



How Should Arizona Spend Federal Pandemic Funds?

Northern AZ Report

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

The best way to use the funds is for one-time expenditures to advance individual projects because funds are not available to support ongoing projects. Get shovel-ready projects ready so that when funding is available for future development the infrastructure will be ready to support that development. Investing in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure would fit this criterion and could make impressive and lasting differences in Arizona communities. Lack of broadband contributes significantly to health care disparities, particularly as telehealth is becoming increasingly important in rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the problems of emergency food providers with storing food in times of emergency. There are 1,300 of these providers, many in rural areas. During emergencies they need to bring in and store large quantities of food to meet the increased need. Some of the one-time money should be used to assist these providers in building cold storage capabilities to meet this need.

Affordable housing is needed in most if not all Arizona communities, and the need is particularly acute in northern Arizona. During the COVID-19 pandemic communities could not use congregate housing facilities to shelter people. One-time monies could be used to purchase older motel facilities to house people who cannot be placed in congregate facilities and to house families. One-time funding could also be used to establish a housing commission in counties such as Yavapai where none exists.

Northern Arizona has difficulty attracting and retaining health care professionals, particularly physicians. An effective strategy to address this shortage is to allow the communities to “grow their own” physicians through local training programs. One-time monies could be used to establish local training programs and help defray the costs of starting medical practices in underserved areas. It would also be helpful to fund mobile units to provide health care in rural areas where people do not have access to health care due to transportation constraints.

Priorities for Utilizing One-Time Funding

The worker shortage across Arizona and the U.S. is becoming critical. Measures to get people back to work should have priority for one-time funding. This includes funding of childcare services, including before- and after-school programs.

Assistance for the homeless, supportive services, and finding shelter for people who simply can't afford housing also should have priority. One model that might be considered is the Navajo Nation which was awarded funds for housing, and which assists members affected by COVID-19 with security deposits, utilities, and short-term rental assistance.

We should incentivize quality health care in rural communities. This would entail providing economic support to health care providers who will stay and serve rural communities. Supporting public health care workers

is also important. Therapists in shelters and other non-profit settings are notoriously underpaid. Funds should be targeted to improving pay for this sector.

Business assistance should be available to businesses with a proven track record, not just startups.

A cross-cutting issue is the fact that assistance is available for those with very low incomes but there are many people who barely missed the cutoff and did not receive aid who are struggling financially. These people should receive some relief from problems such as late fees, missed payments, etc.

Some funding should be directed to vaccination campaigns, particularly in rural areas.