

Insights from Providers:

Enhancing Arizona's Homeless Service System to Understand Client Needs and Utilization

Participation Summary

- 9 exploratory interviews guided focus group questions;
- 25 statewide focus groups in 2022 and 2023 with 58 homeless service providers and administrators;
- More information on the methodology is available [here](#).

40%

Administrators

60%

Service Providers



Homelessness system stakeholders responded to questions about:

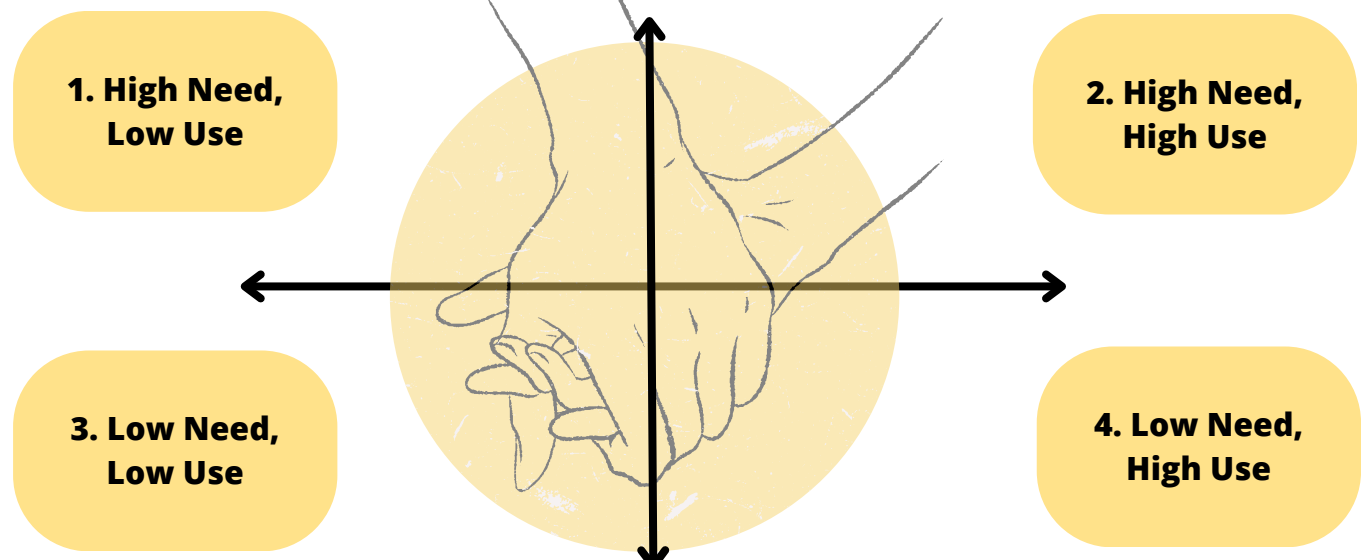
1. Who is under/served by the homeless service system?

2. How adequately do services address needs?

3. How can the system improve to meet the diverse needs of all populations?

The Need/Use Framework

The "needs" and "uses" of the homeless service system varies across populations.



The Need/Use Framework

Group 1: Populations with High Need & Low Use

High need, low use populations may include members of stigmatized groups, people who are doubled up or unsheltered/encampment-based, families with children, pregnant people, people who have experienced trauma in homelessness or other systems (notably youth/young adults), and those who are trying to avoid contact with punitive systems.

Those with **high needs** but **low use** access services less than their needs require. They may also rely heavily on other systems for services.

"Really, what it would take for a mom to bring her kids into a congregate setting and then access resources? Family homelessness is often something that's harder to connect resources that we have with the need."

"[Youth] don't feel like they can trust...because some have had bad experiences in the system. They feel the system is not designed to help them. Professionals have failed them in the past so it's hard for them to open up and actually get help."

Societal Myths:

Some people who are homeless do not need help; people choose homelessness; help is available and people don't want it.

Provider Realities:

Actual or perceived barriers discourage the use of potentially beneficial services; the system was not designed for all populations.

Takeaway: This group highlights the need for increased attention to hard-to-reach and hard-to-serve populations and the important reasons (e.g., barriers to access, stigma, discrimination) they are not using available services.

The Need/Use Framework

Group 2: *Populations with High Need & High Use*

High need, high use populations may include people who experience chronic homelessness, who are “stuck” in the system or intensively use housing/services (e.g., emergency shelter, RRH, transitional housing) without being matched to appropriate housing options, do not qualify for or struggle to use housing vouchers, and/or experience serious or untreated mental illness.

High need can result in **high use**, including chronic shelter use and/or repeat service engagement, often contributing to high costs.

“So we're kind of forcing people with disabilities to like, stay homeless for a year, because... that's what the system has in place for assistance right now.”

Societal Myths:

This population does not want stable housing; takes advantage of the system; is not willing to “do the work” needed to attain & sustain housing.

Provider Realities:

Stable housing options & necessary resources do not exist for people in certain high need/use categories.

Takeaway: This group highlights the system limitation that there are populations who use services often or intensely but are often not stably housed. Attention is needed to remove barriers and work towards cross system collaboration for these populations.

The Need/Use Framework

Group 3: Populations with Low Need & Low Use

Low need, low use populations may include people seeking prevention services, eviction services, people who are “first time homeless,” those using other systems for primary services, and/or people categorized as “self-resolvers.”

Low need, low use is a group for which homelessness may be prevented with rapid and/or one-time assistance.

“That is one of the most common ways that I see folks ending their homelessness is when they have that financial support or deposits and first month's rent or and or last month's rent and even furniture and things like that... people really need that help to get moving.”

Takeaway: This group can represent a match between need and use *if* appropriate homelessness prevention, diversion, or rapid resolution support is provided.

The Need/Use Framework

Group 4: Populations with Low Need & High Use

Low need, high use populations may include people who continue to use services despite stable housing because their family connections remain in the system and/or they lack out-of-system social support.

Takeaway: Providers offered no examples of people in this category. Although outlier cases may exist, they did NOT identify this combination as a system concern.

Provider-Identified Structural Challenges

Barriers to affordable housing

E.g., inclusionary zoning laws; Arizona is one of seven states to ban inclusionary zoning; AZ has a statewide ban on rent control by cities and counties; alleged price-fixing by large property managers contributes to rising rents

Provider or funder limits on the provision of critical supportive services for housing sustainability (See study on provider experiences)

Ineligible for services based on HUD definitions

E.g., those doubling up, or in overcrowded or substandard housing and/or their income threshold is too high (See HUD's definition of homelessness)

Inadequate public benefits/benefit regulations

E.g., Benefits not keeping pace with inflation; "benefits cliff"; backlog caused by PACT Act (See PACT ACT for Veterans)

"Rents can go up as high as the landlord wants in any year because Arizona has a law against rent control... especially people newly entering homelessness or some of the folks that we've successfully housed, they're reentering the system because there's not really a lot of market pressure to lower the amount that landlords can raise rent every year."

"People stay on benefits or turn down a raise or promotion because it's gonna put them \$10 over that limit and they'll lose their food stamps, childcare and potentially their housing. Those systems have to have flexibility."

"People get stuck in the middle of income requirements for rentals versus income requirements for our programs... most landlords want to know that you're making three times the rent as your income but if you're making three times the rent as your income, you may not qualify for our assistance and so people getting stuck kind of in that middle ground."

Income requirements

E.g., 50% area median income (AMI) cut off for housing is too high for people who just started working, have no savings (See Area Median Income, Median Family Income [MFI])

Increased exclusion of marginalized populations

Large property management firms have greater access to criminal history data leading to an increased housing exclusion of underserved populations (see Private Property Managers: Unchecked).

Provider Recommendations to Address Needs & Improve Equity

High need/Low use

- Support the development of inclusive, low-barrier shelters;
 - Increase the availability of shelters for young people;
- Improve access to resources in rural communities;
- Relax eligibility criteria, income restrictions & documentation requirements for social & housing services;
- Increase free, low-cost, & drop-in childcare;
- Prioritize outreach & services for underserved populations (in concert with people with lived experience; PWLE).

- Provide rapid prevention & diversion services to reduce inflow into the homelessness system & prevent trauma/harm.

Low need/Low use

High need/High use

- Invest in & remove barriers to permanent housing;
- Promote “Housing First” as a cost-saving measure for other systems;
- Provide long-term case management to rehoused populations; remove provider barriers where needed;
- Lower caseloads, collaborate across agencies & use multi-disciplinary provider teams to serve complex cases.

- Prioritize whole-family housing placements;
- Support clients’ exiting services in building new support systems.

Low need/High use

Takeaway: System redesign is needed to 1) identify levels & types of need, with attention to socially and structurally disadvantaged populations; 2) expand services; and 3) match services to needs.