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## **An Insecure Border and the Opioid Crisis: The Urgent Need for Action to Save Lives May 30, 2018**

### **The Problem**

- Arizona faces an epidemic of substance abuse that translates into staggering costs to our state. Substance abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness, poverty, crime, rising medical costs, incarcerations, repeat offenders, recidivism, child removal into state custody, and family deterioration.
- According to AZ DHS website for the period 6/15/17 – 5/24/18, there were:
  - 1238 Suspected opioid related deaths,
  - 8022 Suspected overdoses
  - 766 Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome
  - 5262 Naloxone doses administered
  - 347,816 Opioid prescriptions dispensed last month
- The Opioid crisis has been a wake-up call. However, substance abuse, other addictions, and negative behavioral manifestations such as violence and abuse continue to rise as well. Society continues to increase its desire for instant gratification, self-medication and escape.
- The problem is greater than just availability of chemicals. Our society is declining spiritually, we have seen the breakdown of the family unit with more fatherless households, and a growing number of those who cannot sustain themselves and afford the cost of living.
- The problem does not operate in isolation. There is also a large underserved population of men, women, and families facing poverty, homelessness, and trauma in Arizona and especially in the Phoenix metropolitan area.
  - **Poverty:** PRM provides services in some of the most poverty stricken areas of our community and nation. Many lack the basics needed to sustain themselves and are often only one step away from homelessness. They are often unaware or unable to connect to services that may assist them. There are over 1,100,000 persons or 16.4% in AZ below poverty line ranking 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation. More efforts are needed to provide elevation through vocational development and education.
  - **Homelessness:** According to AZ DES 2017 report, more than 37,000 persons experienced homeless in AZ and there may be as many as 8900 homeless on any given night. In Maricopa County there were over 22,000 experiencing homelessness or 54% of the state's total with more than 5600 on any given night. Of those experiencing homelessness, 67% were single adults, 12% were adult members of families, and 21% were children in families. Causes include economic factors, substance abuse, mental health issues, and domestic violence.
  - **Lack of Quality Affordable Housing:** There is grossly insufficient affordable housing in Arizona and often it is not in a safe and healthy environment. Many leave recovery programs or incarceration and go right back into a war zone. Housing is the

fundamental intervention that moves an individual or family from homelessness to self-sufficiency. Without housing, all other intervention programs are less effective. There is a great need to provide healthy supportive housing communities.

## Recommended Solutions

- Phoenix Rescue Mission (PRM) applauds the efforts to reduce supply and efforts towards prevention of substance abuse.
- PRM also supports the efforts of medication assisted treatments to reduce cravings for and effects of Opioids (example – Vivitrol).
- There is an immediate drastic need for increased capacity for cost effective comprehensive residential and nonresidential programs that provide pathways out of poverty, homelessness, addiction, and other life-controlling problems. Most need more than just temporary relief or short-term programs and are unprepared for direct placement into housing. Their life-controlling problems are often complex and need comprehensive community and residential services. These programs should include:
  - **Rescue - Crisis Response and Stabilization** to prevent further decline by meeting basic needs, providing stability, support, assessment, and guidance in developing and executing a solution plan. Motivated persons must have their immediate needs met or brought to a safe place so they can be properly assessed and placed into the right solution pathway.
  - **Recovery from Life-Controlling Problems** - Comprehensive services to address the total person towards solutions and sustainability. Services such as case management, connection to services, academic assistance such as GED/High School Diploma, and English as a Second Language, vocational development and job placement, spiritual growth, counseling, life skill development, short and long-term addiction recovery.
  - **Re-Entry** – Expanded capacity for housing and support services for persons completing residential recovery programs, existing incarceration, and other populations so that they can continue forward momentum.
- Work in partnership faith-based providers. Many do excellent work and receive little to no federal funding. Remove barriers and provide equal opportunity for funding. An example:
  - **AGRM** – PRM is a member of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions. There are 7 member missions in Arizona. Now in its 105th year, AGRM is North America’s oldest and largest network of independent crisis shelters and rehabilitation centers. AGRM has nearly 300 rescue mission members across North America. Each year AGRM members serve more than 65 million meals, provide more than 20 million nights of lodging, and help more than 36,000 people find independent housing, assist about 45,000 people in finding employment, bandage the wounds of thousands of abuse victims, and graduate nearly 17,000 people from addiction recovery programs into productive living. Every year, AGRM members use 300,000 volunteers and 10,000 full-time staff to serve.

## PRM’s Recent Experience

- **Rescue-Assess-Place (RAP) Program:** is the first step for admission into all PRM programs and is a maximum 7-day residential triage program for motivated adult men, women, and mothers with children under the age of 12 facing homelessness and/or seeking recovery from addiction or other life-controlling problems. PRM Rescue-Assess Place (RAP) Program statistics for last 10 months 7/1/17 – 4/30/18.
  - PRM admitted 542 unduplicated men into RAP. The top 3 presenting problems disclosed were homelessness (513 or 95%), financial (434 or 80%) and substance abuse

(337 or 62%). The top disclosed drugs of choice for substance abusers were alcohol, stimulants, cannabis, and opioids (38%). **Note:** 392 or 72% of men were successfully placed in an appropriate solution program with 254 or 47% being placed in PRM's Foundations (phase 1 recovery program).

- PRM admitted 217 unduplicated women into RAP. The top 3 presenting problems disclosed were substance abuse (170 or 78%), homelessness (103 or 47%), and financial (91 or 42%). The top disclosed drugs of choice for substance abusers were stimulants, alcohol, and opioids. (40%). **Note:** 177 or 82% of women were successfully placed in an appropriate solution program with 117 or 54% being placed in Foundations.

- **Street Outreach:** PRM's Street Outreach ministries go out in **Hope Coach** vans to engage unsheltered homeless individuals to rescue them off the streets and into appropriate solutions. Basic survival needs such as water and hygiene kits are provided. Street Outreach partners with law enforcement and first responders and caseworkers to provide solutions to homeless individuals and the neighborhoods affected by homeless camping. PRM's street teams are trained and equipped in the use of Naloxone (Narcan). From 7/1/17 – 4/30/18 Street Outreach:
  - Engaged over 650 individuals for attempted rescue.
  - 95 were engaged off the street and transported off the street and connected to services.
  - 25% of those rescued were admitted opioid abusers.
  - 55 were admitted to PRM's RAP program.

**Anecdotal observations** from the street teams over the past few months:

- The three greatest segments of those on the streets are substance abusers, mentally ill, and service resistant. Particularly among the substance abusers there is a large number that are responsive to “hand-up” options when properly engaged and the timing is right.
  - Heroin continues to be prevalent on the streets and is rapidly ascending as a drug of choice. It is available and less expensive than many other choices.
  - There is a growing number of heroin addicts that started as result to addiction to pain medication. Many of these are relatively inexperienced in homelessness and are vulnerable.
  - Pain medication is decreasing in supply and becoming more expensive. Heroin is a much less expensive option and more readily available.
  - Many panhandlers are substance abusers with an increasing number addicted to heroin.
- PRM has experienced success in working with clients in recovery from opioid addiction particularly in its long-term “Transformations” recovery program. Currently both the men's and women's RAP program are run by graduates each with over five years sobriety. Graduates are also in leadership positions with our Street Outreach and Foodbank operations. To see many of PRM's stories of success, please visit [www.phoenixrescuemission.org](http://www.phoenixrescuemission.org)
  - PRM has current plans to expand its residential capacity for men's recovery by over 300 beds with anticipated construction beginning by the end of 2018.