revive people who have overdosed, Fentanyl test kits, and the like.
 - Increase treatment facilities for Fentanyl addiction and get people into treatment as early as possible.
- Encourage collaboration, coordination, and innovation between service providers, government agency representatives, elected officials, tribal authorities, faith-based and community organizations, those with related lived experiences, families and those needing services.
 - Reduce or eliminate red tape from state and federal resources.
 - Develop a more robust, accurate, complete, and impactful resource that connects all of Arizona and integrates the multiple databases to include an inventory of best practices, existing collaborations and partnerships, and technical resources to allow the more effective delivery of services.
 - Reinstate the Governor’s Commission on Homelessness and Housing and establish standing committees on homelessness in the House and Senate.