Vista Fronteriza

Outcomes in Community Based Research in the Arizona-Sonora Border Region
Greetings Dear Readers,

After five years of rigorous, community-based research in the United States and Mexico, Southeastern Arizona Behavioral Health Services (SEABHS) presents these data results in order to further public discussion, to contribute to collaborative community problem solving and to support the remarkable work in binational health promotion and community development, already ongoing in Border communities.

Deserving of extreme special recognition is Sally Riggs with the Center for Nonprofit Research and Evaluation—whose expertise and enthusiasm has helped drive this project since its inception, through this publication and into the future. SEABHS also wishes to recognize the SEABHS Community Development/New Turf Prevention research team—Enrique Perez Gomez, Alexandra Ochoa, Tresa Thomas Massiongale and Jennifer Jacobs—who all contributed to this publication with vigor, camaraderie and vision.

Alongside many dedicated partners, SEABHS participates in diverse efforts to promote community health along the Arizona-Sonora Border and across South Eastern Arizona. We wish to thank the binational committees and their members including Niños Migrantes/Repatriated Children, Domestic Violence, and HIV/AIDS for their efforts towards health promotion on both sides of the border. In particular, SEABHS wishes to recognize the COBINA (Binational Health Committee) whose members are:

- Secretaria de Salud, Hermosillo and Nogales
- Mexican Consulate, Nogales, AZ
- Southeastern Area Health Education Center/SEAHEC
- Mariposa Community Health Center
- Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Border Health
- University of Arizona

Lastly, it is with overwhelming respect and appreciation that SEABHS wishes to acknowledge the contributions of more than 2,000 community members along the Arizona-Sonora Border who shared their valuable time, their sage counsel and their indispensable insights via surveys responses, focus group participation and in key informant interviews.

Thank You,

Dana S. Johnson
Chief Executive Officer
Supporting Community Development through Research and Technical Assistance

Understanding the Communities We Serve

SEABHS was established in 1976 as a private, not for profit organization. We have as our mission to continually improve the quality of life for the people we serve in collaboration with our diverse communities in a respectful, caring, culturally sensitive manner. The structure and operation of the SEABHS system of service delivery has at its roots the agency’s long established presence in, connection to, and collaboration with communities. SEABHS has been the catalyst and convener of numerous collaborative activities designed to improve conditions in our communities.

SEABHS is committed to advocating for positive change. However, before programs designed to strengthen a community can be implemented, a thorough understanding of each community’s needs and assets must be ascertained. To that end, SEABHS has worked closely with qualified researchers and evaluators in an effort to gather as much information as possible. This information is then used to tailor each intervention to a community’s unique profile and inform collaboration and advocacy efforts at local, state, federal and international levels.

Over the past five years, SEABHS has administered over 2,000 Community Opinion Surveys. These surveys are distributed to people throughout Southeast Arizona as well as in Mexico. Designed to gather information on risk and protective factors, Community Opinion Surveys have been distributed in English and Spanish, and have been completed by people representing a wide range of ages and ethnicities. In an effort to better understand the complex issues facing a community, key informant interviews and focus groups are conducted in conjunction with the Community Opinion Surveys. Stakeholders such as law enforcement personnel, educators, hospital staff, mental health clinicians and child care workers are interviewed in depth. Focus groups provide community members an opportunity to discuss pressing issues in a supportive environment. Information derived from key informant interviews and focus groups is helpful when creating a profile unique to each service area.

In addition, because SEABHS has worked closely with law enforcement, schools and other public and private agencies for so many years, SEABHS has access to many secondary data sources, such as crime statistics and drop out rates—additional tools to ascertain community needs as well as a means of providing some insight as to a program’s effectiveness.
The Arizona-Sonora border region is commonly identified as the four counties in Arizona and 11 municipios in Sonora adjacent to the international boundary. In Arizona they include Yuma, Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise County. In Sonora, the 11 border municipios are San Luis Rio Colorado, Puerto Peñasco, General E. Calles, Caborca, Altar, Saric, Nogales, Santa Cruz, Cananea, Naco, and Agua Prieta. The region’s population growth, expected to exceed 2.1 million by 2010, has placed tremendous pressure on available resources and infrastructure. Local and regional governments on both sides of the border struggle to meet growing demands for water, sewage, health care, roads, housing, and other services. Like elsewhere in the U.S.-Mexican border, Sonora’s border cities are several times larger in population than their counterparts on the Arizona side. Largely attributable to migration from the interior of Mexico in search of jobs, this disparity creates severe implications for Arizona border cities, which struggle to absorb the impacts of increasing trade, traffic, and migration without adequate financial resources.

Marisa Paula Walker and Vera Pavlakovich-Kochi

SEABHS serves the Arizona-Sonora Border region along the far SE corner adjacent to New Mexico—including the Arizona Counties of Cochise and Santa Cruz.

Spotlight on SEABHS Technical Assistance

Through a initial collaboration with Fundacion del Empresariado Chihuahuense Asociacion Civil in Chihuahua Mexico, SEABHS has created valuable collaborations and relations by providing: technical assistance, meeting support, translation, resources and training. A key Arizona-Sonora collaboration is with DouglaPrieta in the ambos border towns of Agua Prieta and Douglas. DouglaPrieta Trabaja (DPT) was established in 2005 to promote economic development and self-sufficiency in Mexico, beginning in a poor colonia in the border town of Agua Prieta, Sonora and Douglas Arizona, hence the name DouglaPrieta Trabaja. The DPT center is located in the colonia Ladrillera, the Center serves as a gathering place, occasional housing for visiting groups and the place all projects are initiated. Some of their projects include a sewing cooperative, computer lab, English language classes, used clothing store, kitchen and wood shop. SEABHS’ Community Development Department has provided technical assistance with facilitation skills, action planning, effective meeting management and other crucial community development capacities.

“When I have helped others in Community Development and they start making true change in their communities, I feel my life has a purpose and it confirms for me that I am where I am supposed to be.”
Alexandra Boneo

Fencing along the Arizona-Sonora Border line

Collaborative participants working to promote community development at the Dougla-Prieta Center
Annual Conference on Border Youth

“Youth on the Border” is an annual conference developed and coordinated by SEABHS Community Development and Prevention that highlights the unique experiences of youth living in the Arizona-Sonora Border Region. These experiences result from cross-border life and include the strengths and challenges of both nations and a truly unique Frontera culture. The conference is attended by both youth and youth service providers which allows for a wonderful opportunity for providers to learn from and interact with middle and high school students in a professional setting. Workshop topics include Niños Migrantes/Repatriated Children, Relationship Violence in the Age of Technology, and many others. Components to the conference include a keynote motivational speaker and an art and essay contest where youth express what life on the border means to them.

“A Community Development approach to human and social services is now more important than ever. It ensures that we listen to diverse views to identify collectively the root causes of important community based issues. Cross-system cross-border collaboration is essential to enable the pooling of our limited resources whenever possible to better achieve real and long lasting results. “

Sally Holcomb
SEABHS
Director of Community Development
Health Issues along the Arizona-Sonora Border

Chronic Diseases

Chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease have become prevalent along both sides of the border. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), type 2 diabetes is now the leading cause of death in Mexico. Like their neighbors to the north, people in Sonora struggle with obesity. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive Disorders, ninety percent (90%) of border residents are obese or overweight, which is the number one risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

It is estimated that over 36% of individuals with type 2 diabetes along the border have high blood pressure. According to a public health official in Nogales, Sonora, many of the health behaviors that result in obesity, heart disease and diabetes in the U.S. are practiced in Sonora, Mexico as well. “In Sonora, children in school eat unhealthy food, as do their parents. In general, people don’t exercise as much as they should”.

Infectious Diseases

While the U.S. and Mexico share the burden of treating and addressing the causes of chronic disease, the ability to diagnose and treat disease varies widely between the two countries. Health professionals in Sonora agree that there is a lack of infrastructure to adequately deal with both chronic and acute diseases, such as diarrhea and respiratory infections. Some residents of Nogales, Sonora lack potable water, drainage and electricity. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), within 100 kilometers of the border, there is a two to fourfold incidence of hepatitis A, measles, rubella, shigellosis and rabies.

Mental Health

The weakened economy has impacted residents on both sides of the border. Job loss in the U.S. has negatively affected workers from Mexico who, for years, have crossed into the country on a daily basis to work in jobs that are either no longer available or have been taken by Americans. Meanwhile, on the U.S. side, anecdotal evidence has suggested that more and more newly unemployed citizens are now accepting work as “mules”, transporting drugs into the U.S. from Mexico under very dangerous conditions. Unemployment, coupled with increased levels of violence in Sonora, is taking its toll on the psyches of everyone living along the border.

According to mental health professionals from Nogales, AZ and Douglas, AZ, the preponderance of violence and homicides related to drug trafficking is traumatic for the people who experience it on a regular basis. This violence is often transferred to the home environment. Over the past two years, SEABHS clinical staff has observed more referrals from Child Protective Services (CPS) and the Probation Department. More and more of their clients are suffering from a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Unfortunately, information derived from focus groups and key informant interviews revealed that all too often people refrain from seeking help for a mental health problem. On both sides of the border, mental health problems are highly stigmatized and may result in repercussions from being ostracized and out-casted to losing one’s job. Community members and mental health professionals agree that resources are needed to educate the public about mental health issues as well as increase availability of mental health services along both sides of the border.
Health Issues along the Arizona-Sonora Border

Underage Drinking

It is a widely accepted fact that underage drinking is a problem and is frequently associated with car accidents, vandalism, burglaries, alcohol poisoning and sexual assaults. Along the Mexican border in Arizona, underage drinking is often viewed as a “right of passage”. According to a survey administered by SEABHS to over 400 residents in Santa Cruz County, 72% of respondents feel that “Parents think it’s o.k. for youth to drink as long as it’s done at home”. SEABHS and its partnering agencies are committed to educating parents, students, local officials as well as bar and restaurant owners on both sides of the border in an effort to decrease underage drinking.

Tale of Two Cities

SEABHS administered surveys to over three hundred people who lived in Nogales, AZ and Nogales Sonora. This survey, designed by the Arizona Department of Health Services, is designed to gauge people’s opinions about strengths and weaknesses pertaining to their community. Entitled “The Community Opinion Survey”, this instrument has been used by SEABHS as part of their on-going community wide assessments.

According to the results of the survey, Nogales, Sonora demonstrated more “problem” areas as well more “protective” factors when compared to Nogales, AZ. Yet, because of the relatively small number of residents who were surveyed, we believe that these results cannot be generalized but do lend themselves to further investigation.

Alcohol and Drug Use

When compared to Nogales, AZ, more people from Nogales, Sonora viewed youths’ access to alcohol, adults’ abuse of alcohol and illegal drug use among parents as problematic. The results of these findings are displayed in the charts below.
Health Issues along the Arizona-Sonora Border

Percentage of respondents who stated that parents using illegal drugs is a problem in their community

- Nogales, AZ: 53%
- Nogales, Sonora: 72%

Percentage of respondents who feel that young people have easy access to alcohol

- Nogales, AZ: 75%
- Nogales, Sonora: 86%
Health Issues along the Arizona-Sonora Border

On the other hand, survey respondents from Nogales, Sonora expressed some community behaviors and beliefs that have been demonstrated to protect and strengthen a community. Compared to Arizona, residents from Nogales, Sonora stated that a higher percentage of young people are close to more than one adult, and that more people believe that their community has cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide.

Percentage of respondents who believe that young people are close to more than one adult

Percent of respondents who believe that their community has cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide
SEABHS Community Development Department was recently honored by the State of Arizona, Office of the Governor for its support to coalitions throughout South Eastern Arizona. The award acknowledges SEABHS for “Outstanding Leadership for Support to Arizona Community Coalitions.” SEABHS serves as convener, provides administrative and programmatic support, research and evaluation support and provides financial technical assistance and fiscal agent services to diverse community coalitions throughout Cochise, Graham, Greenlee and Santa Cruz Counties. This work is made possible via funding from:

- SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
- State of Arizona, Governor’s Office for Children, Youth and Families, Division for Substance Abuse Policy
- Arizona Department of Health Services
- Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA)

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