

# ***Equity for All Arizonans***

## **VITALYST VIRTUAL COMMUNITY TOWN HALL**

**October 12, 2023 – Online via Zoom**

### **DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT**

Equity provides custom resources that address unequal opportunities so that individuals with diverse circumstances have access. One size does not fit all. Having a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible is essential. Equity is a personal, professional, societal, and political responsibility. Universal design is necessary to provide the most access possible and allow everyone the same opportunity to lead a healthy life.

Aligning equity in various areas requires fairness and opportunities to rectify the wrongs that are happening through injustice. Recognizing differences that others have is crucial.

Healthcare can vary based on socioeconomic status. The difference in the types of health insurance and the cost vary significantly between individuals covered and creates a large inequity among people. The healthcare system is also difficult to navigate.

Each city and town in our state operates in a different way. Federal funding differs from state or county funding. Local groups and networks may block messages if they do not agree with the message or the outreach. Equity conversations help but may not reach those who need the outreach.

Having an equal opportunity for financial resources is key. Stating that funds will only address a particular group is not equal nor is assuming that agencies only assist a certain population segment. In this state, there are barriers that impede agencies' ability to work equally across all groups.

We want to be able to bring justice to those who need it the most based on their circumstances. We don't all have an equal playing field. There needs to be education and access for all.

### **OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES**

To improve our communities, we must start with identifying the people in our community and what equity looks like for them. The 2021 Census for example, did not capture sexual orientation and gender identity. Without data on the baseline population in our state, funding, planning and initiatives cannot address our specific needs. If the system doesn't count or acknowledge certain groups, those groups do not matter in the system. Many of our systems are not equitable. Areas that should be emphasized for equity are education, healthcare, and business/finance/economics. Listening to those in need is crucial.

There is a lack of trust in the system. Many people in need do not know whom to trust. They may be used to being promised something that is not delivered. It is crucial that we bridge gaps to be able to help those in need. Families are struggling to trust the programs that are designed to help them due to vulnerabilities being reported. Trust needs to be built upon and moves slowly.

There needs to be clarity (specificity) on the gaps and prioritization so that measurable impact can be made on equity. Resources must be available.

We need to push to bring community members' comments into the discussion. Too many people fall through the cracks. Other issues can distract people from focusing on equity in our communities.

Collaboration is important. The City of Tempe is having Health and Human Services, Fire Department, and Police Department work together to address equity issues and come up with solutions.

We need more resources for community conversations to discover the inequities and hear from people how these could be addressed. Society and business want data and cost-effective analysis; life experiences must also be valued.

There is currently a shortage of providers. Without the workforce available, people in need cannot be helped. Wage compaction in Arizona is prevalent and economically impacts many.

### **NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS**

- Policy makers need to shed their political affiliations and focus on the community. There should not be so much red tape attached to funding that agencies cannot do what they need to do to help others.
- Leaders in all fields, businesspeople, politicians, academics need to become aware, educate themselves and others, influence policy, regulations, laws and reparations, influence opinions, and broaden perspectives.
- Spreading awareness in the community is key. Having town halls is very important. Certain populations that are growing older need mental health care. Something as simple as a dropdown menu could help them navigate the system.
- Small nonprofits help in our communities, in particular, to address inequity with very few resources. Having funding available that these nonprofits can utilize would help them do their work more effectively. Real people need help today and they can't wait.
- A focus on teaching JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, inclusion) courses for middle school and high school would also help shape the next generation of Arizona's. There should be a community-based volunteer requirement for students to learn about disparities and areas of opportunity.
- Paid parental leave would help support parents supporting their children and families.
- Understanding what each of our roles are and need to be is important. Coming together to discuss these issues is crucial. It is essential that each individual has a voice they can share with others on their needs, especially our elected officials and leaders. There needs to be influence from the ground up.
- Sharing local successes broadly should be done more frequently. Keeping it local can maintain funding within our local areas.
- Children should be taught while young to hardwire equity. Equity courses should be taught within the school system.
- While government law may have been written with good intentions to help certain groups within the population, part of a law then labels someone as guilty even though they have not been charged with anything. Transparency is missing in laws, policies, and in the healthcare system.
- Politicians should be required to help our charities a certain number of hours a year to learn and listen to their constituents.
- Giving children opportunities to collaborate and providing access to opportunity and resources would be impactful.

## **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 Vitalyst Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared:

### ***I WILL...***

- Commit to creating trust and a safe space for my staff & colleagues so they feel free to express their opinions, needs, and wants.
- Commit to being mindful of equity and to vote for legislators that are demonstrating that commitment.
- Expand my definition of equity to consider the various roles of our community members - equity for those who are delivering services and equity for those who are the recipients.
- Commit to promoting and voting for policies that create more equitable conditions for families (Child Tax Credit, Paid Parental Leave, etc.).
- Perhaps do a subgroup on finance, education, and healthcare.
- Continue to work and advocate for systems change to advance community level equity.
- Expand my definition of equity to consider the various roles of our community members - equity for those who are delivering services and equity for those who are the recipients.
- Encourage friends to run for office.
- Be intentional about centering the voices of community and analyze ways I can help reduce barriers to equity.
- Support more grassroots organizations that are fighting for equity in our communities.
- Try to educate and advocate for a non-profit board of which I am a member on equity issues and challenges (but our board is diverse so may be “singing to the choir”); we can still look for where improvements can be made.
- Continue to work with the state's rural hospitals reinforcing their commitment to health equity.
- Listen more to the communities to learn how they want to resolve their issues and concerns.
- Continue to attend Arizona Town Hall events to allow me to hear diverse perspectives.
- Spread the info on social media and in my church.
- Attend more Arizona Town Halls.
- Be more proactive in spreading information on the importance of equity and notifying others of these Town Hall meetings.
- Continue to work with community organizations who are committed to creating and maintaining equity.
- Look into everyone’s organization and follow and support them however I can.
- Commit to centering equity in the data collection process, both in the gathering and in the distribution.
- Make equity a major consideration when deciding who to vote for in upcoming elections.
- Work in community and with emotional intelligence to transform toward equity.
- Join an equity work group.

- Serve on other similar groups and subcommittees like advocacy and expand my definition of equity to consider the various roles of our community members – equity for those who are delivering services and equity for those who are the recipients.
- Commit to joining this team on any of the action items resulting from the town hall.
- Continue working with hospitals to promote health equity measures from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).
- Inform people about the grassroots organization Civic Engagement Beyond Voting (CEBV) that was started by people alarmed about what is happening in the legislature and read their newsletter called the Legislature Weekly.