

# ***Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness***

**Casa Grande Community Town Hall**

**October 4, 2022 – Casa Grande, AZ**

## **THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS**

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness are parts of a puzzle that cannot be completed without looking at the solution.

Mental health leads to substance use, and then the chance to become homeless with the loss of faith and vision for their future.

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness are related since they start with substance abuse, which can lead to mental health illness or vice versa, which then leads to homelessness. We have five students who tried to harm themselves. Without help and support this leads them to drug use. Parents are also using substances, which leads to a lack of support at home and the inability to raise their children to be healthy and productive.

Sometimes prescription drugs are used and abused. This can lead to finding other ways to medicate and increases their dependency on substance use.

All three areas relate to each other in many cases, but not all. It is important to address mental illnesses as they are often the beginning stages to the other two problems. Educating parents and the community on how to address these areas is also critical.

Because there is not one reason for homelessness, it is not a choice. Mental issues may cause an individual to have issues that will not allow them to work or obtain any source of income, which may cause homelessness. Substance use is similar; if the issue is not addressed it could also cause homelessness.

Unsheltered individuals may be dealing with mental health issues or substance use. They need help to be diagnosed and assisted. The three conditions can be addressed together. Underlying trauma may also link to mental health, substance use, and homelessness. There is no wrong door, and we need to cross-train agency staff.

Because these conditions are often co-occurring, systems need to coalesce to wrap services around individuals to address multifaceted needs. These systems must be designed to address the impact of trauma.

Each condition exponentially increases the risk of becoming a victim of each of the other conditions or issues. It is important to address these conditions together because they typically overlap each other and compound the problem, further reducing their chances to resolve the problem.

When someone is experiencing a mental illness, they are unable to maintain the life and coping skills needed to function properly in society and maintain housing. Very commonly, mental illness and substance use are interrelated because substances are used to self-medicate after mental illness goes without proper treatment. Homelessness results, and the person is unable to regain stability without treatment and resources.

It is a vicious cycle. There are not enough resources for mental health. We have overworked and underpaid case managers. Drug use induces psychosis. We have no homeless shelters, very limited low-income housing and rent control for the disabled. We need to revamp mental hospitals and behavioral health agencies and provide more help for people who come out of prison. Without addressing all these things, we create incomplete solutions that set people up to fail.

The conditions of mental health, substance use, and homelessness relate to each other because they are a social disease. They can be viewed as different stages of the same social disease and people

can suffer quicker and more painful stages. It is critical to attack the disease and work to relieve its symptoms.

Collaboration of services, right resources for right need, more treatment programs need to be strategically placed around the county with easy access to resources, trauma-informed care, and a toolbox.

All it takes is for one to stop the cycle. If we stop the cause, we can possibly stop it all.

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness relate to each other and affect the person no matter what their individual needs. An action needs to be taken and they need to get help. They are human beings, and their mental health and substance use does not make them less of a person. They are the only ones that know their trauma, and this is why we can make a difference by working together to help. It is important to address all three conditions even if they do not affect them, because it is always good to have knowledge and information about the consequences and help with prevention to stop the problem altogether.

### **ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS**

Resources to end homelessness need to be available. People need a home to begin to build their lives free of drugs and help get mentally well. These are all community issues, and we cannot rely on the government to take care of them. Money is not the only answer. It takes different groups with expertise to fill in the pieces. Non-profits, faith-based, and other organizations do not need to be competitive with each other, but instead support one another and work together.

The support needs to be somewhere that really helps and not just let clients go out on their own. This leads them to return to the same cycle. We need to support them through the process.

There are multiple factors contributing to substance use, mental health, and homelessness more and more as time goes on. The problem is continuing to get worse.

Transitions are hard to work through and people need to be walked through each process and feel supported as they go through each step to be self-sufficient.

We need to find programs (like CHIP) that work to take folks from homelessness to self-sufficiency and find solutions and implement the plan. The buck stops with us and we have the responsibility to help those in need. The answer is among us – the people in this room that care about the community.

We need to educate the community and work with parents and teachers on identifying and treating people in the schools and families that are related to those schools. It is important for cities to be involved and stay involved, especially the police department.

We should encourage others not to give up on the person if they are not willing to find the resources for the person to receive the proper services to be able to function daily. It is important not to hand off, but to continue to work on the issue to avoid continued mental health issues, substance use, and homelessness.

Agencies must work together to train their staff, continue training, assure first responders are trained, and to keep presenting and educating to communities. Create one place, a one stop with many stops and hubs that care for the individual.

We as a community can expand to address these opportunities by being aware of things within the community. We need more resources to be able to talk more about these opportunities to strengthen our community. For example, the Pinal County Coalition to End Homelessness has multisystemic membership to reduce recidivism to homelessness, including strengthening the already existing groups of domestic violence and sexual violence survivors and those with lived experience. We need to generate more funding.

We need a homeless shelter in our community. Horizon needs more money and resources to provide counseling and services to people in need in our community. We need to increase our homeless resources across the board in our community.

Transportation needs to be available in rural and tribal communities to access resources like the food pantry. We need less anti-homeless architecture, and more safe dose clinics.

We need to reduce the stigma associated with receiving help. People should be able to ask for help without guilt or shame. The community needs to be more willing to help those in need and find ways to make receiving help easy and painless.

Systems should be better aligned. There is potential for alliance approaches that leverage interdisciplinary efforts working in sync rather than individually. These systems also include uniform approaches to the treatment planning for patients. There should be patient management software for recording and sharing for all clinicians, including social workers and doctors. We need increased support from the government and non-profit leadership to come together to create long-term policy and solutions.

Trauma informed interventions are necessary to treat conditions that create mental illness and substance use disorders. These interventions include more resources for SMI housing, crisis stabilized unit shelters, and a revolving shelter system. DBT groups are needed along with more incentives for people to become therapists.

We need to center and promote evidence-based and non-carceral forms of intervention and treatment. We need to educate the community better on the benefits of these programs and how these things are related. Collaborating between multiple groups can provide deeper and more wide-ranging resources to better help people get the help they need and break cycles.

The iHelp model is favorable. We are looking forward to opening churches to house those who are experiencing homelessness. Courts can mandate substance use programs instead of jail time. More programs inside of jails and prisons will help those incarcerated and allow them to connect to organizations when they get out, like Celebrate Recovery.

We can expand opportunities by opening more facilities, rehabs, groups homes, and centers for people in need. More facilities for the community will help to see a huge impact rather than sending them away. Walk-in clinics on a van that goes some place each, so homeless individuals can go talk, get medications all of them the opportunity to get help being close to their home or community. This would aid in people feeling welcomed and change their feelings about getting help.

People need housing and we need to ensure they have a place to live and are safe from outside elements. If a home is given, then drug testing can be completed, and substance use services provided along with mental health services. The issues of mental health, substance use, and homelessness will get better. The issues may never go away, but they will get better.

## **SETTING PRIORITIES**

We need to look at what community resources we have and find what is missing.

We need to be realistic in what we can achieve to find realistic results.

We need to walk through with them, not just tell them what is available and have them go there on their own.

We need to support programs that already work (like CHIP).

We need to work with stakeholders and the police department.

We need to stop causing barriers by building affordable housing and family shelters in general.

Great case management and advocacy that works with and refers to other services providers to provide whole person care. "Warm handoff". There needs to be a resource manual, programs that build trust, and culturally responsive services.

People experiencing homelessness need to have food, shelter, and clothing, and to learn skills to support themselves.

We should update youth education to teach empathy for people experiencing these conditions and teach people to not to be judgmental about these topics.

The community needs to make help easy to access. Release the stigma of mental health so that people are willing to receive help.

We need an alignment of efforts, funding, and regulations.

Family involvement, patient management system.

Work together to meet the needs.

If someone is experiencing substance use and mental health issues and one is treated but not the other, they will not achieve long-term recovery. Share information on what programs and treatments have shown the best results. Talk to the afflicted that have succeeded.

Educate teachers to notice signs and symptoms of children so they will have the tools to nip problems t in the bud.

Diversion and treatment programs to stop over incarceration, access to resources, and treatment that takes all factors into account.

Eliminate legal barriers that perpetuate the system and bar people from offering aid.

More resources for mental health and substance use. Safe living conditions with help, such as iHelp homeless shelter.

We need education, cultural humility, model-case study, peer support, housing, and safety.

The most important actions we should take in this situation is to listen. Hear them out to win their trust. Without trust and communication, we cannot establish a plan together. No matter the situation they are in, we still must give out information on what will happen and what they can do to prevent it again. The key is having the knowledge to provide what we learn to better our community and increase the knowledge in others.

Better pay for individuals who work with mental health, substance use, and homelessness because there is high turnover. Because there is high turnover, there is not trust. People have to start over when they get a new case manager, or they get lost in the cracks. Better communication between agencies is needed. Doctors, probation officers, attorney's, case managers all need to talk and work together to find solutions to these problems.

Intervention and education are needed to progress and grow.

### **WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW**

- We need an increase of funding and prevention.
- Fund programs like CHIP who are currently doing the work.
- Help by providing prevention. Students need help and do not have a lot of support to receive that help.
- We cannot depend on just the leaders. We have the opportunity to lead, we just need to be realistic at what the barriers are.
- Stop looking at the issue, look at the person, find a way to gain trust, do something, not just say something.
- Rural vs urban. More funding.

- We need more resources to address the problem. Support and strengthen coalitions and their activities. Recognize there are different levels of resources in rural vs urban AZ.
- Lead by example.
- Fund, fund, fund.
- Stop arresting so many people and help them. We need more funding in programs that help with substance use, mental health, and homelessness.
- Better training, education on what to look for to recognize early on. Be accountable. Bring all agencies/organizations. Provide and gather funding. Continue to get educated on the needs of our community and inform what has been learned.
- Provide more focus to trauma prevention for children and recognize its lasting effects. Provide more funding for services for the SMF population. Continue working for new solutions while collaborating with other agencies and organizations.
- Dedicate and gather resources.
- Tell the ones making the laws and providing funding to spend a week in a behavioral health facility and have them get paid what they make. We need low-income housing and shelters with peer support staff.
- HELP! More education and training for teachers, case managers, all staff at agencies, police, parole, and probation officers. Juveniles in general.
- Continue to pray and help. We cannot arrest and imprison our way out of this problem.
- We need to start young and get more help in the schools. We need more facilities to house mental health patients instead of incarceration and we need substance abuse recovery programs in jails and prisons.
- Housing, resources, funding, and leading by example are all great ways to help support these three issues. We need to start with prevention and do not arrest and incarcerate. We need to find ways to help with their problems instead of sending them to jail.
- Stop criminalizing mental health and understand its effect on homeless and substance use. Time would be better spent looking at all three not just one issue at a time.
- One of the best ways to address all of this information is school, community events, prisons etc.
- Creating more housing options for those with low or no income and who have records that prevent them from getting into houses. We could ensure that there are rules to getting housing such as, random drug test and housing searches for those that need it, along with getting members into mental health agencies and active in their care.
- Easy access to help, healthcare, and resources. We spend too much on inappropriate programs that are nowhere near enough help for those who want and need it.

### **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 Casa Grande Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

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

- Lead by example.
- Help rural schools.

- Try to get more help for our students.
- Fund the nonprofit organizations that are there to end homelessness.
- Take on whatever is needed to end homelessness.
- Fund organizations that are doing the work.
- Continue to talk with and learn from stakeholders in Casa Grande.
- Help us by creating a homeless shelter and providing people to staff it.
- Look at Pinal County and not compare to Maricopa.
- Support organizations that need financial assistance. Look at the service, see where it is lacking, support the cause. Affordable housing is needed, MS, SA, and homelessness is not a choice people with these issues don't have the necessary tools to get what they need.
- Work towards assisting my community.
- Be a volunteer to help the community.
- Continue to; chair Pinal Coalition to End Homelessness, chair the Child Abuse Prevention Council, continue to work at Against Abuse.
- Share our discussion with elected officials to help create policy that resolves this issue and promote health and wellness.
- Continue to work to integrate and connect school-based resources.
- Commit to treatment and resources over carceral responses would be a great start.
- Celebrate Recovery in all prisons. The results where Celebrate Recovery is inside have amazing results!
- Fund.
- Make connections with folks in Pinal County to see in which way the organization I work for can better serve the populations we work with in Pinal County
- Amplify my voice to county and state officials.
- Work with the county to get help inside to work with the new transition home in Florence.
- Work together across county lines. Work with and listen to people on the ground and assist them with the fight they are facing.
- Create more helping programs.
- Do not just address it one by one, address it as a whole.
- Open facilities for each topic such as mental health, homelessness, rehabs, group homes and shelters. Provide information for parents, teachers, officers, etc., that will help educate the community and prevent problems from occurring or prevent them from turning back to these problems when they just need more help.
- As a supervisor in the mental health field, I will ensure that my staff are trained and part of the solution not the problem.
- Help those who I can and put them in touch with programs I know that will help.
- Work with agencies to connect the mental health, substance use, and homeless people as they come out of prison and ensure continuity of care.
- Spread my word and keep getting knowledge out. I know I can make a change.