

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

Mohave County Community Town Hall

October 5, 2022 – Kingman, AZ

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE AND HOMELESSNESS

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness are interconnected and often can be a vicious circle with one leading to the other. While not always connected, mental health issues can lead to substance use and substance use can lead to mental health issues. Likewise, homelessness can lead to substance use and mental health challenges.

To address one issue, we need to address them all—treating the mind, body, and soul together and creating one stop shops that address all of these challenges and make it much easier to get services. When someone is ready to get help, we need to give them the help they need immediately.

We also should look at prevention. This includes looking at the root causes, such as childhood trauma, poverty, adverse childhood experiences, undiagnosed mental health issues, and the normalization of substance abuse or mental health issues in families. We also need to address the impact of being in the criminal justice system. Prevention also means creating personal connections and support systems; reducing barriers to housing and transportation needs; creating more transitional housing and services for those who need it; and addressing the stigma and shame that often gets in the way of people seeking needed help.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

While our county is doing great work in many areas, we still need more awareness of available resources, and more resources in general. We need more affordable housing and more sober living and residential living. As an example, in a lot of our inpatient units, we mix in those detoxing with those with mental health issues, and there are no level one inpatient services for children.

We need to stop working in silos and work together. We need to come together to apply for grants and get additional funding to obtain the services and resources we need—including a one stop shop with resources, and a resource fair for professionals that allows for connection and collaboration.

There should be no wrong door when someone is looking for assistance. We should all help them find the services they need. Community Connections is an example of an effective closed loop referral system funded by AHCCCS that will help address these issues in a more integrated way.

Integrated health care is essential –we need to address the whole person and yet we are all short staffed. We need to incentivize people to come to our community to serve in these much-needed roles, including school counselors.

We should expand our efforts with prevention and education and explore what systemic issues can be addressed. This can include raising awareness of and access to the county's resource guide and finding more ways to get people to these resources, including those who are being released from prison. It also can include having alternatives to imprisonment that open doors for detox and other services.

We need to work more collectively and collaboratively together, getting rid of the red tape and hurdles that can get in the way of organizational coordination and necessary follow up.

We also should make an effort to build more community cohesiveness with community events that connect people and have better communication to everyone about what resources are available.

We need to figure out how to get more boots on the ground to bring needed services with those who need help and to reduce the time for receiving services. Programs like this help to connect people to each other and to available resources and we should have more of them.

SETTING PRIORITIES

1. Have grant writers or other personnel to search and apply for funding for behavioral health homes.
2. Reduce the roadblocks and silos caused by competition with providers and insurance coverage.
3. Create connections between people. We're dealing with the symptoms of forgetting how to be connected as humans and as a community. Find a friend and be a friend.
4. Treat this as a problem of the entire community, not an individual problem.
5. Educate the people we serve about their conditions in a way they can understand. We need to teach just as much as we need to treat.
6. Increase mobile crisis units and response services better to meet people where they are.
7. Increase local access to mental health services after detox—build a local continuum of care in the community.
8. Find ways to increase the local talent pool for needed services.
9. Expand on existing resources with greater collaboration and teamwork. We are short staffed and can address this with greater collaboration.
10. Remember to listen and focus on the individual, not just the need.
11. Make efforts to expand knowledge about resources and create easy reference and access to these resources.
12. Provide care when someone is ready to receive it.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

1. Communicate and collaborate with those who provide resources.
2. Get informed and invest in the solution. Be open minded and listen to community concerns.
3. Create an entity like Arizona Department of Housing for Behavioral Health in order to provide direction and to obtain and distribute funding.
4. Increase release funding.
5. Provide more housing options. Create more affordable housing.
6. Invest in affordable housing with access to case managers and resources that provide the resources to heal and get stronger. Create more permanent supportive housing funds.
7. Create more mental health and substance use shelters and funding for behavioral health services and programs that address community needs.
8. Increase local talent. Expand funding for programming and pay to case managers. Incentivize and retain qualified staff.
9. Increase services all around in Mohave County.
10. We are managing the symptoms and need to address the problem which includes loneliness and soul care.
11. The need may be the same, but each individual is different.
12. Take the politics out of it and look at the person.
13. Start at an early age and make children aware of their entire being, mind body and spirit.
14. Everyone needs to work together, regardless of agency and background and whether they provide or need services.

15. Increase public/private partnerships.
16. Mandate every first responder to take a first aid mental health class show understanding in action. Team up these workers with a mental health professional.
17. Instead of arresting addicts, rehabilitate them.
18. Lobby for more funding for housing, services, and qualified and passionate “fixers.”
19. Educate the community about these issues and increase assistance for housing and transportation.

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 Mohave County Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Commit to being more informed about available resources in our community and share that information.
- Educate myself about all of the resources available and inform others.
- Volunteer more and never create a wrong door.
- Continue working with the nonprofit I started to help medically fragile homeless and others to access resources and support.
- Continue to self-care so as not to lose my passion to help those suffering from these issues. Reach out to team members to check-in on mental health, burn out and self-care.
- Continue to be an advocate of collaboration with other organizations to help people become informed about resources and to help the homeless and people in need.
- Build a strong foundation for the inclusiveness we need.
- Continue to go to meetings and teach.
- Listen and meet people where they are to help them reach the services they need.
- Research successful programs to see what works.
- Be available.
- Become more available to new member of the community and collaborate with my best effort.
- Volunteer my time, knowledge, and connections to help organizations I would not normally be working with.
- Stay in the game and help my community.
- Remember why I do what I do.
- Help to make sure frontline officers are aware and willing to share available resources with potential clients during interactions, whether law enforcement related or consensual contact.
- Continue to do the best I can as an inmate re-entry coordinator at Mohave County Jail.
- Continue developing the Sheriff’s re-entry program.
- Continue to work hard to overcome outstanding community issues and work harder to connect with other mental health workers and families to include the “no wrong door” policy.
- Continue to help my community.

- Attend more local government meetings to advocate for high density housing and keeping housing affordable, starting at the grassroots levels.
- Continue to partner with my community!
- Learn more.
- Show integrity.
- Work on bringing agencies together to find a way for homeless and sober living.
- Be non-judgmental, open minded, empathetic.
- Make it less about money.
- Be the voice of those in need to be able to help those in need.
- Give more to my community.
- Advocate! Participate! Engage! Empower!
- Continue to reach out in the community to connect and find ways to better our community together.
- Ask to enforce local laws—educate early on personal responsibility, community involvement.
- Continue to work on the front lines beside individuals experiencing mental health challenges, substance abuse, mental health challenges, substance abuse, and homelessness as well as educating community members of our local issues and resources.
- Commit to work at bringing the key leaders back to the table.