



Stimulus Learning Session: Developing Holistic Behavioral Health and Housing Supports

This Learning Series Recap summarizes lessons from state and local government leaders on how the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) can be used to improve supports for behavioral health and housing. The insights come from a learning session on [Behavioral Health and Housing](#), hosted and facilitated by the Government Performance Lab (GPL) as part of its [Stimulus Learning Series](#).

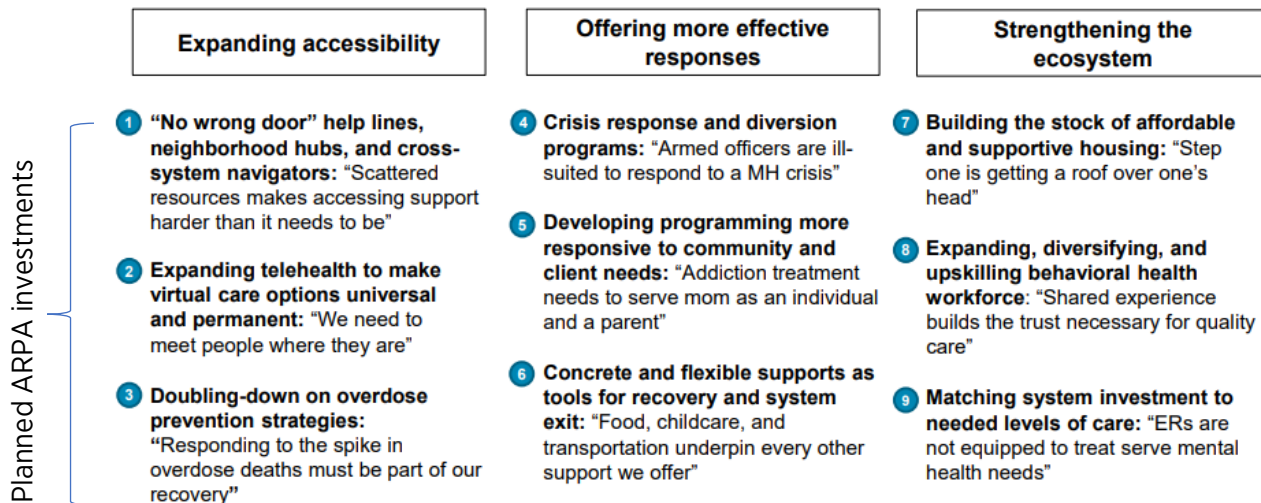
Using ARPA funds to transform behavioral health and housing supports

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated our nation’s behavioral health and housing crises; communities across the country are experiencing greater housing insecurity, worsening mental health outcomes, spiking overdose fatalities, and new barriers to in-person treatment. State and local government partners have told the GPL about how existing behavioral health and housing systems face major challenges to supporting vulnerable populations, including:

- *Inaccessible supports.* Unevenly distributed and siloed resources can be difficult to access and navigate, especially for poor, rural, and/or BIPOC communities. Help is often not delivered in the mode that is most accessible or appropriate.
- *Narrow, reactive help.* Poorly equipped systems emphasize remediation rather than prevention and are not responsive to changes in life circumstances or cultural differences.
- *Stretched infrastructure.* Systems focus on immediate crises rather than addressing longer-term underlying needs, and workforce gaps lead to long waitlists for services.

Leaders from state and local government agencies shared how they are planning to tackle these challenges using stimulus funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). ARPA funds provide a unique opportunity to reshape behavioral health and housing support by expanding accessibility, increasing service effectiveness, and strengthening the housing and behavioral health ecosystem.

You told us about planned investments in behavioral health and housing that are...



Planned ARPA investments in behavioral health and housing, as shown in the figure above, include building out help lines and creating more housing resource hubs, providing staff to help families navigate addiction treatment and insurance options, rolling out alternative responses to 911 to reduce reliance on law enforcement for behavioral health incidents, building out the stock of affordable housing, and investing in providers to expand and retain the behavioral health workforce.

Examples from the field

Expanding youth behavioral health services in California

California's Health and Human Services Agency is planning to use ARPA funds to provide every person 25 and under with access to quality behavioral healthcare - right when they need it and in the mode that they want it. As part of this, the state has laid out a \$4.4 billion plan to improve accessibility, availability, and delivery of youth behavioral health supports. The state is rolling out a virtual platform to provide 24/7 access to behavioral health information and resources, connections to licensed professionals and supportive care, and warm hand-offs to a diverse network of behavioral health services. California is also expanding their continuum of behavioral health services, rolling out new school-based and/or school-linked health care centers, partnering with military departments to serve young veterans, and investing in higher education services. The state is planning to use \$250 million to fund new facilities, which may include adolescent residential treatment beds, wellness drop-in hubs, or outpatient and peer support centers. To address the behavioral health workforce gap, and try to ensure that there are enough skilled staff that fully represent the population of California, the state is also planning to make significant investments in training programs across a range of skillsets and cultural backgrounds.

"We are trying to finally take the long road. This is truly a universal prevention and early intervention approach to behavioral health and that's why we are focusing on the 25 and younger population, because that is when the vast majority of more serious mental health and substance use disorders onset. These particular funds give us a once in a lifetime opportunity to do that."

- Stephanie Welch, Deputy Secretary of Behavioral Health, California Health and Human Services Agency

Strengthening diversion and increasing permanent supportive housing stock in Colorado

Colorado is planning a two-pronged approach for ARPA funds, balancing meeting immediate needs and making longer-term investments in behavioral health and housing. The state is planning significant investments in expanding the behavioral health workforce, building community mental health centers, expanding substance abuse treatment programs, and quickly boosting the amount of affordable housing units in production. To inform this planning, the state is drawing on examples of innovative programming that have shown promising results. For example, using a mix of state and federal stimulus dollars, Denver recently opened a new diversion center that provides sixteen beds for crisis intervention support, as well as a connected facility that provides thirty days of transitional housing before connecting patients to longer-term community support. To help create longer-term housing solutions, Colorado is also planning an incentive program to encourage local governments to quickly build more units of affordable housing, drawing on lessons from [Denver's Permanent Supportive Housing Pay for Success Project](#).

"[Stimulus dollars are] truly a once in a generation opportunity to make some of these larger investments in behavioral health and housing, while at the same time recognizing we have crises in our communities to address right away."

- Tyler Jaeckel, Chief of Staff, Colorado Office of State Planning & Budgeting

Creating affordable homeownership opportunities in Massachusetts

Massachusetts aims to leverage ARPA funds to tackle housing insecurity, and is planning significant investments to help close the racial homeownership gap. The state is planning to allocate \$300 million to expand first time home-buyer programs, including down payment assistance programs, interest buy downs, and support with mortgage insurance. The state views these tools as proven methods for expanding homeownership – particularly for people of color – by helping to meet the enormous demand for homeownership supports. In addition, Massachusetts is planning to allocate \$200 million to a builder program that subsidizes the construction and production of affordable homes for those making a moderate income. This allocation aims to increase the affordable housing stock by 2,000 units, which is a significant increase in the availability of affordably priced homes. This program will allow for concentrated investments in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

“The ability to concentrate investment through ARPA dollars in housing production in these communities is a particularly powerful tool in order to make homeownership opportunities available for first time home-buyers and people of color... We can’t look at the racial homeownership gap without understanding the long-term history of wealth creation through homeownership... This is a strategy that we believe can, with resources to this degree, move the needle in a meaningful way.”

- Mark Attia, Assistant Secretary, Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance

Building sustainable systems

Government agencies using ARPA, a one-time infusion of federal dollars, to fund major systemic change face challenging questions around sustainability. In particular, agencies are trying to figure out how to use ARPA in a way that creates lasting impact. So far, we have seen state and local government leaders plan ARPA investments to enable sustainable systems change in three ways:

- 1) ***Investing in physical and human capital:*** Agencies are planning on creating new technology platforms and investing in data analytics to permanently replace outdated systems, building new infrastructure that can be maintained over time, and upskilling staff to build internal capacity that lasts beyond COVID-19 recovery efforts.
- 2) ***Demonstrating the case for future funding:*** Agencies are aiming to prove out new programing to build political will and make the case for sustained local or federal funding, including through rigorous evaluation designs that demonstrate program results.
- 3) ***Filling the temporary funding gap needed to build preventative systems.*** Agencies are planning to use ARPA funds to build out preventative programing with community-focused care delivery, while still being able to maintain expensive, reactive programs they currently provide (and still need). Finding dollars to fund new up-stream prevention services at the same time as keeping current programs running has historically been challenging. ARPA’s cash infusion can help bridge toward the future system, where hopefully agencies can start winding down expensive down-stream services, as up-stream preventative programs begin to work.

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