



How Should Arizona Spend Federal Pandemic Funds?

West Valley Report

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

There was broad consensus that housing is the most important area in need of funding. There is certainly an emergency need as the moratorium on evictions ends and some people lose access to housing, but the information and referral hotline 2-1-1-Arizona (<https://az.211counts.org>) has received almost 41,000 calls from people requesting housing and shelter assistance since the start of the pandemic. We need not only temporary assistance and homeless prevention assistance but also long-term solutions. Permanent supportive housing, including the creation of more units, would be a good investment in long-term housing solutions for the low-income population.

In addition, there are many people who do not currently qualify for relief based on income and asset requirements, but who will suffer greatly and may lose their homes as a result of the pandemic. Much of the relief already provided has targeted renters rather than people who are struggling to pay their mortgages. Homeowners need help too, particularly those who just miss the eligibility requirements for assistance.

Housing values in the Phoenix Metro area are skyrocketing, and homes have become unaffordable. Statistically, many people need to work 78 hours per week to afford housing. Working parents also need access to quality childcare. Parents working longer hours must knit together a patchwork of childcare providers, ranging from childcare centers to friends, neighbors, and relatives. This childcare is scarce and expensive, and low-income parents in particular need of assistance.

Broadband is also an area that warrants investment. Broadband affects health and well-being of Arizonans in many ways, including access to essential services such as schools, health care, and basic communication. This ultimately affects the economic well-being of individuals and communities.

Priorities for Utilizing One-Time Funding

Within the category of housing, affordable housing and rental assistance should be prioritized. There is an extreme shortage of affordable housing across the state and approximately 136,000 affordable units are needed for extremely low-income renters. More information about the need for affordable housing in Arizona is available at <http://www.nihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/arizona>. Housing for victims of domestic violence, including housing for men and their children, is also needed.

Although some businesses may need assistance, most cannot sustain themselves for long without paying customers. For the welfare of Arizona's people and the health of its economy American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) monies should be used to ensure that the basic needs of individuals for food, shelter, and health care are being met.

Broadband has become an essential service for everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that it is critical that everyone have equal access to broadband. There are disparities in access between urban and rural areas, as well as between economically advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Digital inequities should be viewed

from a broad perspective that includes both access to broadband and education about how to use basic essential digital functions. ARPA monies should be used to address all these digital divides.