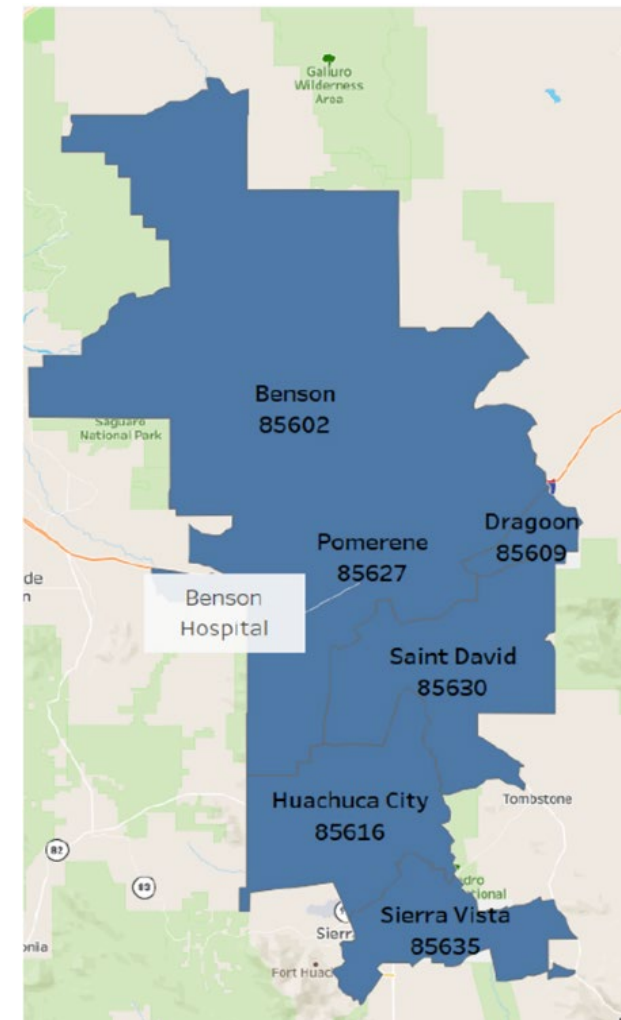


Collaborative Community Engagement to Address Substance Use and Opioid Use Disorders in Rural Arizona

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Background

In 2020-2021, Arizona had 3,900 opioid overdose deaths and hospitalizations with mention of opioids of \$2.2 billion in charges.¹ For rural Arizona, substance and opioid use disorders (SUD/OD) have had limited resources for prevention, treatment, and recovery. Benson is a rural city in Cochise County, AZ, just 43 miles southeast of Tucson.



Benson Hospital is a federally designated Critical Access Hospital serving a large geographic area; 83% of their patients live in just six zip codes (see Fig. 1).²

Like many rural communities the population has a high prevalence of chronic diseases and few SUD/OD treatment resources.

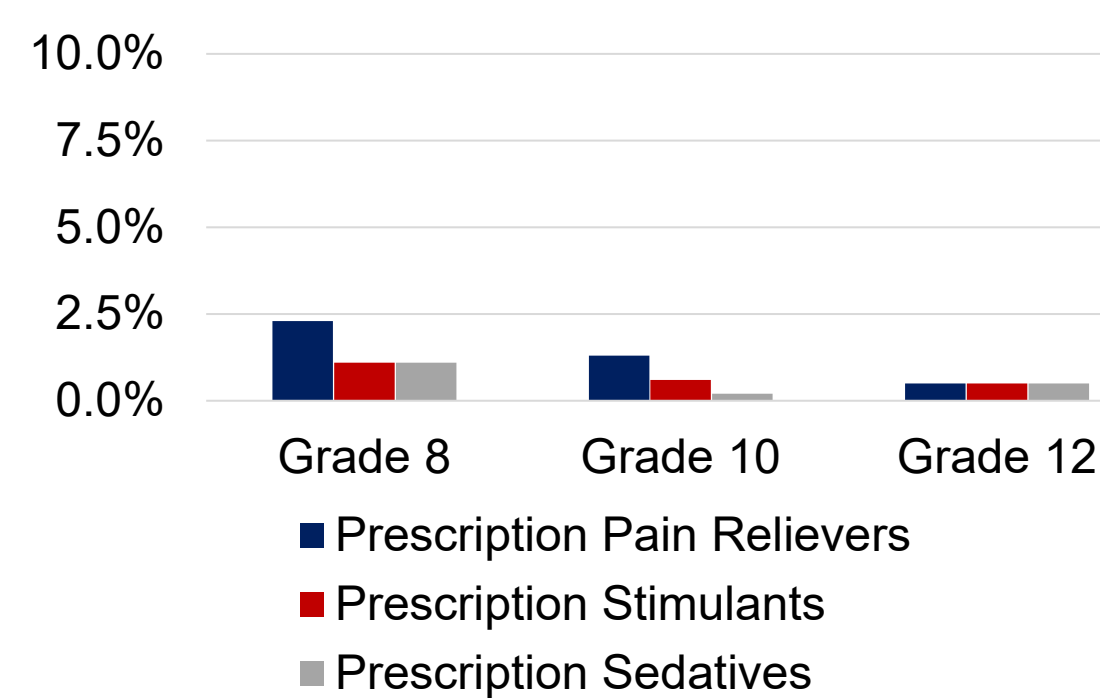
As of 2020, the population of Benson was just over 13,600 people. Of this total population:

- 22% are between 0-17 years old.²
- Approximately a quarter of Bensons residents are Hispanic.²
- American Indian and Alaskan Native represent 1.3%.²

In 2022, Cochise County participated in the Arizona Youth Survey (AYS 2022) to further assess the prevalence and frequency of youth substance abuse. The survey used a sample size of 2,330 students from 16 schools across the county. Results from the AYS 2022 showed:

- Youth SUD/OD varied among grade levels surveyed (see Fig. 2).³
- When asked about unauthorized prescription drug use in the last 30 days, youth across all grades indicated their home to be the top source of these substances.³
- For grades 8 and 10, family and friends were the next highest source, whereas grade 12 indicated their friends as their next source.³

Figure 2. Use of Unauthorized Prescription Drugs by Grade 2022



Approach

The Arizona Center for Rural Health (AzCRH) works collaboratively to address the negative consequences of SUD/OD in rural Arizona through state and federal funding initiatives. The AzCRH, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) - Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) initiative expands education and prevention programs. Since 2019, AzCRH has partnered with Cochise County to address SUD/OD by providing Naloxone education, pamphlets, and training videos.

The ADHS-CDC-AzCRH COVID-19 Health Disparities funding allowed expansion of efforts in Benson community to include youth and parent education. This Advancing Health Equity, Addressing Disparities in Arizona (AHEAD AZ) program participates in Benson's monthly community meetings that including the police department, local behavioral health organizations, and juvenile probation representatives and other partnering organizations (see Fig. 3).

Benson's Sunshine House will serve as an educational resource center for children and families. It will host and coordinate services, education resources, and therapy focused on SUD/OD, recognition, intervention, assessment, and prevention.

Continued engagement with the Benson community has resulted in trusted relationships. This collaborative approach rests on active listening, co-defining, prioritizing issues, and co-developing solutions. Figure 3 illustrates the characteristics of the AzCRH-Benson community collaboration.



Organizations involved

- Arizona Department of Health Services
- The Arizona Center for Rural Health
- Cochise County Juvenile Probation Department
- Benson Hospital
- Benson Unified School District
- Benson Police Department
- Department of Child Safety
- Other Community Organizations in Benson

Figure 3. Collaborative Approach and Organizations Involved

Outcomes and Results

Convened by Benson Hospital, the Benson Community meets monthly at the Benson Unified School District. The meetings focus on active discussion of community concerns and local factors (such as absenteeism and engaging parents) contributing to SUD/OD. Since 2022, AzCRH has facilitated discussion, helped identify limitations in the current approaches and opportunities for action.

The collaboration has:

- Involved all stakeholders.
- Built new partnerships and expanded collaborations.
- Identified gaps and recognized strengths.
- Developed a vision for youth centered community education to address SUD/OD.
- Done strategic planning to engage parents.
- Proposed strategies to share resources between stakeholders in behavioral health, probation, and others.
- Conducted interactive education and activities (see Fig. 4).



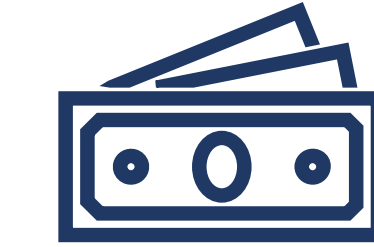
Figure 4. Engagement of Stakeholders During the Identification of Opportunities, Perceptions, Needs, and Constraints Related to SUD/OD

Challenges



Fragmented Communication

- Community stakeholders work separately, unaware of other efforts being made.
- Duplicated services or efforts.



Lack of Funding

- Funding needed to support initiatives prioritized by community members.



Time Constraints

- Deadlines.
- Workload capacity.
- Resource allocation.

Next Steps

- The Benson community will continue to meet monthly to plan and implement prioritized strategies.
- Identify barriers and implement solutions.
- The Sunshine House (see Fig. 5) will provide a haven for children and families. AHEAD AZ will house education materials and trainings on SUD/OD.
- Develop and implement a curriculum focusing on youth education on SUD/OD and mental health. Curricular materials will be accessible to Benson before the next school year.



Figure 5. AzCRH and Benson Partners at the Sunshine House.

Conclusion

Successful facets of community collaboration include having common goals and a clear vision. The use of informed and constructive dialogue is essential, as well as considering constraints and sustainability. Evaluation of engagement outcomes and lessons learned will be necessary to determine whether the current process is working. The Benson community will continue its efforts to improve SUD/OD and to build a strong and healthy community.

Acknowledgements

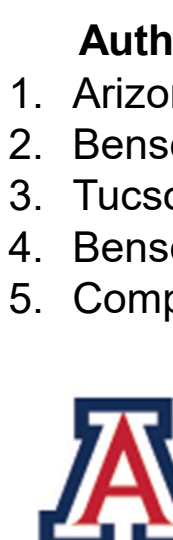
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