Mental health advocates explore options to support sufferers

Monique Brand  Jun 28, 2017 Updated 8 hrs ago
SIERRA VISTA — The two-day CHIP strategy session ended with a three-person presentation discussing ways to tackle stigmas involving people with mental illness.

About 100 people — representatives of academia, elected officials and mental health advocates — gathered at the Cochise College Downtown Center on Wednesday to participate.

CHIP — short for Community Health Improvement Plan — follows the 2017 Cochise Community Health Assessment that was presented by the Cochise County Health and Social Services earlier this year.

The anonymous results were compiled through a data program called Survey Monkey. It was then combined with an analysis of several dozen other sources such as Medicaid.

According to the report, top health priority responses were mental health and substance abuse, good jobs with a healthy economy, and healthy eating.

Copies of the full report are available upon request at the Cochise Health and Social Services agencies in Bisbee, Douglas and Sierra Vista.

Currently, Arizona ranks 12th highest in the nation for rates of prescription drug misuse and abuse for individuals over 12 years old, as well as 12th highest in the nation for opioid-related overdose deaths.

In Cochise County, out of 657,029 outpatients visits by Medicaid patients in 2014 and 2015, 390,872 — around 50.6 percent — were for mental disorders. It didn't break down which of those visits were drug related.

The assessment states the exact finding of the “magnitude of mental illness and substance use in Cochise County” is difficult.

“In addition to Medicaid utilization data, there are data sources that can help us better understand the prevalence of substance use and abuse,” the report states.
Francisco Garcia, director and chief medical officer for the Pima County Health Department, presented “The Burden of Opioid Use/Misuse in Pima County.” The lecture highlights how the county approaches issues of substance and mental abuse.

“This isn’t because it’s the best or the only approach, but because it’s an experience that we can share that we can put on the table and maybe beneficial to your community as we are supportive of our sister county in that way,” he said.

Elizabeth Hall-Lipsy is an assistant professor at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy. Her speech was on producing a sequential intercept map.

The chart could serve as an interactive tool for developing criminal justice-mental health partnerships at each of five intercept points: law enforcement, initial detention/court hearings, jail/courts, reentry and community corrections.

“I think it’s really important to bridging the concept between mental health...substance abuse and the criminal justice and legal policies,” she said. “...before you begin to make changes, you have to really arm yourself with what the face of mental health might look like.”

She encouraged the audience to debunk their views of mental illness and build each case on compassion.

County Administrator Ed Gilligan finished the presentation motivating the audience to implement programs in the community that won't “get them bogged down on the money.”

“People change people...we can’t be paralyzed into believing that we can’t have positive outcomes for our people,” he said.

The next step is to use the assessment data and feedback from the sessions to complete the CHIP which will set priorities and goals for the entire community for the next five years.

According to Judith Gilligan, prevention services director for Cochise Health and Social Services, it should be completed by the end of the year.

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