

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

Cave Creek-Carefree Town Hall

September 16, 2022 – Scottsdale, AZ and Online via Zoom

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

The conditions of mental health, substance use, and homelessness are all intertwined and can be seen as a Venn diagram with intersecting points. Substance use, such as alcohol and drug use, can result in homelessness, as can a general lack of resources or treatment for mental health issues. For example, veterans may self-medicate as a result of trauma relating to their service, which can lead to homelessness. Homelessness, likewise, can lead to mental health issues and substance use.

Our school systems, emergency responders, and justice systems need to come from an integrated holistic approach and address these issues together to have the best impact on all the problems.

These are big issues, and a great deal of work needs to be done, including early intervention in the schools with parents and students, which will result in a trickle up effect. We also need to address the heavy stigma that keeps those who need help from getting services, and to create networks of support systems.

Public health services, federal, state, and local governments can be a bridge to the community, acting as shepherds to guide people to needed resources and creating relationships between systems and communities.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

We need a proactive push to do outreach to communities about existing resources. Even with existing resources, there can be long wait times, involving months of waiting that discourages those who seek help. Not knowing what is available is a hindrance to those looking for assistance with substance use, mental health, and homelessness.

Having a one-stop facility available that provides housing, mental health, behavioral health, career assistance, governmental documentation needed for jobs, and follow-up with individuals, would be an integrated way to help those in need. These are lifelong challenges, and we need to address the challenges with that in mind.

We should start early with programs in schools that raise awareness of these challenges, including the fact that these issues are here in our community. Those with these challenges include our family, friends, and neighbors. We should support our overburdened teachers with ingenious programs and services that provide life skills to parents and students.

Expanding on successful models, we should provide better bridges to services, including transportation for people to get to needed services. We should work in collaboration with our faith-based organizations as part of a collaborative community wide effort.

Houston, Texas has provided an integrated tool kit that could be viewed as a best practice. St. Mary's Food Bank within our state has a great system setup.

As with any ideas, organizations, systems, individuals, and neighbors need to work together so that support can be provided. This includes financial support. Financial support should be brought together to fund opportunities and to strengthen the organizational groups already working in this space.

Follow-up care is essential, such as community navigators, mentors and others who can outreach and connect to the people who need resources.

We also need to address this issue with our elected officials by raising awareness and providing information for needed policy change.

Finally, we need to normalize mental health and get rid of the stigma associated with these challenges. People in need should not be stereotyped; empathy is crucial. Understanding why issues occur will help those who can assist to better help others and best address these challenges.

SETTING PRIORITIES

We need to address these issues collaboratively and proactively.

First, we need to raise awareness. Town halls that promote conversations about these conditions help people talk genuinely about issues and better address them. We should use the media, including social media, to raise awareness that these issues exist and are not going away. We should structure these communications in a way that helps to destigmatize these challenges and raises awareness that these conditions continue to exist and need to be addressed.

Prevention and early intervention are critical. We should increase awareness and understanding in schools with age-appropriate information about mental health issues and substance use. Adding these issues to the school curriculum can broaden the knowledge of students and their families.

Prevention also includes transitional housing and services, such as helping people to get IDs. We should get youth involved, including with social media.

Creating more partnerships with faith-based and non-profit organizations is important to have more of a holistic impact. Not knowing what other programs are offering creates silos and hinders helping people in need of resources. We need to reduce duplicative programs that compete with each other. Nonprofits and other organizations who receive funding should have more accountability and transparency. We need to continue to break down silos and encourage collaborations. We need to not only address basic needs, but also higher needs.

While addressing these issues, we should recognize mental health, substance use, and homelessness are linked, but not always.

We also need to remember that caregiver burnout and compassion fatigue are real. Raising salaries of state and service employees that provide services is crucial to be able to adequately staff resources.

Sharing success stories from other cities and towns enables communities to learn about best practices that are making a difference and enable social change.

It is important to vote. Voters can support through their vote those who can make a positive change. Public officials who promote building affordable housing and other needed services need to be actively supported.

Whether small or large, we as a community need to take whatever action we can. We need to be involved and stay involved and spread the message to others. We all can play a role in being proactive as heroes connecting resources and creating change.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

- Communication between leaders about resources is important. Leaders in touch with other leaders can help by learning about resources that can support these conditions in an integrated way. It is not just a quick fix that can be solved by passing one bill; it is a multi-faceted problem. Individuals should not be stereotyped. Sharing best practices is crucial.
- Take a bipartisan approach and listen to your constituents so they can make the proper changes. They also need to share best practices across systems of care utilizing elected officials.

- We can do this by measuring outcomes and from elected officials being accountable and transparent to the public.
- Provide funding for non-political bipartisan community navigators that can create urgent awareness and offer solutions from local neighbors, faith-based organizations, scientific and technical communities in a timely manner.
- Make it a priority to organize and talk about the problem, as well as the solution.
- The Human Services Campus was built as a model for the nation. Use that model to build more.
- Shore up affordable housing. We are pushing people into homelessness because they cannot afford housing.
- Support a coalition to address homelessness.
- Create an advocacy or liaison group that can help motivate and get people to the services they need.
- Stop politicizing the issue and fund all communities; let them decide how the funds should be used and how best to promote community awareness.

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 Cave Creek-Carefree Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Support and vote for candidates for local, state, and national office that support expansion of programs to alleviate the housing shortage, provide more funding for affordable housing and programs to support the mental and physical health for the indigent and unhoused population. This includes local city council candidates that support increasing housing opportunities in all neighborhoods, regardless of affluence and demographics.
- Continue to expand my knowledge around the state of mental health in Arizona, so that I can take action that is effective and impactful within my community.
- Take time to listen and speak with members of my community who are making waves in mental health movements and learn from their experiences and knowledge.
- Create partnerships in the communities I serve, learn about their resources, and share those with others.
- Work with all the chaplains, board of directors, staff, and volunteers to better the chaplaincy for the homeless.
- Foster community awareness.
- Help local non-profits and faith-based organizations that assist others.
- Distribute cards directing homeless to services.
- Work harder to fight for homeless people to be helped in our community.
- Get involved and stay involved. Continually learn and improve skills.
- Commit to being a volunteer.
- Carry water in my car to give away.
- Vote.

- Be kinder to street people. Smile more.
- Continue to vote and encourage unity.
- Be more proactive in inspiring, motivating and listening to those who are unhappy – asking if I can help.
- Continue to promote connection in our community.
- Unplug. Things work better if we unplug it for a while.
- Prayer. Meditation. The opposite of addiction is connection.
- Continue helping my son who is SMI (serious mental illness).
- Be mindful that education about the issues is never done.
- Spread awareness of this event and parts of the discussion to educate those I know of the issues our community has with homelessness, substance use, and mental health.
- Continue working with the Association for the Chronically Mentally Ill (ACMI) on legislation for secure residential treatment facilities.
- Carry the messages I have learned and always act as soon as I can.
- Continue to employ youth and advocate a sober living lifestyle.
- Take lifestyle changes group to federal prison for women.
- Maintain a sober lifestyle of my own.
- Organize education to elevate self-awareness.
- Not give up on being part of the solution.
- Identify retail outlets that sell vapes or alcohol to underage users.
- Volunteer, help organize, think tank, spread awareness, speak, and think diplomatically.
- Get in touch with community and organizational leaders.
- Become more involved and volunteer at shelters.
- Share what I've learned today with friends and family.
- Be a voice for mental health, substance use, and homeless people.
- Have empathy for those who battle mental health, substance use, and homelessness.
- Keep telling my story about disability.
- Join Arizona Town Hall.
- Continue to seek quality organizations and people to be less isolated.
- Speak with Arizona Town Hall to include chronic pain.
- Work to equip and support our neighbors, agencies, and volunteers in mental health so they have a "tool kit" to help others.
- Work to create a Community Resource Center that brings organization under one roof to help our neighbors.
- Continue to advocate as a community navigator for those who are experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, and substance use.
- Try my best to cover and report the mental health crisis for the purpose of creating awareness for people to get involved and create a conversation on this issue.

- Continue my path of presenting a new method that takes away the shame associated with a bad habit. I just published a book that gives hope to those who feel hopeless called The Plans He Has for Me.
- React and act no matter how big or small.
- Capacity build.
- Making strategic connections, awareness of existing systems of care and resources.
- Advocate for veterans and survivors of domestic and sexual violence (underserved populations)
- Seek out others within the Valley of the Sun.
- Become involved and look to connect or lead some groups – family to family or peer to peer support.