

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Sun Health Virtual Community Town Hall

October 14, 2020 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Different regions within Arizona have different community strengths that contribute to community health. For example, Green Valley, a senior community in rural Pima County, doesn't have all the bells and whistles that are present in larger communities, but it does have a caring population that looks out for one another. They can build on these strengths by reaching out to community leaders, so they are reaching out to their constituents to assure that they are caring for themselves and one another.

Flagstaff has a free drop-in youth center that offers recreation for youth as well as scholarships. Surprise in the west valley is a very safe community that is diverse in age and ethnic background with a great deal of open space and parks and plenty of health care systems. The Veterans Heritage Project works with the school systems. Rural northern Arizona is the tourism center for Arizona and people live there by choice. Geographic centers in this region are quite diverse. The region has major universities and education centers, and adequate health care.

In Yuma, due to distance from other urban centers, they grow their own programs, tapping into the resources of the state's universities and the benefits of the border economy. There is a need for more youth and senior recreation programs. Yuma benefits from an influx of winter visitors, and the ability to access health care resources on both sides of the border.

COVID-19 has had an impact on community strengths. Volunteerism, a traditional strength in many communities, has been reduced because of COVID-19. Although efforts are being made to work around these challenges, the overall level of volunteer service, particularly by older Arizonans, has been reduced. COVID-19 has also impacted sexual and domestic violence shelter programs, due to distancing requirements, isolation, and lack of reporting. Some businesses and employers are taking advantage of desperate employees who may fear loss of job more than the trauma of abuse.

Some felt there was is generally broad and equal access to health care throughout their communities. Others felt that there is not equal access to health care, particularly in rural areas, where there are fewer health care providers and specialists, and for low-income populations and the homeless. While there may be plenty of health care providers and facilities, if you do not have the resources to access and pay for these services, they are not accessible, and it cannot be said that access is equitable. In rural communities there are additional challenges such as lack of transportation and unavailability of access to digital resources, such as broadband internet.

Communities could reduce health care costs and improve access to health care if they find ways to keep our populations healthy instead of waiting until people become ill from the many social conditions that affect health and then treating illness once it occurs. Spending money in advance on efforts to address background environmental conditions may avoid the need to pay for expensive in-hospital care. More collaboration, bringing government, nonprofits, and volunteers together to address conditions that are harmful to health, could produce big dividends. A greater focus on nutrition and exercise has emerged in response to COVID-19, and this could produce longer term benefits for community health.

Broadband internet services keep people connected to one another and to vital community telehealth services, particularly in rural areas, and help keep people healthier and reduce the demand on more expensive inpatient services. Investment in greater access to broadband throughout Arizona would offer many other benefits, including connecting students and families to their schools, and making it possible for employees to work from home.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has both created new problems and exposed the weaknesses in systems, and magnified problems that already existed.

Systemic racism has become a focus during the pandemic, but it was a pre-existing condition that has needed to be addressed for many years. The pandemic has further eroded the trust minority communities have in systems that should be there to help them, such as law enforcement. The virus has affected different segments of the community differently. This should have raised sensitivity to the differences in conditions affecting these communities, including circumstances such as racism, poverty, lack of access to broadband, and safe housing and health care services. It has also called attention to the fact that white people are in the position to make decisions and all too often people of color are not. We need to work harder to include people of color in decision-making and discussions at all levels. Unfortunately, there are still many people who are unaware of these discrepancies and the need to address the problems of systemic racism.

COVID-19 has also undermined the bonds that connect us and protect us. There is concern that children and other vulnerable individuals are suffering because of the isolation caused by COVID-19. Adverse Childhood Experiences, domestic violence, abuse, and neglect are occurring in secret, not reported because victims are removed from view and mandatory reporters, and there is potential for life-long harm. Frustration and fear that parents feel are transferred to children. They know something is wrong. Inability to have normal social interaction is not good for their health. Children are in danger of losing their sense of safety and stability. What are we doing to help build resilience while children are not connected to the teachers and other helpers with whom they normally have regular interactions?

The disconnection from schools has even more serious consequences for communities of color. These communities may be more dependent on schools for educational resources and access to social services, and for engagement with the larger community. They may have fewer resources at home and may be disproportionately affected by the disconnection.

There is concern that COVID-19 is having a profound impact on community health. Viewed from the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, COVID-19 is affecting the most basic human needs for safety and security. People are afraid of dying from COVID-19, so they avoid seeking needed medical care, and are dying at home instead. People are affected by fear and need to find a way to get back to providing safe access to food, lodging, water, and meeting other basic needs across the diverse spectrum of population. COVID-19 has also caused economic injury to the business community and at home. In rural northern Arizona average wages can't compete with unemployment payments, making it difficult to get people to come back to work.

One way to address systemic racism in the context of the pandemic is to take it into account in setting our priorities for action when addressing issues affecting community health.

Stronger as One mental health and wellness.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

Participants would tell Arizona's elected leaders:

1. End the digital divide by developing a plan and providing the funding to invest wisely in state-of-the-art internet infrastructure for the whole state, including the reservations and small rural communities. Internet is like a utility, and these communities have the same needs as big cities. This will help with education, employment, social connectivity, virtual care for health care, and calls for help by victims of abuse and neglect. Austerity should not be the overarching criterion for this plan. Communities should be engaged in a collaborative effort to develop the plan to consider the unique needs and characteristics of each region. This initiative should be carried out at the state level, led by the Governor's office, and funded by the Legislature. Perhaps we could build

on Proposition 123 funding for this purpose. To increase the likelihood that the Governor and the Legislature will act, individuals and communities must demonstrate their support for the plan.

2. Be inclusive. You represent the whole community, not just the people who voted for you or contributed to your campaign. You are role models for the entire community. You should make everyone in the community feel needed and cared for.
3. Finish the I-17 corridor, which includes broadband internet. This would extend the I-19 to the I-10 segment from the international border in southern Arizona to Maricopa County, and the I-17 corridor north from Maricopa County to Nevada.
4. Foster collaboration and inclusivity through meaningful incentive programs.
5. Healthy communities are comprised of more than just one thing. They need arts, culture, health care, and transportation. They are affected by changing conditions and shifting priorities. Needs and priorities vary from town to town, and region to region. Listen to individual communities when determining community needs.

TAKING 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 Sun Health Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- To get things done we must collaborate, plan, and recruit a champion to advocate effectively to governmental leaders.
- Instead of waiting to respond to crises, we should invest in preventative measures to address social problems in each community before they become a crisis.
- Northern Arizona Council of Governments (NACOG) is writing a recovery and resilience plan addressing all the issues addressed today and will apply for federal funds to leverage as much private sector investment as possible.
- Better Together, a grassroots organization in Green Valley that meets periodically, will continue to work to raise funds to provide internet access for school children.
- Continue to use my voice and privilege to advocate for investment and attention into prevention programs to decrease future crises.
- Continue to speak up about things that are relevant, whether in my personal life or in my family.
- I've been working on this issue for a few months already. I've had conversations with the Chambers of Commerce, Greater Phoenix Leadership, the Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits, Arizona Grantmakers Forum, Arizona Public Health Association, League of Cities, Arizona Association of Counties, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Arizona Commerce Authority, Valley Leadership, and more.
- Commit to voting thoughtfully in each and every election.
- Continue to participate in future Town Halls and share information with others. I will also bring youth to the table as often as possible.