

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

Bullhead City Community Town Hall

November 1, 2022 – Bullhead City, AZ

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE AND HOMELESSNESS

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness are connected and interrelated with one challenge often, but not always, leading to, exacerbating, or causing the others.

For example, when someone experiences mental health challenges or abuses substances, they often will end up experiencing homelessness. Likewise, individual substance use, including dependency on prescribed meds, may cause mental health problems which may then cause a breakdown of familial and other support systems and lead to homelessness. Similarly, those with mental health issues may turn to substance use to cope which may then lead to homelessness. Or someone may lose their job, creating homelessness or mental health challenges.

Early challenges and trauma can also create mental health challenges which may lead to substance use as a coping mechanism.

We can stop this cycle by reducing the stigma around those experiencing these challenges, preventing the causes before they occur, and through early diagnosis and treatment, which includes teaching coping mechanisms to help people overcome these challenges.

To solve these issues, we need to address them all together looking at: mechanisms to treat special populations such as juveniles and veterans; how to better assist first responders and law enforcement in responding to mental health issues; educating providers on how best to listen to the needs of those served; and providing more mechanisms for coordinated collaboration and access to resources.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

While we can always use more resources, our community resources have vastly improved over recent years. We have many community resources, but people don't know about them or how to access them. We need to bridge communication, increase collaboration around these common issues, reduce duplicative services, and eliminate the revolving door.

We need a complete and regularly updated resource guide so that everyone knows what is available—one that includes who does what, where, and when they provide the services as well as contact information that anyone can use and access. We should also make efforts to bring resources to people where they are and reduce the barriers to people getting services (such as bringing services physical to them where they are or providing transportation to services). We also need to explore how to create systems that reduce competition among providers.

The Homeless Task Force could be used more to share information, connect different stakeholders and to bring in community volunteers and other organizations for coordinated services that reduce competition and improve services to those in need.

Peer resources are important for getting people to services they need and helping people to have consistent and regular support. We should use those with lived experience to build rapport with those in need, to lower barriers to services and to provide additional support for police, first responders, hospitals, and other providers.

Quality of life or treatment court has been a useful tool for those who deny or refuse services. It can be the impetus to begin counseling and to get services which then allows people to learn life skills, get a job and get on the right track.

To reach a broad swath of children and families in need, we need to involve our school systems. Truancy is related to many of these issues and places children at a greater risk for later experiencing mental health issue, substance use and homelessness. Working with our schools and educators can help to prevent or address these challenges at an earlier stage (including recognizing undiagnosed mental health conditions). It will also help to reduce the stigma that keeps many from seeking needed services.

We need education not only to inform educators and service providers about resources but to inform community members so that they better understand best practices and what resources may be available to assist those they encounter. This type of education and communication may also reduce issues of NIMBYism, stigma, and other barriers. Overall, we all need to listen more to each other and to those who are facing these challenges.

SETTING PRIORITIES

Six Steps to Success:

1. We need better communication, cooperation, and consistency.
2. We need better coordination of services, benefits, and resources. This includes a collective and easily accessed resource guide. It may also mean having one person who oversees updates to this resource guide and who takes other efforts to effectively coordinate collaboration. It may also come through increasing use of existing resources to better coordinate existing physical space into a hub, such as more use of the homeless shelter for related services and agencies.
3. Education:
 - a. To those who need services.
 - b. To reduce stigma in the community and to raise community awareness around existing resources and efforts.
 - c. To reduce silos, improve coordination and integration among providers and stakeholders.
4. Advocacy to our legislators to make these issues a priority at all levels which includes additional funding for needed services.
5. Expand the homeless task force to include mental health, substance use and domestic violence.
6. Improve screening within our medical community and hospitals to raise awareness to address these issues early on.
7. Develop our volunteer base.
8. Attract and retain more treatment professionals. One way to help address these needs could be to use innovations such as telehealth. We should also create more pathways and opportunities for peer support services for all ages, from youth through seniors.
9. Create and support more affordable housing.
10. Workforce integration: assistance with clothes, education, transportation, and other resources to connect people to employers.
11. Meet people where they are, not where we want them to be, with consistent peer support that comes to them.
12. Create a 10-year plan on how to address these priorities and monitor progress.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

- We want our legislators and leaders at all levels to be aware of these events and to show up with an open mind to listen and to then provide resources as needed (funding, legislation, changes to rules et) to help Be open to new and innovative ideas and allow local communities to use funding as they think best.
- Ensure resources are allocated fairly to rural areas. Provide services to veterans.
- Reduce barriers to available grant funding.
- Expand incentives for working in rural areas (for social workers, health care workers (such as loan forgiveness, etc.).
- Require training for mental health issues to teachers and others.
- Clarify and see if limitations can be place on the use or possession of marijuana on school grounds.
- Have more localized government involvement-regional funding for a hub that would house representatives of organizations who serve in these areas (akin to an emergency operations center).
- Expand the use and branding of the Homeless Task Force to other issues.
- Invest and support a shelter model for the city and then fund the integrated services under one roof to maximize effectiveness. This should include related services that connect people and reduce barriers to services, such as shelter space for animals.

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 Bullhead City Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Volunteer at the shelter monthly to assist with nursing tasks.
- Continue to collaborate with other agencies to upgrade resource guide.
- Continue to be the front door to services to navigate to area resources.
- Provide medical consultations at the shelter and coordinate services with local pharmacies for affordable medications to homeless clients.
- Promote adult care center.
- Support education on homelessness, drug addiction, and senior welfare issues.
- Assist local agencies getting publicized.
- Continue to be the be the “feet on the ground” for Talas Harbor Behavioral Health Hospital and other community services.
- Continue building the reentry program.
- Educate the community about social issues and community resources.
- Make sure that I am able to help whoever comes to me get the help they need.
- Volunteer where I can at the shelter and task force.
- Advocate the continuous efforts to find solutions and overcome mental health, substance use, and homelessness.

- Be part of the homeless task force and be a part of potential rebranding to address more of the issues facing us today
- Stay consistent in the reaching out of services among our communities in Mohave County.
- Retire soon but be available whenever needed!
- Do more to help!
- Talk with Jeff about attending homeless task force meetings.
- Continue to establish greater collaboration with the resource community to heighten effective responses for community need.
- Take the information other agencies shared today and share it with coworkers and others in my community to best help individuals, youths, and families in our area.
- Ask for more paper handouts for homeless teens.
- Partner up with the resources that is in our city for homeless teens.
- Work with homeless shelters through therapy and a “back to work” program for the homeless.
- Advocate for our youth and families to have red tape barriers removed so services are available to all.
- Reach out to state legislators to utilize food wisely and reasonably.
- Spread awareness though business websites about this town hall meeting and the goas for the community.
- Be a part of the solution not the problem.
- Share resource on my platforms and encourage people to share at the city council.
- Create and innovative resource list that is digital and easy to share.
- Focus on marketing to the public to educate everyone on the great resources in our community.
- Support and continue working with all community members.
- Continue to be part of the conversation.
- Continue to contact our local representatives and senator to address and fund these issues
- Urge local officials to obtain a four-year university so we can obtain local professionals for counseling, law enforcement and teachers.
- Contact: Leo Biasiucci, Sonny Borelli, Mark Kelly.
- Share information with others to spread word of available resources.
- Contact local legislators to encourage funding the homeless issue.
- Maybe become more active at a local level
- Compassionate law enforcement that connects with the community and partners with them to address the needs within a law enforcement context.
- Urge AZ leadership with help fund programs.
- Work to keep focus on local issues at state.
- Bring resources to the community.
- Focus on local needs reality.

- Be an advocate for the programs we have and let the community know the benefits that these services provide.
- Be open to ideas and resources.
- Continue to educate myself on issues, concerns, and resources to assist with homeless, mental health, substance abuse issues, and concerns.
- Continue to work with and engage local service providers to enhance the services we provide to our community to build and support the homeless engagement system we are building within the tri-state area.
- Help inform the local community of the difference within the homeless community.
- Help change the outlook on substance abuse and mental health.
- Research more on House Bill 1376 and find curriculum on the subject.
- Commit to actively participate in the development of a digital platform for community resources, data exchange, and information exchange.
- Commit to continue to advocate to have barriers broken down to have access to grant funding and resources to be able to continue to make positive changes and behavioral health services in our rural community.
- Develop a resource guide for Mohave County with community partners.
- Help those in need, join homeless committee.
- Pass along information from this meeting.
- Volunteer at other agencies to know better what is out there.
- Put myself out there to learn more.
- Continue to educate myself and community.
- Get engaged!
- Educate others and improve our community.
- Educate service clubs.
- Ask for more volunteers and donations.
- Work with local legislators for state funding.
- Invite legislators to see how we run the coalition to show our needs and funding.
- Make sure to communicate with other local agencies and nonprofits to coordinate our efforts to work together on community projects.
- Follow up to see how BHHS Legacy Foundation can help with the resource guide.
- Help find ways to staff clinic at Catholic Charities.
- Make sure our agency participates in the Homeless Task Force and work with the community partners in a meaningful way.
- Continue to go to the Homeless Task Force and be a voice for the residents who are tired of not being able to use the local services and dodging homeless drug addicts in the middle of the streets.