



Board of Supervisors Memorandum

December 7, 2021

COVID-19 Testing

Background

Since the start of the pandemic Pima County has provided, coordinated and supported COVID-19 testing for individuals in this community. In fact, our Health Department was among the first in the country to create the infrastructure for SARS-CoV2 testing when it was not readily available. At first, this effort was responding to the scarcity of testing capacity in Arizona and throughout the country, but quickly it became about ensuring the equitable distribution of this resource across our community.

Since July 2020, over 2,318,469 tests have been performed in Pima County. Currently, testing is now abundantly available at over 88 different fixed sites including retail pharmacies, urgent cares, grocery stores, medical offices and other locations scattered throughout Pima County. These fixed locations are robustly supplemented with Pima County directed efforts that bring testing into testing centers, schools, long term care facilities, churches, low-income housing and other community settings.

As the County Administrator made clear in his prior communications to the Board, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) managed federal pass-through funding to support COVID-19 testing will be exhausted early in December given the current utilization rate. Despite the lack of fiscal support from the state and federal government, we continue to believe that the County's investment in free and accessible testing is critical during the current COVID-19 surge. For this reason, I asked the Pima County Health Department to update its testing plan funded with an additional \$3 million allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) contingency funds.

Test Site Expansion

The *downtown Tucson Electric Power (TEP)* site is operated by Paradigm in partnership with TEP currently has limited availability providing testing from three (eight hour) days a week and is currently averaging 185 antigen tests per day on weekdays and 150 on Sundays. Our cost at this site is approximately \$111,000 per month at the current utilization rate. We have asked our contractor to expand its hours at this easily accessible central location by adding three additional days (Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday) to its schedule which will increase the rate up to 555 tests per week. This will increase our testing costs by \$83,000 per month.

Paradigm also operates a site in partnership with Chicanos Por La Causa (CPLC) at *Liberty Plaza* (across from the Laos Transit Center). This site operates five days per week from Tuesday to Saturday and currently averages approximately 244 tests per day at a cost of approximately \$182,800 per month. We have asked our contractor to add Monday hours

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at that site and an additional 244 tests per week. The anticipated incremental cost to the County is approximately \$36,500 per month at the current volume of testing.

The ***Ellie Towne Center*** site is currently operated by Arizona State University (ASU) and funded directly by the Arizona Department of Health Services at no cost to the County. This site operates 7 days per week (5-hours each day). Last week conducted just over 900 tests. Of note this site was scheduled by the State to cease operating in December until the new year. We have received preliminary commitments to continue the current level of testing. Additionally, we have asked ASU to consolidate its operations to 4 to 5 days with expanded hours. The County plans to make the balance of the available days at this site (or an alternate site) available to another vendor that accommodate a volume of 1,200 tests per week at an approximate cost of \$199,000 per month.

Continued Support for Existing COVID-19 Testing

Pima County has two reliable contractor partners in the COVID-19 testing arena. Both are being challenged to increase the scale and volume of services envisioned in this plan. Our contractor operated sites have been very productive doing large volumes of testing under the guidance of the Pima County Health Department.

At this time, we plan to continue to fund Paradigm to operate its East Grant Road site which has been averaging approximately 329 tests per week at a current cost of just over \$344,500 per month.

Paradigm also operates a site at the Tucson International Airport which is supported by the State. This site has been processing approximately 2,000 tests per week. We anticipate that services there will continue uninterrupted, however this is a State contract to which the County is not a party.

Mobile testing outreach efforts resources targeting vulnerable communities and supported by Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) resources will also continue to move forward. Mobile sites selection is based on multiple factors, including census tract case counts, and vaccination rates. We project that these efforts will provide approximately 300 tests per week over the next three months.

Additional efforts supporting school districts in schools with either rapid antigen or pooled PCR testing that are funded and resource will continue to mature and expand. Through these partnerships, we have distributed 64,158 test kits for supervised and self-administration during the month of November, and plan to continue to respond to school demand for these assets.

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Science-based Population Testing Strategies

The most effective COVID-19 testing is the one that can provide personally actionable results in the shortest period of time. For this reason, the CDC continues to support the use of rapid antigen testing, which is especially useful in high-transmission settings like Pima County. Thus, it is appropriate that the bulk of the County's investment in testing resources continue to leverage federal testing assets by making rapid antigen testing as broadly available as possible.

There is also a critical public health role for high-quality PCR testing that is supported by the County. This is articulated in the operating procedures that have been disseminated by the Pima County Health Department and vetted by state and federal health authorities. Using these protocols, we anticipate expending nearly \$50,000 per month.

Recommendation

As I have previously noted the broad range of COVID-19 testing, inclusive of rapid antigen testing, PCR, and antibody testing is broadly available throughout Pima County through retail pharmacies, health care providers, independent laboratories and even on-line. However, I believe that the County has a critical role in the provision of low-barrier no-cost testing especially in the midst of the current surge.

For this reason, I recommend the Board direct the use of \$3 million in ARPA contingency resources to support continued COVID-19 testing in Pima County.

Sincerely,



Jan Lesher
Chief Deputy County Administrator

JL/dym – December 2, 2021

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
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