

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

ASU Future Leaders Town Hall

October 27, 2022 – Phoenix, AZ

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE AND HOMELESSNESS

People use substances to cope with difficult situations, which leads to poor mental health and homelessness. Like COVID, homelessness can cause mental health and substance use issues to worsen. Substance abuse can impair mental health and cause impoverishment as people spend their resources on substances. People with mental health and/or substance use issues can have difficulty getting and keeping jobs, which can lead to homelessness, which also makes it harder to get and keep a job, and each of these conditions contributes to one big cycle of misery. Being homeless impacts physical and mental health. When people have a roof over their heads they can focus on other conditions. People experiencing homelessness or mental health issues are more likely to self-medicate by turning to substances. The use of substances separates people from their communities and support systems. We should recognize that the environment influences people, and that the environment includes other people. If behavioral problems are not addressed, they can lead to inter-generational problems, and a continuing downward spiral.

It is important to address these three conditions together because one contributes or leads to the other. It is like the domino theory. It is important to apply the Housing First model because when people are more vulnerable, they need more support.

We need to meet people where they are. We should recognize that not everyone suffers all three conditions simultaneously but treating them together brings more resources to the table and assures that when they are coextensive, they will be addressed together.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

Education is a big part of the solution. We need more teachers, psychiatrists, and social workers. We should get the community involved and informed, so that they will be more motivated to solve the problems. If they understand that mental health problems are real and common, and that there are solutions, they may be more willing to help. Education of older people about substance use could create greater understanding of the nature of the problem and the solutions that may be effective.

We need more shelters. We need professionals in those shelters to provide resources and evaluate people using the services. We need backup for nonprofits to assure that there is sufficient infrastructure to provide care. We should keep records to track what has helped people to make changes in behavior. We need better transportation options, so that people can access needed services.

We should remove financial barriers. These are expensive problems to have. We should consider changes to regulations and laws, and make substance use and mental health counseling more affordable. We need more affordable housing. Instead of dispatching police to mental health crises, we should send mental health crisis intervention teams. We should make it easier for marginalized communities to create intergenerational wealth through home ownership. We should take steps to destigmatize all three conditions. People may not seek help because they are afraid of being judged.

We need to coordinate services. We should develop more affordable housing in communities like Scottsdale where there is land available. Adopt the Housing First model. Vote for candidates who are committed to addressing these issues.

SETTING PRIORITIES

Raise awareness of these conditions

Focus on prevention of crises for people facing these conditions

Make housing more affordable.

Know where the money is going.

Education to find the root of the problem to stop it from growing.

Invest in programs that stabilizes people rather than just giving them a place to stay for the night. To do this, redirect funds from other programs that are less useful.

Focus on preventative measures: direct approach to fix the problems, community education to reduce stigma, early intervention to address mental health issues in the young, more program funding.

Elect politicians who are more engaged in dealing with these problems.

Be more collaborative and stop working in silos.

Educate people working in the field to be less intimidating and educate people generally to be less intimidated and to seek out resources on their own. Also, to focus on the present instead of looking back.

Preventative measures: establish a database for responders so that they would know about past mental health incidents at a particular address; emphasize education to de-stigmatize these issues and promote compassion; have nurse and social worker at public schools, to support students and reduce financial barriers to treatment, provide in-school treatment.

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 ASU Future Leaders Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Continue to look for effective solutions to combat homelessness by providing resources and mitigating further crippling factors that cause any of these issues.
- Focus on the now, not the how.
- Share the information that I have learned and contributed to and from this session with my family and friends.
- Continue efforts to integrate healthcare/homeless systems data in order to more effectively understand and assist individuals experiencing homelessness, mental health, and substance use.
- Discuss the issues of homelessness more often; Arizona has a huge problem, and it will not go away anytime soon.
- Talk to other Arizona Residents about these issues and I will share my experience with others.
- Use my knowledge and connections to spread awareness for those who are less represented. I hope my future career also helps me advocate for them as well.
- Continue to spread awareness of this issue to the people around me and start to discuss it in my assignments if given the chance.
- Tell other people about AZ Town Hall.

- Spread awareness by informing those who need it on resources available to them that could help better their situation.
- Go out and help homeless rather than relying on government processes to do the hard work.
- Spread the word to all my peers and close family members.
- Spread awareness across my community about ways to help improve current ongoing issues.
- Tell other people and spread awareness for those people and vote for people who care about these issues.
- Continue to volunteer at non-profits who are helping the community. I will continue to read and educate myself on issues & attempt to discuss these matters with any and all individuals willing to engage on different social topics.
- Share what I learned with my family, friends, and peers and continue to educate myself on these complex topics.
- Educate those around me of issues that are happening through social media and in my classes.
- Share what me and my table talked about with my family and friends.
- I will use this to complete my ASU 101 assignment and reflect.
- Learn more about it in order to find a solution to make a positive impact in our future as a society.
- Take more knowledge to these companies that take part of our everyday lives.
- Learn about other non-profit organizations that address mental health, substance use, and homelessness issues.
- Spread information and awareness about the topic I learned today with my peers in my classes
- Look for more community service opportunities and discuss what I learned with my family and friends.
- Spread awareness by informing those who need it on resources available to them that could help better their situation.
- Share what I learned with my family, friends, and peers and continue to educate myself on these complex topics.
- Inform myself of the statistical data of these issues and motivate my peers to do the same to spread awareness.
- Apply this information discussed to my internship and when working with clients who are experiencing these issues.
- Do my own research and educate myself more about the issues at hand.
- I will also talk about what I learned today with others because it was a topic I found interesting and important to know about.
- Educate those around me of issues that are happening through social media and in my classes.
- Raise my voice more and inspire others to create a change. Also, attend more events where I can help with mental health, substance use, and homelessness.
- Share the information that I learned with my friends and family. I would also vote for those in office who will make a difference in our state. I will educate myself more in mental illness.
- Share what me and my table talked about with my family and friends.