



# MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS



Highlights of  
Arizona Town  
Hall Sessions  
2022



Top to bottom: A participant at the New Freedom community town hall shares her “I WILL” card and individual commitment to action, Phoenix.

A student participant reports on her table discussion at the Verde Valley community town hall, Clarkdale.

Since 1962, Arizona Town Hall has created solutions to complex problems by educating, engaging, connecting, and empowering Arizonans.

Community Town Halls and Future Leaders Town Halls (events held for high school and college students) allow a greater number of Arizonans to experience positive civic engagement. These programs also produce solutions for statewide issues and develop a grassroots network of informed citizens ready to work together to maximize Arizona’s potential.

To ensure informed discussion, Town Hall participants review background information developed by the Arizona Town Hall Research Committee.

Participants at the statewide town hall consider both the information in the background report as well as recommendations from the various community and future leaders town halls.

This publication is a summary of key points from the background report and the town hall sessions held in 2022.

Town Hall reports are published and made available to Arizona Town Hall members, elected officials (including the Arizona Legislature), public libraries, and the general public.

Download digital copies, for free, online at [www.aztownhall.org](http://www.aztownhall.org).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

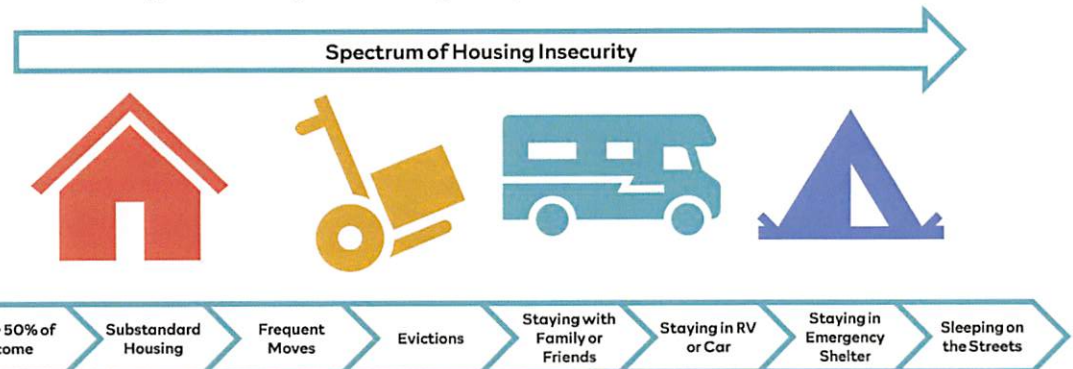
*Special thanks to the Morrison Institute for Public Policy, and Kristi Eustice and Benedikt Springer in particular, for serving as Editors of the Background Report.*

Mental illness, substance use, and homelessness impact people from all walks of life. The effects of these issues extend far beyond the individual — negatively affecting loved ones and threatening public health and safety. Mental illness, substance use, and homelessness often occur together. Sometimes it is homelessness that leads to substance use and/or mental health issues, and sometimes it is substance use and/or mental health issues that leads to homelessness. From there it can be a vicious downward spiral.

In 2022, Arizona had one of the worst homelessness crises in the nation. While homelessness across the country increased by 1% between 2020 and 2022, homelessness in Arizona increased by 23%.

## THE SPECTRUM OF HOUSING INSECURITY

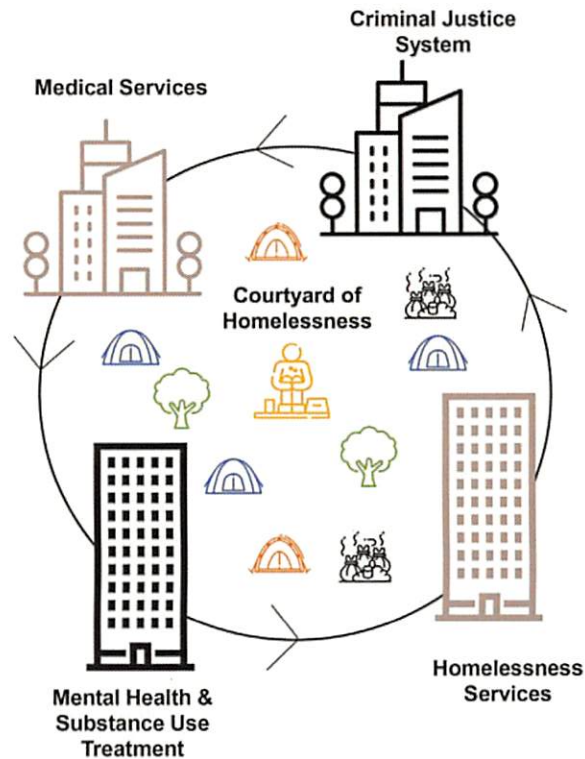
Housing Instability      Marginally Housed      Homelessness



## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

- Lack of integration and coordination
- Lack of funding and resources – too few treatment facilities, staff, psychiatrists, units
- Decreasing supply of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Re-housing (RRH) units combined with increasing rent prices
- Lack of effective and coordinated outreach strategies to reach homeless youth and adults not connected to traditional service systems
- Expense and complexity of delivering trauma-informed care
- Multisystem factors that do not encourage developmentally appropriate behaviors in youth
- Involvement in foster care or the justice system
- Lack of access to the internet or a phone
- Unreliable or no transportation
- Lack of awareness about services available
- Difficulty adhering to treatment regimens
- Stigmatization
- Criminalization
- Adverse Childhood Experiences and other trauma
- Systemic racism, poverty, and inequality
- Language barriers
- Complex, difficult to navigate systems
- Scarcity of affordable housing

For additional links and resources, visit:  
[http://aztownhall.org/114\\_Town\\_Hall](http://aztownhall.org/114_Town_Hall)



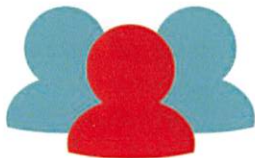
## THE REVOLVING DOOR

The door through which a person might exit homelessness is determined by policies, regulations, and individual life circumstances. Policies and regulations affecting homelessness are created both within each building (or system) and through external forces, such as governmental processes and the health care and insurance industries.

Often, these rules are meant to protect the safety of staff and clients. However, for people at the intersection of mental health, substance use, and homelessness the result can instead be a release back into the courtyard of homelessness.



**Less than 1%**  
 Increase in the **national**  
 homeless population  
 between 2020-2022.



**23%**  
 Increase in **Arizona's**  
 homeless population  
 between 2020-2022.

Source: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



After an introduction from Cynthia Lietz, Dean of Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, panelists give topic insights at the “Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness” Background Report Launch, Phoenix.

### BACKGROUND REPORT LAUNCH EVENTS PANEL PRESENTERS

#### PHOENIX - APRIL 14, 2022

- Tom Simplot, Director, Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH)
- Sarah E. Selzer, Commissioner, Superior Court of Arizona, Maricopa County
- Shelli Silver, Deputy Director, Health Plan Operations, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)
- Amy St. Peter, Deputy Executive Director, Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG)

#### YUMA - APRIL 15, 2022

- Shelli Silver, Deputy Director, Health Plan Operations, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)
- Amy St. Peter, Deputy Executive Director, Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG)
- Cindy Stotler, Deputy Director, Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH)
- Erin Ballos, Conciliation Court Mediator, Superior Court

#### FLAGSTAFF - APRIL 28, 2022

- Janet Dean, Community Affairs Manager, NE Division, Arizona Public Service (APS)
- Shawn Nau, Chief Executive Officer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona - Health Choice
- John Rivers, Board Secretary, Northern Arizona Healthcare Board of Directors
- Adam Shimoni, Councilmember, City of Flagstaff



Top to bottom: Participants of the Southeast Arizona (Thatcher), Prescott, and ASU (Downtown Phoenix) community and future leaders town halls.

# COMMUNITY AND FUTURE LEADERS TOWN HALLS

Before the statewide town hall, 26 precursor community and future leaders town halls with nearly 2,000 participants developed ideas for local and statewide solutions and committed to individual actions. Their recommendations informed the statewide town hall and their actions created community impact.

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

- Mental health, substance use, and homelessness, while not always present together, are often linked.
- To ensure the best outcomes, especially for our most vulnerable, these issues must be addressed in a coordinated manner.
- Failure to address these problems can lead to a downward spiral that continues across generations.
- Arizona's affordable housing crisis has become even worse due to the pandemic and rapidly escalating housing costs. Individuals and families can be homeless simply due to insufficient income.
- The stigma attached to these issues prevents those who need help from seeking assistance.

## ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

- Reduce the stigma applied to those experiencing these challenges and increase equitable treatment by educating all levels of our communities about issues and available solutions.
- Emphasize the economic and social benefits of prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, and ongoing support for individuals.
- Invest in affordable housing, shelter beds, treatment facilities and transitional housing to provide housing first. Give particular attention to keeping families together, reaching out to unaccompanied teenagers, and accepting those exiting the criminal justice system.
- Effectively connect people with needed services through multiple entry points that treat people with empathy and respect and accept them where they are when they are seeking assistance. There can be no "wrong door."

- Develop or improve mechanisms to treat populations such as juveniles (including those aging out of foster care), veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals, and the elderly. Consider the historical trauma of specific groups such as LGBTQ+, tribal members, victims of trauma, immigrants, and people of color.
- Ensure long term services are provided for individuals with a serious mental illness (SMI).
- Reduce barriers to services by addressing challenges with language, technology, and transportation.
- Remove silos and maximize resources through dialogue, collaboration, coordination, and creative problem solving between service providers, faith-based organizations, governmental representatives, elected officials, tribal authorities, business, families, and those with related lived experiences.
- Provide training and better assistance to first responders and law enforcement in responding to mental health issues. Involve our school systems, as truancy and limited literacy put children at greater risk for experiencing these challenges. Use more peer support systems and involve those with lived experiences as mentors.

## WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

- Get out and talk to people doing this work, those with lived experience, and to members of the community. Be open minded and listen to all concerns.
- Increase affordable housing and support the Housing First Model with wraparound services.
  - Revise state and local zoning regulations to reduce barriers to the development of affordable housing.
  - Utilize existing programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and the Government Property Lease Excise Tax to provide incentives for the development of affordable housing.
  - Establish a local housing authority/land trust to take advantage of federal funds.

- o Create more permanent funding sources for the support of affordable housing projects.
- Destigmatize and invest in mental health.
  - o Educate the community about these issues and what brings people to these situations.
  - o Increase education with younger generations and schools to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues. Begin at an early age to teach basic mental wellness skills as well as when and where to seek help.
  - o Provide more support for schools, government agencies, service providers and caregivers, including resiliency and vicarious trauma training.
  - o Build, incent, and retain qualified staff by providing funding for programming and salaries, offering a loan reimbursement program, tuition assistance, paid internships, pay incentives, and programs focused on “growing our own.”
  - o Create more mental health and substance use shelters and funding for behavioral health services.
- Prioritize resources to prevention.
  - o Continue examining the criminal justice system for opportunities to use prevention and intervention services to improve safety while reducing incarceration.
- o Educate students about the impacts of substance use including intellectual impairment, potential addiction, and particularly the life-threatening consequences of drugs such as Fentanyl.
- o Embrace harm avoidance programs, such as needle exchange programs, suboxone distribution to help revive people who have overdosed, Fentanyl test kits, and the like.
- o Increase treatment facilities for Fentanyl addiction and get people into treatment as early as possible.
- Encourage collaboration, coordination, and innovation between service providers, government agency representatives, elected officials, tribal authorities, faith-based and community organizations, those with related lived experiences, families and those needing services.
  - o Reduce or eliminate red tape from state and federal resources.
  - o Develop a more robust, accurate, complete, and impactful resource that connects all of Arizona and integrates the multiple databases to include an inventory of best practices, existing collaborations and partnerships, and technical resources to allow the more effective delivery of services.
  - o Reinstate the Governor’s Commission on Homelessness and Housing and establish standing committees on homelessness in the House and Senate.



*“The most impactful solutions are inspired through healthy and collaborative discourse, and I have never left a Town Hall session without having been inspired, educated, and enlightened.”*

## COMMUNITY AND FUTURE LEADERS TOWN HALLS

23rd Annual Summer Institute for Behavioral Health  
 New Freedom  
 Rural Arizona (Show Low)  
 Prescott  
 Cave Creek-Carefree  
 Cochise County  
 Florence  
 Southwest Arizona Town Hall Forum “Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness” (x4)

Casa Grande  
 Homelessness to Housing Committee  
 UA Health Sciences  
 Mohave County  
 Flagstaff  
 Human Services Campus Client  
 Southeast Arizona  
 Native American Connections  
 Payson

Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits  
 Verde Valley  
 Pima County  
 ASU Future Leaders  
 Bullhead City  
 “Exploring Solutions: Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness” Presented by Arizona Town Hall and Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health

Top to bottom: Participants at the Mohave County (Kingman), Pima County (Tucson), and Cochise County (Sierra Vista) community town halls.



Award-winning artist Supaman giving a special performance to participants, students, and community members at the 114th statewide town hall.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STATEWIDE TOWN HALL

The 114th statewide town hall convened in Tempe, Arizona and virtually November 14-16, 2022. Over 100 participants considered the Background Report and recommendations from Community and Future Leaders Town Halls. Below is a summary of the recommendations for action.

- Increase funding for low-income affordable housing, including rental assistance, eviction protection, serious mental illness (SMI) housing, senior housing, and adolescent residential treatment facilities. The costs associated with these stabilization services are much less than the public costs of persistent homelessness.
- Fund community resource navigators, peer support specialists, and social workers to guide people experiencing mental health or substance use challenges through a complex, decentralized system and provide a “warm handoff.”
- Support and establish co-located government agencies and non-profit organizations to create “one-stop shops” where multiple services from different providers are available in a single location. Save the Family and New Freedom in the Phoenix area and Front Door in Flagstaff are examples of programs with a high rate of success with their targeted populations.
- Review laws and local codes to ensure that homelessness is not criminalized. Revise state and local zoning regulations to allow inclusive zoning and encourage the construction of affordable housing by providing tax incentives and robust funding sources.
- Eliminate barriers for shelters and property rentals to individuals with mental health or substance use challenges and those with outstanding judgments or prior criminal convictions.
- Implement interdepartmental action teams at all levels of government to eliminate silos, duplication or gaps in services. Put people at the center of process and program design.
- Implement a statewide outreach campaign to inform people about alternatives to calling law enforcement for crisis response, including 2-1-1 Arizona and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Create a line item in the state budget for these helplines.
- Imbed mental health and social service professionals with first responder units to deal with issues that require crisis intervention, but not law enforcement. Educate 911 staff on best practices for utilizing these systems.
- Increase and expand the availability of specialty courts addressing mental health, substance use, and homelessness, particularly in rural areas.
- Expand effective diversion programs and give judges the flexibility to support and sentence individuals dealing with mental health, substance use, and homelessness issues. Avoid the use of incarceration in lieu of treatment.
- Encourage collaborative efforts to seek grant funding and provide training for staff at all levels on how to seek and utilize grant funding effectively. Eliminate the red tape attached to funding that gets in the way of caring for the whole person.
- Review eligibility requirements for government benefit and assistance programs, including healthcare. Consider economic conditions and implement “step downs” rather than all or nothing eligibility requirements.  
Expand access to healthcare and support services to address mental health, substance use, and homelessness through a mobile delivery system, especially for rural and tribal communities using programs similar to Circle the City.
- Prioritize our elderly population in addressing mental health, substance use, and homelessness issues, especially given our aging population.
- Involve those with shared and lived experiences with mental health, substance use, and homelessness issues in dialogue at all levels including funding, policy development, strategic and operational planning, direct services, and program evaluation. Ensure that involvement is done in ways that ensure equity, decrease stigma, and increase trauma-informed care.

- Eliminate restrictive practices in housing and employment that adversely impact individuals with criminal backgrounds, those with serious mental illnesses and substance abuse issues from obtaining a place to live or a job. Take an individualized approach to determining what is appropriate.
- Make greater use of those with lived experiences as coaches, mentors, and navigators, and provide specialized training as needed.
- Recruit and support individuals to pursue careers in social services through multiple forms of financial assistance and invest in workforce training and development to increase the supply of available staff. Eliminate restrictive professional licensure requirements.
- Utilize unused American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding by expanding programming, shelters, affordable housing, and other related services. Seek new sources of revenue at the county and local levels to sustain funding beyond 2026.

*“I love the format and think it is very conducive to conversation and problem-solving.”*



Participants propose recommendations report amendments and edits during the “Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness” statewide town hall plenary session.



## 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. Below are some representative commitments to action.

- Be a vocal advocate with my family, neighbors, and coworkers for the dignity and needs of those dealing with homelessness, mental illness, and substance use.
- Share my story so I can continue to live a life free of addiction and be a living example to the next person in need.
- Offer support to educators in the areas of teaching student self-regulation and further reducing harm from adverse childhood experiences.
- Say “yes” in my backyard.
- Strive to empower the voices of those with lived experiences by bringing them to the table where decisions are being made.
- Work to connect with organizations and individuals already engaging and providing services for people in our community and fund these organizations.
- Continue to incorporate opportunities for medical trainees to gain experience, understand resources, and have more compassion for the people they serve.
- Focus on connection with students, families, and community resources. Connection is the opposite of addiction.
- Support and vote for candidates that advocate programs to alleviate the shortage of affordable housing and support the mental and physical health of the indigenous and unhoused populations.

Top to bottom: Participants engage in panel discussions. Panel group participants propose amendments and edits to the recommendations report.



We welcome your involvement,  
questions, and perspectives.

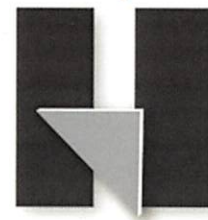
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Town Hall recommendations are a valuable resource for policymakers because they do not represent the agenda of a particular group or political perspective. Instead, Arizona Town Hall reports contain the informed consensus of Arizonans from different political parties, professions, socioeconomic status, and geographic areas of the state. A private, nonprofit civic organization, Arizona Town Hall serves as a catalyst for conversations and recommendations that create significant changes in Arizona's public policy. Countless local, state, and national leaders cite Arizona Town Hall as an important factor in educating people about complex issues and fostering the development of civic and community leaders.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO GENERAL SPONSORS "MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS"



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