

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

Prescott Community Town Hall

September 12, 2022 – Prescott, AZ and Online via Zoom

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

While everyone who is homeless does not have mental health or substance use issues and those who have mental health and substance issues may not be homeless, these areas are interconnected and often related to each other. For example, those with lower incomes have more trouble addressing and finding treatment for mental health challenges. Finding housing is also a major challenge for many and this can lead to challenges with mental health and substance use disorders. Recovery is extremely difficult if you are homeless. Furthermore, mental health issues can lead to substance use issues and then homelessness. Although all three of these issues are interconnected, correlation does not necessarily mean causation.

It is important to address these issues together because you have much better success with outcomes. We cannot focus on any one of the issues in isolation if we want to solve all three of them. We need to look at the issues holistically, as working on one area impacts the others and these areas exacerbate each other.

To effectively address these issues, it is important to address stigma. The stigma surrounding these challenges keeps people from seeking treatment and makes everything worse. At the point people are seeking recovery, they are often at rock bottom, which makes it more difficult for them to succeed. We need to look at how we can better support people when they are in need during their most difficult times, so we can stop the revolving door and solve all of the issues collectively and effectively.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE AND HOMELESSNESS

There is a negative cultural and social stigma attached to these issues. NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard) is real and it is a challenge we must address. We can combat NIMBYism and the negative stigma attached to these conditions by letting people realize that just because you cannot see it, does not mean it is not here. It is here. To combat NIMBYism and negative stigma around these issues, we should have marketing and communication efforts, especially for children. They need to know that it is okay not to be okay.

Yavapai County has many good organizations, services, and resources available to address these issues; although, there is a shortage of health providers and affordable services for people going through these challenges.

We need to bring our resources together in a better more collaborative way to leverage the resources that are available. We also need to find ways to get people to these resources, and to help them to be ready to receive the resources that are available.

We should build comprehensive resource guides, better leverage resources that are available through collaboration and coordination, and work in a more integrated way with governments, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, service providers, and most importantly, community members.

We should consider creating a housing coalition for Yavapai County to address housing issues. The housing coalition should look at supportive housing options with wrap around services for those who need them and explore creative housing options like tiny homes.

We need to work together to better support people when they are in crisis. When people are in a crisis, having community support makes all the difference. Community case management is key, as is meeting people where they are. Accountability is also key, including individual, organizational, and community accountability. We also need resources to address these issues, whether through expansion of funds with fundraising events or better collaboration and coordination with those involved.

SETTING PRIORITIES

1. Support collaboration.
 - a. Incentivize collaboration through federal and state grant funding.
 - b. Bring all the organizations working on these issues together along with policymakers and others to have solution-based discussions for how best to take action.
 - c. Create a coalition to seek needed funding for recommended actions.
 - d. Have a centralized and coordinated intake process.
2. Make resources more centralized and available.
 - a. Provide and maintain a centralized source for resources.
 - b. Create a free one-stop shop for resources that provides access to resources and information.
 - c. Have a central information and education webpage or other source for information.
 - d. Train police and first responders about available resources.
 - e. Have a communication and marketing roll out of the information and how to access it.
3. Meet people where they are.
 - a. Send out personal caseworkers to disperse information to those who may not have access or understanding.
 - b. Provide neighborhood living and resources.
4. Housing.
 - a. Create stable affordable housing for providers and professionals.
 - b. Create stable affordable housing for those who are vulnerable and those experiencing these challenges.
 - c. Have affordable housing throughout the region and within the city limits.
 - d. Create a housing coalition to address how best to create affordable housing, including how to collaborate with builders and local leaders.
5. Transportation.
 - a. Create more public transportation.
 - b. Address the transportation challenges that prevent people from getting needed services.
6. Address workforce shortages.
 - a. Create flexible and alternate work schedules.
 - b. Create flexible payment options: sharing resources for a full-time employee who works for multiple organizations.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

- Prioritize affordable housing throughout the spectrum (from professionals and paraprofessionals to the unhoused).
- Everyone is just one family member or friend away from someone who is experiencing these issues.

- It makes economic sense to invest up front as it saves on the back-end. Review existing studies that show how investing up front to address the crisis of housing, mental health and substance use will save our country money going forward.
- Create a renewable state fund that allows individuals and other organizations (such as corporations) to contribute to the fund so that grant money can be made available statewide to prioritize and address these issues, perhaps looking at First Things First as a model.
- We need education and outreach tiered to the needs of the individual.
- We need your time, talent and treasure devoted to addressing homelessness, substance use, and mental health.
- Create a one stop shop and central database.
- Support more caseworkers.

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 Prescott Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Urge my peers to better understand and engage with their community by amplifying the voices of those doing the work.
- Continue to work with youth and research community resources.
- Continue to remain engaged with community resource providers in order to advocate for positive Veteran outcomes.
- Keep in contact with the community partners. Report the information to elected representatives.
- Continue to work with HUSD to provide resources, gift cards, and support to reduce the amount of homeless students.
- Continue to work with MATFORCE on educating our kids on the dangers of drugs.
- Say “yes” in my backyard.
- Continue to attempt to get community stakeholders to meet to determine joint steps to help those affected become self-sustaining once again.
- Continue to reach out within my own home and backyard. I believe healthy behaviors and coping starts in youth within the home. My vow is to ensure my child is equipped with the tools of life.
- Communicate what I have learned.
- Work on pooling resource information.
- As a leader, I will prioritize the issues of homelessness, mental health and substance use in order to create meaningful change and improvement in these areas across Yavapai County through collaboration and leveraging of resources.
- Engage in community groups, workshops, collaborations, to develop coalitions focused on housing and mental health issues.
- Make the time to consistently attend our tri-city “Community Impact Coalition”, which meets monthly at the Prescott Public Library, which addresses mental health, substance abuse, and housing and is attended by community stakeholders in public service and social service organizations.

- Be more mindful about these issues.
- Leverage my position and influence to work on these issues.
- Work toward helping build consensus.
- Contribute more time in finding effective solutions to our current topics rather than just talking about it.
- Continue providing integrated care one patient at a time.
- Share AZ Community Town Hall information with organizational leaders.
- Share what was talked about today and the needs within our community.