



DESERT HEALTHCARE DISTRICT & FOUNDATION

Community Listening Forums – Eastern Coachella Valley

From late February to mid-April, the Desert Healthcare District and Foundation staff hosted six community listening forums in communities across the newly annexed area of the District. The goal of the forums was to start to understand the needs and priorities of the newly annexed area while also using the opportunity to bring awareness of the District and Foundation, share our history, highlight the recent expansion passage and two new Board members, and discuss the importance of civic engagement in informing our Strategic Plan and the rezoning process.

Following a brief informational presentation on the District and civic engagement, residents participated in an interactive activity. Throughout the activity, staff engaged in resident-driven conversations around three of our community focus areas: homelessness, primary care and behavioral health access, and healthy eating and active living with an opportunity for residents to discuss other ideas that did not fall within our identified areas. Ultimately, staff aimed to try and truly understand issues faced by the community by conversing on underlying concerns within high-level issues, building on conversations, and discussing solutions and barriers in order to identify priorities likely to have the greatest impact. This document will summarize the input from all six forums in hopes of informing our current and future Strategic Plan and policies. After engaging with the group, we asked the participants to rank the three focus areas (including other ideas) in order from 1 to 4 with 1 being the highest priority/need in their community [please note that not everyone returned their ranking sheets].

Highlights from community listening forums:

The forum locations in the newly annexed area included Mecca, North Shore, Coachella, La Quinta, Palm Desert and Indio with translation services available at each. Across the forums, we reached 75 people with primary care and behavioral health access coming out as priority number one and a high need for resource awareness across all focus areas. The smaller groups provided a valuable opportunity for in-depth, meaningful conversations. Below are the high-level summaries of the forum discussions. Complete, detailed notes will be available on dhcd.org.

Mecca

- Homelessness: Participants identified overcrowding or “precariously housed” with a lack of mixed-income housing and the poor quality of the current housing supply with an emphasis on the need for infrastructure improvement support and quicker transitions into housing from evictions or rent control issues.
- Primary Care and Behavioral Health Access: There was a significant concern for agriculture workers around sanitation, pesticide safety, and toxin education in addition to the need for targeted, mental health youth programs and ways to mitigate stigma.
- Healthy Eating, Active Living: The focus was on opportunities to reduce the dependence on foodbanks and implementing creative ways to be active with a focus on stress management.
- Other Ideas: Equipment assistance after fires, improved access to water, and community policing.

Coachella

- Homelessness: The participants identified overcrowding or “precariously housed” that occurs due to rent control issues and emphasized the importance of identifying root causes of homelessness and improving resource connection through outreach.

- Primary Care and Behavioral Health Access: When discussing health access, the need for increased frequency of mobile health units and opportunities for walk-in visits were highlighted along with finding solutions to mitigate the fear of doctor visits that stem from a lack of culturally competent care.
- Healthy Eating, Active Living: The underutilization of available resources and the need for increased community organizing around living a healthier lifestyle was highlighted.
- Other Ideas: There is a high need for increased awareness during the planning stages for marijuana dispensaries and the need for more community leaders.

Indio

- Homelessness: This group highlighted the importance of homeless service awareness for the entire community, developing an understanding of trends that come with seasonal challenges, and having cultural competency trainings.
- Primary Care and Behavioral Health Access: The behavioral health conversation was driven by lack of resources within the schools, the importance of normalizing mental health and moving away from the medicalization of mental health.
- Healthy Eating, Active Living: Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of developing healthy habits through educational classes and expanding evidence-based programs like NEOP.
- Other Ideas: Transportation awareness campaigns and integrating environmental justice into conversations were emphasized.

North Shore

- Homelessness: Residents identified homelessness being driven by lack of new construction and infrastructure investment in the North Shore region.
- Primary Care and Behavioral Health Access: Access to care issues mainly stemmed no local clinics and the preference of medical tourism. Also, the parents of the group emphasized mental health education to help identify signs and ways in which they can support their children as they deal with the social pressures of society.
- Healthy Eating, Active Living: The conversation focused on the rain damage to the newly built park with safety concerns around stray dogs, lack of lightening and the need for a patrol car.
- Other Ideas: Increased frequency of Sunline bus routes and more focus on the physical health impact of the Salton Sea.

La Quinta

With a small audience, we were given the opportunity to have a focused, in-depth talk and enhance our knowledge around priorities for the physically disabled population.

- Homelessness: With La Quinta's close proximity to the homeless shelters, they have found their homelessness efforts focused on the at-risk population.
- Primary Care and Behavioral Health Access: In order to address the gap in services for the physically disabled, there is a need for monthly sub-specialty care rotations, resource awareness and having behavioral health professionals with relatable experiences.
- Healthy Eating, Active Living: Additionally, in order to address demand and seasonal challenges around active living, a recreational facility with adaptable equipment and indoor spaces is desirable.
- Other Ideas: There was discussion on the lack of data to inform decisions, the need for inter-generational activities and targeted, population-specific focus groups.

Sun City Palm Desert

- Homelessness: There is a need for connected, consistent, unduplicated, and stigma free services across the entire Coachella Valley for homeless and the at-risk population.

- Primary Care and Behavioral Health Access: With no onsite services, transportation to medical appointments and mobile health clinics resonated among residents with deep concern for the lack of specialists and education around Alzheimer/Dementia care.
- Healthy Eating, Active Living: Even with access to a myriad of healthy activities, there is additional need for healthy cooking demonstrations, dieticians, and balance programs.
- Other Ideas: There was high interest in health fairs and improving cross-sector collaboration.

Community listening forum – what we learned:

- Smaller groups allowed for in-depth conversations and a deeper understanding of high-level priorities
- The forums provided time to understand current coping mechanisms and skills and what we can learn from them – ways to expand and build off pre-existing resources
- Hosting 6 forums at 6 locations provided several opportunities for residents to be civically engaged
- The forums created an opportunity to engage a wide audience in information sharing and discussion
- The forums provided an opportunity to increase awareness of the District, the Foundation and the future rezoning process
- The conversations created resident-driven, meaningful dialogue
- Individuals had opportunities to meet others with the same interests/problems/concerns
- Opinions obtained were limited to those who attend—not all viewpoints were heard
- Some participants may have been intimidated from actively participating because of the presence of other participants, especially if some participants have assertive personalities and tend to dominate the discussion
- The last two forums were scheduled the day before large music festivals which may have negatively impacted attendance

How do we plan to use this information – what is our intent?

Our intent is to share the information learned from the six community forums to DHCD Board members, staff, and the public. This information should inform the Board during discussions about future funding and the strategic plan in order to establish priorities likely to have the greatest impact across the entire Coachella Valley. During the summer months or early fall, staff will go back into the community and host additional forums to share what was learned and how resident feedback will be utilized in future decisions around policies, processes, and procedures.