



How Should Arizona Spend Federal Pandemic Funds?

East Valley Report

July 29, 2021 by Zoom | 12:00 p.m. –1:00 p.m.

Most Important Areas to Address Disparities in Health and Well-Being

As the eviction moratorium ends, housing for low income and workforce is already at a crisis level and this crisis will only get worse. We should prioritize the development of affordable housing as quickly as possible in the following ways:

1. Some people, such as seniors with limited incomes, need rental subsidies to maintain their ability to stay in their homes, as distinguished from temporary assistance. We should provide subsidies for those who need them.
2. All kinds of affordable housing should be developed—from shelters to transitional to affordable for families.
3. Rental assistance paid directly to landlords.
4. Housing for those suffering from mental illness or substance abuse.

We should also consider using one-time funds to aid programs that are leasing facilities and having difficulty paying high rents, to enable them to purchase their facilities to help them continue operating more sustainably. Housing infrastructure is a great way to use one-time money because reducing the cost of housing and keeping people housed can reduce health care costs in the long run, keeping people healthier, reducing emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and overall health care costs.

Some money should be spent to educate and assist people to access benefits that are available to them, including housing assistance. There is a lot of misinformation circulating and we must do a better job of educating people.

Many educational institutions are receiving funding. We should prioritize finding where there are gaps to make the best use of the funding and resources that are being provided.

Health care is critically important in all its aspects. This should include assistance to develop housing for health care workers and assistance in filling out paperwork to receive assistance of various types.

Environmental pollution should be addressed, as it significantly affects health, particularly in marginalized communities.

Since these are one-time funds, we should spend them on high-value investments that will not leave a void when they are no longer available. Sustainability is a key consideration and should be part of the decision-making process when allocating funds.

To obtain greater buy-in from the community at large, some of the money should be spent on communication about how the funds are being otherwise used, and public-private partnerships should be encouraged. This would also maximize the benefit obtained from the monies.

Priorities for Utilizing One-Time Funding

Within housing development, affordable housing should be prioritized. There is an extreme shortage of affordable housing statewide, particularly for extremely low-income renters. We should use public-private partnerships to develop this housing stock, with nonprofits applying for grants working in partnership with developers. This housing should prioritize those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

It is important to develop greater public understanding and support of these programs. Some money should be spent to educate and lobby for support for increasing the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and Housing Trust Fund and for changes to zoning laws that stymie the development of multifamily housing, particularly in communities close to jobs. Value-based investment opportunities would provide for sustainability of these programs. Housing developers and property managers should be encouraged to develop properties, particularly multi-family properties, with edible landscaping. Greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables would improve health in these communities.

The built environment is critical to sustaining healthy communities. During the pandemic people wanted to get out to walk and bike, but not all communities provide safe opportunities for such activities. Some of the one-time money should be spent on infrastructure that provides walkable and bikeable communities, outdoor recreational opportunities, and public transit.

We could promote mental health and reduce substance abuse by investing in more nurse and health family partnerships for family health and behavioral health visiting. The intersection between policing, corrections, and behavioral health services also needs to be improved. Too many people with mental health issues end up in prisons without access to the help they need.

Economic mobility for families would be improved if we could provide free childcare and after school care programs and adult learner programs that enable families to access jobs with livable wages. Free mental health programs for families also would be helpful.

Municipalities are using funds to improve infrastructure (water, sewer, and broadband). We need to improve and provide free broadband service throughout the state. This will yield significant benefits for future economic development, for workers, and for teachers and students.

Arizona suffers from a teacher shortage that is linked to low levels of teacher compensation. We should use some of the money to increase teacher pay.