

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

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THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness intersect and are indisputably interconnected. These issues are all complex and cannot be looked at individually. Homelessness is always complex with multiple factors at play. Substance use and mental health issues are often only the tip of the iceberg

A mental disorder which goes untreated can lead to substance use and substance use may lead to homelessness. Mental health is an underlying issue for many problems like substance use and homelessness.

If you give someone a home and do not address mental health or substance use, they may end up homeless again. Successful, long-term treatment and recovery is impacted by all three of these areas, so it is important to consider these three areas together to see long term success.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS AND WORKFORCE

There are a wide range of actions and approaches that can address mental health, substance use, and homelessness in a holistic and integrated way. They include partnerships between first responders and mental health providers and a person-centered approach to help individuals prioritize needs. It's important to meet people where they are and to consider the environment, social determinants of health and how systems impact or perpetuate problems.

It's important to have the right workforce to address these issues. We need a greater investment in education to fix our lack of workers, and to empower individuals so they know how and when to how to ask for help.

Accessibility is something that is unfair in our state, and varies depending on the zip code that an individual lives in. This is also tied to the lack of equity for already underserved populations in our community. We need greater equity in terms of access to healthcare, transportation, and even necessities like food and shelter. The level of resources varies across so many communities including LGBTQ, people of color, age, and zip code.

Our population is aging and often do not have the economic resources to effectively meet their housing needs. Systematically we are not positioned to address this adequately. A growing aging population cannot be ignored, and Arizona is not in a position to adequately address this issue. We need more support to give this population what they need, including affordable housing. We also must face the fact that as populations age, we do not have a way to replace these individuals in our workforce.

SETTING PRIORITIES

- 1. Education.** People need to be educated on the resources available and we need to address bias and often incorrect stigmas surrounding the homeless population. All segments of our community need to be better educated on this issue, including law enforcement.
- 2. Community.** The community needs to come together as a whole to address these issues. This is a community issue that requires a community solution. Human contact and connection are important.
- 3. Focus on Prevention.** Be proactive. Prevention is key and a better more effective use of resources.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION

Individual action is important for solving these issues. Each of us can: advocate for services, promote legislation that is relevant and addresses the issues with compassion and best practice in mind, and participate in educational opportunities such as Arizona Town Hall discussions.

We can also lobby our legislators, work with local and state agencies to find solutions, help individuals get connected to resources, and create small successes. It's important for everyone to become aware of the systemic issues and support leaders who are committed to addressing the issues.