Center for Health Care Strategies

Data Across Sectors for Health

Bringing Community Voice into Cross-Sector Data Sharing:
Addressing the Health Care Needs of People Experiencing Homelessness in Arizona

Arizona, like all states, lacks affordable housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. Since 2020, homelessness has increased nearly 35 percent in Arizona's largest county, Maricopa County. There is strong political will in the state to address homelessness through improved coordination between agencies that interact with people experiencing homelessness and to use resources more efficiently. Cross-sector data sharing provides an opportunity for agencies working on homelessness, behavioral health, and health care to better understand the overall scope of homelessness and health care expenditures, while providing necessary context to make broader system improvements.

As part of *Learning and Action in Policy and Partnerships* (LAPP), a national initiative that supports community-based data sharing efforts, a cross-sector team in Arizona sought to integrate data systems and expand care coordination opportunities across state and local partners serving people experiencing homelessness. Each partner brought a unique perspective to the LAPP team. The Arizona Housing Coalition, the project lead, served as a backbone organization that brought together all Continuums of Care in the state.

AT-A-GLANCE

- **Community Health Goal:** Improve health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Arizona.

- **Partners:** Arizona Housing Coalition; Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (Arizona's Medicaid agency); Arizona Department of Economic Security; Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care; Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness; and Arizona Balance of State Continuum of Care.

- **Highlighted Accomplishment**: Integrated statewide homeless management information system (HMIS) data with state Medicaid data.

- **Policy Impact:** Build statewide support for housing opportunities in Arizona.

BRINGING COMMUNITY VOICE INTO CROSS-SECTOR DATA SHARING

Sharing data across state agencies and community-based organizations is critical for advancing health equity and addressing complex health challenges that involve multiple sectors. Insights from individuals with lived expertise provide valuable context to inform data-sharing efforts that is critical to improving health equity. This case study is a product of *Learning and Action in Policy and Partnerships*, a national initiative led by Data Across Sectors for Health in partnership with the Center for Health Care Strategies and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), Arizona's Medicaid agency, operates a supportive housing program for people with a serious mental illness diagnosis, as well as people with general mental health and/or substance use disorders, including a priority for people with high service utilization. The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), another state partner in the effort to address homelessness, provides resources for older adults and people with disabilities and administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and TANF programs.

Key Project Activities

The Arizona LAPP team developed a mutually agreed upon set of principles that outline the benefits of data sharing. This served as a guiding document with clear roles for each partner and articulated a vision for agencies and partners throughout the project. To begin its exploration of data sharing across homelessness response systems, the Arizona LAPP team reviewed similar data-sharing efforts or "use cases" in Arizona, as well as examples from other states that have successfully integrated housing and Medicaid data. Articulating the purpose of cross-system data integration (e.g., improving coordination of housing and services for people experiencing homelessness) was critical for ensuring buy-in from team partners and aligning activities with proposed goals. Another vital aspect of the project was to obtain written consent from individuals experiencing homelessness to integrate their data into the shared system to optimize care coordination. This allowed for greater transparency and power for individuals experiencing homelessness to opt into data sharing.

Since the project's inception, the Arizona LAPP team sought to center the perspective of persons with lived expertise related to homelessness and housing instability. The team partnered with From the Ground Up, a consulting firm led by persons with lived experience, to engage people with lived and living experience of homelessness as well as homeless service providers to inform how data should be used and the role of data sharing in improving responses to homelessness. These community insights helped inform how data can be used in a shared data warehouse that brings together Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data from the state's three Continuums of Care, Medicaid data, and economic security data. For example, through focus group interviews, individuals with lived experience of homelessness and homeless service and behavioral health providers expressed the need for agencies to better share data across systems to improve care delivery, lessen the repetition of traumatic stories, and reduce inefficiencies. People experiencing homelessness developed recommendations to inform protocols that educate service users on how to access their own data records and provide written consent.

Data-Sharing Accomplishments to Improve Community Health and Advance Equity

Though the LAPP project has ended, each Continuum of Care, AHCCCS, and DES are continuing to work together to test the data warehouse concept. The governance structure developed through the Arizona LAPP project continues to be critical for the maintenance and use of data. In establishing voting members, one-third of members are people with lived experience.

Looking Ahead

The Arizona LAPP team hopes to demonstrate that the integration of homelessness, Medicaid, and economic security data can show the overall housing and health care needs of people experiencing homelessness. To achieve this, the Arizona LAPP team hopes to formalize ongoing commitments to data sharing beyond the current testing and conceptualization phase. Those formalized commitments are contingent upon demonstrating success of the data warehouse concept, securing ongoing funding, and ensuring that there is sufficient Release of Information, security, and privacy guarantees to uphold a client's decision to have their information shared.

A goal of the Arizona LAPP team is to improve efficiencies to solve broader system problems, like the lack of affordable housing and services for people experiencing homelessness, and make tangible improvements that impact housing and services. Looking ahead, the Arizona LAPP team plans to use this project to further drive statewide interest and commitment to addressing homelessness.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a policy design and implementation partner devoted to improving outcomes for people enrolled in Medicaid. We support partners across sectors and disciplines to make more effective, efficient, and equitable care possible for millions of people across the nation. For more information, visit **www.chcs.org**.

ABOUT DATA ACROSS SECTORS FOR HEALTH

Data Across Sectors for Health (DASH) is a national initiative launched by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to improve community health, well-being and equity, by fostering greater alignment among health care, public health, and other community-based social systems to improve multi-sector collaboration and data sharing. For more information, visit **www.dashconnect.org**.