

Opportunities for Policy Change

Prioritizing Community Health and Well-being

One of Vitalyst Health Foundation's goals is to inform decision-makers to prioritize community health and well-being, because healthy communities are created when decision-makers champion proven solutions and include local insights.

Arizona has many opportunities for improving community health. Improving opportunities for access to care, creating housing for school staff while providing much needed community services, and creating schools that allow students to feel safe and learn are ways public/private partnerships can work together to create healthier communities. In this publication, you will get a glimpse of three of Vitalyst Health Foundation's recent Spark Reports: 1) Cost Containment through Collaboration; 2) Creating Trauma Sensitive Arizona

Schools; 3) How School Districts Can Create Attainable Housing Opportunities.

This policy primer provides an overview of some of the issues Vitalyst is working to address with community partners. The complete publications are available on the Vitalyst website, as are many others on issues related to community health and well-being. Vitalyst is proud to be a partner, convener, and trusted source of information for all, from elected officials to community members and leaders.



Cost Containment through Collaboration

Working Across Sectors to Manage Costs and Improve Well-being

A summary of a longer report that can be found at vitalysthealth.org.

\$5,563 PER MONTH

average savings per AHCCCS member housed

\$82.5 MILLION

reduction in total cost of care due to housing

The figures above are the result of public and private sector entities working together in new ways to manage costs and improve community health. They are possible thanks to collaboration among partners within and beyond the traditional health care system, such housing, corrections and food systems.

Key Takeaways

- **Interagency collaboration is key.** It can lower costs, improve health outcomes and advance economic and educational success.
- **Strong leadership is required for cross-sector collaboration.** Efficient and effective application of taxpayer resources often requires overcoming longstanding policy and organizational barriers.

Traditional approaches to managing program costs often result in significant unintended economic and human impacts. States know they must take a different approach, so they're working on collaborative solutions to address underlying factors that impact community health. Entities such as hospital systems, insurers and businesses are following suit.

New Ways of Doing Business

These innovations center on two main focus areas:

Social Drivers (or Determinants) of Health (SDOH):

New partnerships are seeking to improve common drivers that influence health, such as employment, housing, access to healthy food and community connections, which have a much greater impact on health than traditional medical care.

Supporting Whole Person Care: A common theme across many of these partnerships is the interdependence of mental and physical health. Individuals with behavioral health needs interact with a broad array of other public services (e.g., the justice system).

Health Beyond Traditional Medical Care

Partners are developing innovative strategies for new programs that are designed to reduce health care costs and improve care. This includes thinking beyond traditional medical care and collaborating with sectors previously siloed from health care delivery.

Arizona has been an early leader in advancing innovative new approaches to these issues and other states have followed suit. Medicare has allowed its private plans to offer non-traditional benefits such as healthy meals, transportation, home safety devices and more, because they can support health outcomes and are cost-effective. Commercial insurers and large health care systems are partnering with community organizations to support SDOH such as housing (UnitedHealthcare, CareSource), food access (Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas City), job skills (Texas Health Resources) and financial wellness (ProMedica in Ohio).

Arizona Successes

In Arizona, state agencies are also working well together and with community stakeholders to coordinate state, local and federal funding to avoid duplication and efficiently direct resources.

Housing as a Cross-Sector Issue: The Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH) and Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) partner to distribute housing dollars for persons with Serious Mental Illness (SMI), and AHCCCS uses its non-Medicaid funding to provide supportive housing for over 3,000 individuals to avoid costly health care settings such as emergency departments. AHCCCS reports these strategies have resulted in a **\$5,563 reduction in average per member per month costs, and an \$82.5 million reduction in total cost of care.** Additionally, AHCCCS’s private sector health plans have partnered to invest their own corporate funds and bring together community partners to support affordable housing across Arizona.

Supporting Arizona Kids: AHCCCS, the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) are working together in a number of creative ways. Specifically, AHCCCS and ADE have partnered to improve access to behavioral health services for children through Project A.W.A.R.E., which uses federal grant funds to support local school districts and connect them to mental health resources. AHCCCS has also advanced its partnerships with schools to support health services on school campuses through both Medicaid funding and legislative appropriations for students without insurance coverage.

Justice System Partnerships: Arizona’s Second Chance Centers are a collaboration among a broad set of state agency partners, the City of Phoenix and others. The Centers support individuals nearing release from incarceration by setting them up for success in their transition to the community. The Centers provide job readiness trainings and connections to stable housing. AHCCCS also has innovative programs that connect individuals nearing release to needed health care services in the community, preventing costlier hospital admissions and recidivism in the justice system.

Goals of Cross-Sector Collaboration



Creating Trauma Sensitive Arizona Schools

Building Resilience to Lessen the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences

A summary of a longer report that can be found at vitalysthealth.org.

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). These include: experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home or community; or having a family member attempt or die by suicide. Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with: substance misuse, mental health problems, instability due to parental divorce or separation or household members being in jail or prison. ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood, and can also negatively impact education and job opportunities.

The phrase "trauma-informed care (TIC)" has existed since the mid-1980s, but the practice has come into widespread use only in the past decade. TIC assumes everyone has had some trauma in their lives and starts not by asking "What is wrong with this person?" but instead "What has happened to this person?" As a strength-based approach that emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety, TIC embraces six key principles to support change not only within service delivery (health-care or education), but also throughout an organization:

Key Principles:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice, and choice
6. Cultural, historical, and gender issues

Implementation of a trauma-informed approach is an ongoing organizational change process. It is not a program model that can be implemented and then simply monitored. Instead, it's a profound paradigm shift in knowledge, perspective, attitudes, skills and practices

that deepen over time. The trauma-informed approach is a continuum of implementation, beginning with becoming trauma aware, moving to become trauma sensitive, then to trauma responsive, and finally to being fully trauma informed. While there is variation in preferred terminology, for consistency and to be in alignment with language used by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the term trauma sensitive is used throughout this report. ADE adopted trauma sensitive to have the same definition as the Missouri models trauma informed. It is the stance of ADE believes that it is best practices for schools to shift their culture and embody the trauma sensitive/informed principles and approaches.

Trauma Impacts Learning

Trauma changes the architecture of a developing child's brain and body which impairs their ability to learn. In addition to weakening the immune system, increased stress hormones trigger the stress response and diminish students' ability to adapt to challenges. When this fight or flight instinct is activated, it essentially takes the learning brain offline to focus on basic survival. Students impacted by trauma need teachers and administrators who understand the biology of stress and who put restorative practices in place, rather than zero-tolerance policies.

Childhood adversity often leads to poor performance in school, increasing the risk of dropping out, living in poverty, and involvement in the justice system. These all set the stage for transmission of trauma to the next generation. Teachers and administrators are not immune to their own personal trauma. Heavy workloads, challenging behavior, and lack of support all contribute to ongoing stress and burnout. Trauma sensitive schools are critical in building student, teacher, and staff resilience to lessen the negative impacts of adversity and trauma.

Benefits of Trauma Informed Schools

While more rigorous long-term research is needed, studies suggest that adopting trauma sensitive practices in schools can lead to profound and lasting shifts in both thinking and practice.

Reported benefits include:

- Improved academic achievement and test scores.
- Improved school climate.
- Improved teacher sense of satisfaction and safety in being a teacher.
- Improved retention of new teachers.
- Reduction of student behavioral outbursts and referrals to the office.
- Reduction of stress for staff and students.
- Reduction in absences, detentions, and suspensions.
- Reduction in student bullying and harassment.
- Reduction in the need for special educational services/classes.
- Reduction in drop-outs.

Adopting an equity lens for trauma sensitive practices allows educators to create safe environments while also tapping into the strengths of students' culture. This results in students that are engaged in their learning, on-track to graduate, and ultimately increasing economic mobility and life fulfillment.

Why This Is an Urgent Need in Arizona

Arizona ranks 33rd in the U.S. with 17% of children ages 0-17 years having experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs are often the root cause of serious learning disabilities, health problems, and social and behavioral problems that impact a child's ability to learn. Students experiencing multiple adversities are more likely to be held back, miss more days of school, perform below grade level, be labeled as special education, be suspended, expelled or drop out of school.

Arizona faces serious teacher retention challenges with one of the highest teacher turnover rates in the U.S. Nearly 1 out of every 4 teachers (24%) leaves each year and a third leave within the first 5 years. Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of the most experienced teachers are nearing retirement age. While the pandemic has certainly contributed to retention challenges, the state's struggle to hire and keep

qualified teachers in the classroom has persisted for more than a decade.

Trauma Sensitive School Movement in Arizona

Efforts to advance trauma sensitive schools in Arizona formally began in 2015 after a screening and discussion of the *Paper Tigers* documentary film. The film follows a year in the life of an alternative high school that radically changed its approach to disciplining its students, resulting in decreased behavior issues, increased attendance, and graduation rates. Attendees at the Arizona film screening wanted to continue the discussion on ways Arizona schools could adopt similar practices, leading to the formation of the "Creating Trauma Sensitive Arizona Schools" work group, a standing committee of the larger Arizona Adverse Childhood Experiences Consortium (ACEs Consortium). Since then, the group has been meeting regularly with a mission to ensure that Arizona children traumatized by ACEs succeed in school. Goals of the work group include: increasing awareness, promoting professional collaboration, supporting implementation of evidence-based trauma sensitive policies and practice, and promoting educator self-care and resilience.

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) has also been active in the trauma sensitive schools' movement for several years, offering educational opportunities to school districts statewide. Recently, amidst the pandemic, ADE's School Support and Improvement (SSI) Unit has supported action to address the social and emotional needs of staff and students. Recognizing that COVID has changed the landscape makes support for educators and students an essential first step to support academic achievement. SSI was able to offer a 4-part Building Resilience Workshop series for teachers, teacher teams, administrators, leadership teams, paraprofessionals, social workers, counselors, and other support staff. In addition, funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), ADE was able to increase course offerings and offer the Building Resilience Series 2. These sessions supported over 8,000 educators across Arizona who expressed a great need to continue the conversation and bring in content related to equity, diversity, and race. ADE is responding by offering a 2-part equity mini-series.

How School Districts Can Create Attainable Housing Opportunities

Legal and Financial Pathways to Attract and Retain Employees

A summary of a longer report that can be found at vitalysthealth.org.

Nationally, the housing affordability crisis is becoming increasingly dire. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the housing crisis and Arizona is facing one of the toughest housing markets in the country. Rental and home prices have seen double-digit increases in the past year, and working families are facing intense struggles to locate attainable housing. Skyrocketing rental costs are affecting school districts hoping to attract and retain talented teachers and school personnel.

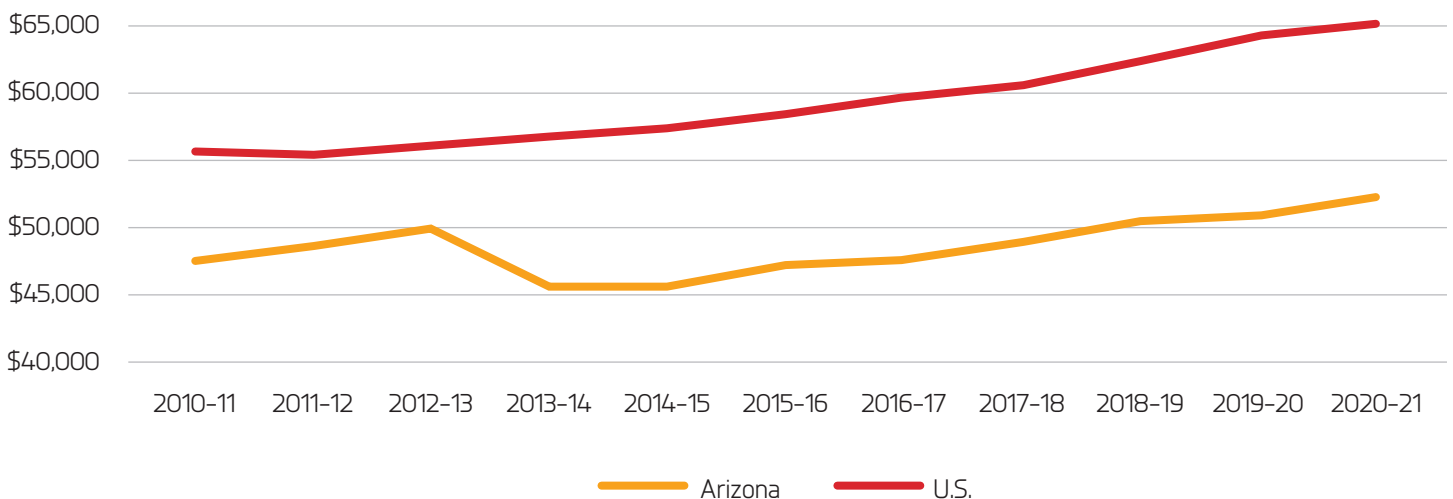
School districts around the country have been searching for ways to create attainable housing opportunities on their campuses so teachers and support staff are able to live

close to the schools where they work. School districts can use their resources to support educators, school staff, and their communities by using school-owned property to develop attainable housing. This brief will explore what attainable housing is, how schools can navigate legal compliance considerations, and how Arizona school districts can make this work.

What is Attainable Housing?

Attainable housing is comparable to workforce housing, which is defined as dwellings for “households earning between 60 and 120 percent of area median income,” In

Estimated Average Teacher Salary ARIZONA AND U.S.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state in select years.

2020 dollars, that is \$46,680 to \$93,360, respectively. These kinds of housing programs are targeted at households that earn too much money to qualify for traditional affordable housing subsidies, and it can include many educators and support staff.

The Need for Attainable Housing

Educators across the country face pay gaps, but data reveals that Arizona educators face significant wage penalties, close to 36%. The teacher wage penalty is how much less money public school teachers make as compared to other college-educated workers. As of 2021, the average salary for public school teachers is \$58,489.

What is Arizona Doing?

Arizona's explosive population growth has exacerbated housing disparities, but there have been some successful efforts around the state to address the attainable housing crisis. For example, Vail Unified School District built 24 tiny houses on a 14-acre lot to offer attainable housing to educators. Yavapai County's Board of Supervisors approved the Home of My Own program, which created a set of pre-approved plans for attainable homes of various sizes, given out to builders and prospective homeowners free of charge. Some school districts in the county have expressed interest in participating once the plans are available. In Tuba City Unified School District, part of the employment benefits offered to teachers includes teacher housing. The Navajo Nation partnered with the Native Housing Partnership to develop Karigan Estates to attract local teachers, among other professionals, to work in Window Rock. Karigan Estates is a 13-acre site consisting of single-family homes, apartment complexes, townhomes, retail/commercial, and governmental offices.





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