



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2021

The list below represents a collection of legislative issues that are aligned with Vitalyst's Public Policy Agenda. Whereas public policy plays a significant role in shaping Arizonans' ability to achieve health, Vitalyst may engage in the following matters during this legislative session.

CARE COORDINATION:

Strengthening 2-1-1 – *Building a robust referral system for Arizonans to access community-based services.* This legislation seeks an annual appropriation from the Arizona General Fund to fully staff 2-1-1 Arizona and extend its hours, thereby creating a stronger statewide system that connects Arizonans to the services they need.

- No longer expecting a bill due to political barriers. 2-1-1 Arizona likely to leverage other sources to obtain additional federal dollars.

Behavioral Health Support in Schools – *Meeting the social and mental health needs of Arizona's children.* Jake's Law, a mental health omnibus bill that passed in 2020, appropriates dollars for providing school-based mental health services to uninsured and underinsured students. Given the pandemic's strain on school attendance, advocates are seeking to ensure the funds are still made available and that mental health remains a priority.

- [1376](#) & 2656 require mental health lessons be included in K-12 health education curricula.
- [1090](#) – Technical fix that allows behavioral health providers to practice in primary care and pediatricians' offices.

EVIDENCE-BASED PUBLIC HEALTH:

Overdose Disease Prevention Programs – *Providing trusted access points to medical, behavioral and community-based services for individuals suffering from substance use disorders.* The literature clearly demonstrates that syringe service programs are an evidence-based practice in reducing the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis. This legislation seeks to legalize such programs.

- [1250](#) – Legalizes overdose and disease prevention programs (i.e., syringe access programs) in Arizona.

Tobacco Cessation – *Preventing tobacco use among Arizonans.* Federal law has raised the minimum age to use tobacco and vaping products to 21. Additionally, cartridges of any flavor (except tobacco or menthol) have been banned. Potential legislation to establish tobacco retail licenses, permit local regulation, limit advertising near children, and include vapor products within the state's definition of 'tobacco' is anticipated.

- [1402](#) & 2602 – Favorable bills, introduced by the American Heart and Lung Associations, that establish tobacco retail licenses.
- [1496](#) – Unfavorable bill from the tobacco industry which, according to the Heart Association, "contains erroneous definitions, many opportunities for retailers to avoid penalties for

A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH

habitually selling to youth and sweeping restrictions on the ability of local government to address tobacco issues for decades to come.”

Vaccination Exemptions – *Protecting Arizonans from infectious disease outbreaks.* Bills will likely be introduced to provide additional flexibilities for vaccine exemptions. As Arizona disseminates COVID-19 vaccines and teeters on the cusp of losing herd immunity for influenza, laws should promote strong vaccine uptake.

- All legislation proposing additional vaccine exemptions (e.g., 2065 and 2432) has failed to be heard in committee and is likely dead.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE:

Oral Health Coverage – *Ensuring that all Arizonans have access to quality, affordable oral health services.* AHCCCS currently provides limited coverage for dental services. Efforts are expected to expand AHCCCS eligibility for comprehensive oral health coverage to pregnant women.

- [2291](#) – Proposes to cover comprehensive dental services for pregnant women on AHCCCS.

Pre-Existing Conditions Protections – *Ensuring that all Arizonans have access to quality, affordable health insurance coverage.* In the absence of the Affordable Care Act, Arizona-based insurers are required to cover individuals with pre-existing conditions; however, current statute does not include protections related to affordability of coverage. Vitalyst supports continuing the ACA’s affordability protections at a state level.

- To date, no related bills are moving through the legislature.

Expanding Children’s Coverage – *Increasing the number of children with quality, affordable health insurance in Arizona.* Arizona’s percentage of uninsured children is among the worst in the nation. Partners are considering legislation to increase the income eligibility threshold for KidsCare.

- Legislation not likely to move forward, but advocates used this session as an opportunity to introduce the idea of expanding KidsCare eligibility criteria.

HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE:

Telehealth Expansion – *Providing remote access to health care providers as a means of improving workforce shortages and enhancing patients’ access to care.* In the wake of COVID-19 and temporary advances in telehealth policy, partners are seeking to pass telehealth payment parity, which would require insurers to pay for telehealth services at the same level they pay for services provided in-person.

- [2454](#) – Requires telehealth services to be paid at the same rate as services provided in-person.
- [1682](#) – Removes the requirement that telemedicine encounters are conducted in real-time with audio and video capability.
- [2808](#) – Appropriates an additional \$10MM to the Arizona Commerce Authority to issue grants to extend broadband throughout Arizona.

Graduate Medical Education in Community Health Centers – *Developing and recruiting a healthcare workforce pipeline to address workforce shortages in rural and under-served communities.* Legislation

may be introduced to establish a separate GME program to reimburse qualified community health centers with an approved primary care GME program.

- [2392](#) – Establishes separate GME program for health centers to encourage providers to practice in rural and underserved communities.

Native American Area Health Education Center – *Developing and recruiting a healthcare workforce pipeline to address workforce shortages in rural and under-served communities.* Partners will seek to create a sixth AHEC which would be focused on developing the workforce pipeline for the Indian health care delivery system.

- [1301](#) – Establishes a sixth Area Health Education Center at the University of Arizona that is specific to developing a workforce pipeline for health care delivery.

HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS:

Double-Up Food Bucks – *Strengthening the availability healthy, affordable food.* The Double-Up Food Bucks program provides a dollar-for-dollar match for SNAP-enrolled individuals purchasing local produce. Legislation seeks sustained funding for the program.

- [1176](#) & [2668](#) – 1176 provides a \$1MM annual appropriation to the Double-Up Food Bucks program at the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

Farmers Apprenticeship Program – *Strengthening the agricultural workforce across Arizona.* Due to Arizona's aging agricultural workforce, there is a need to enhance farmer workforce development efforts. Legislation seeks to establish a program at the Arizona Department of Agriculture to incentivize agricultural internships and build the pipeline of future farmers.

- [2142](#) & [1150](#) – Appropriates \$1MM to develop a 2-year pilot apprenticeship program for beginning farmers and ranchers.

Arizona's Food Banks – *Supporting the capacity of Arizona's food banks to collect, store and distribute food to Arizonans.* Legislation will seek to appropriate additional dollars to support food banks.

- [1369](#) – Appropriates an additional \$1MM to the Arizona Department of Economic Security, and would be earmarked for Arizona food banks. The food banks plan to use the funding for additional resources including warehouse refrigeration, staff, transportation, and expansion of pilot programs.

QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

Arizona Housing Trust Fund – *Development and maintenance of quality, affordable housing for Arizonans who need it most.* This effort seeks to restore funding to Arizona's Housing Trust Fund, which was drastically cut during the great recession.

- [2489](#) – Appropriates \$25M to the housing trust fund. Amount is likely to be cut significantly as the bill moves forward.

State-based Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) — *Incentivizing the development of quality, affordable rental housing for Arizonans on limited incomes.* In addition to the federal LIHTC program, this would offer state tax credits to developers of housing projects that meet specific criteria.

- [2562](#) and [1327](#) – Establishes an affordable housing tax credit that is equal to at least 50% of the federal low-income housing tax credit for investments in qualifying rental housing.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT:

Child Care Assistance Eligibility – *Supporting child care subsidies for parents who are advancing their education.* Work requirements currently exist for parents and guardians applying for child care assistance. This effort seeks to add the pursuit of education as a qualifier to receive child care assistance.

- [2016](#) – Adds education as a qualifier for the work requirements that permit parents to receive child care subsidies.
- [2833](#) – Adds the pursuit of a nursing or education degree as a qualifier for the work requirements that permit parents to receive child care subsidies.