



# Working with Unhoused Clients with Serious Mental Health Conditions

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# AGENDA

Introduction

Learning Objectives

Homelessness in Arizona

Unique Challenges and Intersections

Relevant Framework and Interventions

Managing Expectations

# INTRODUCTION

- ◆ Presenter
- ◆ Circle the City
  - ◆ 501c(3) Non-profit and Federally Recognized Health Center (FQHC)
  - ◆ The Mission: to create and deliver innovative healthcare solutions that compassionately address the needs of all individuals facing homelessness.
  - ◆ Where we meet people: 2 outpatient clinics, 2 medical respites, street medicine outreach, 3 mobile medical care teams, and hospital health navigation in Maricopa County

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1

Identify unique challenges that impact service engagement for unhoused clients with serious mental health conditions

2

Describe a strategy for improving therapeutic alliance

3

Identify practices to provide individualized and sensitive care to those experiencing homelessness with serious mental health conditions

A photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with the sun low on the horizon. Several tall palm trees are silhouetted against the bright sky. In the foreground, there is a paved walkway or boardwalk. A few people can be seen in the distance near the water's edge.

## Homelessness in Arizona

In Maricopa County, there are more people entering homelessness than leaving homelessness (MAG, 2023).

AZ has a high rate of evictions and an affordable housing shortage (i.e. evictions are up 43% compared to pre-COVID average) (Eviction Lab).

AZ is 1 of the top 5 states in the U.S with the highest number of unsheltered individuals- 53.5% of our homeless population (Sousa et al, 2023).

# Homelessness in AZ continued


Significantly larger proportion of population identifies as Black or African American as well as American Indian or Alaska Native compared to overall Maricopa County population

Higher rates among single people and couples compared to families with children

59% identify as male, 40% as female, and 1% as transgender, non-binary, questioning

People ages 25-61 comprise the largest portion of the unhoused

Most common age group experiencing or at risk of homelessness is 55+

The background of the slide features a sunset sky with warm orange and red tones, and silhouettes of saguaro cacti of various sizes against the horizon. The cacti are dark against the lighter sky, creating a stark contrast. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

## Challenges that Impact Service Engagement

Can include but not limited to:

- Competing needs/demands
- Environmental factors
- Frequency of Traumatic Brain Injury's (TBI)
- Increased sympathetic nervous system activity
- Literacy
- Patient-Provider Communication
- Previous experiences with behavioral health system and/or other institutions

## Strategies to improve therapeutic alliance

- ◆ Building trust and rapport
- ◆ Remaining non-judgmental, person centered
- ◆ Pacing
- ◆ Self-regulation (clinician and client!)
- ◆ Acknowledging what it took to get to office/appt
- ◆ Incentives (water, snacks, outlets for charging phones, bus pass)
- ◆ Understanding different factors that may look like or contribute to non-adherence





# Intersections

## Social Determinants of Health

*Conditions in environment where people are born, live, learn, work, age*

Frequency of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse and/or neglect in child and young adulthood

Rates of poverty and/or housing insecurity in family of origin

Incidence of mental health and/or substance use in family of origin

Compound experiences of trauma while unhoused

Limited support, social isolation

## Sympathetic Nervous System

*Fight / Flight / Freeze / Fawn*

Frequency of being in this state as related to experiencing homelessness

Chronic stress and its effects on health

Impact on executive functioning- cognitive flexibility, working memory, planning, impulse control

## Engaging in Mental Health Care

*Increasing our understanding of what we see with some clients*

High rates of no shows for appointments

Challenges adhering to a treatment plan, including medication

Difficulty with having to wait

# Relevant Framework

- ◆ Recovery Oriented Framework
  - ◆ Principles include establishing a collaboration, recognizing an individual's uniqueness, cultivating hope, and demonstrating awareness to consumer's rights.
  - ◆ Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy (CT-R) is designed to “promote empowerment, recovery, and resiliency in individuals with serious mental health conditions” (Beck, 2019). It is distinctly applicable to people who may otherwise not engage in treatment due to factors such as mistrust, history of institutionalization, severity of symptoms.
  - ◆ Promotes engaging in meaningful activities to help create life client wants to live
  - ◆ Can be used in individual or group setting

“

I've learned that people will forget what you said,  
people will forget what you did, but people will  
never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

”

Managing our own expectations:

Celebrating change and remembering it takes time and is incremental

Remember what we can and cannot control

Client story

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