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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: March 2, 2021

To: The Honorable Chair and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator *CHH*

Re: **Purpose and Function of the Pima County Health Department Ethics Committee**

You have heard Health Department Director Dr. Cullen refer to an Ethics Committee in regard to certain decisions and options related to the COVID-19 response and vaccine distribution.

Enclosed is an overview of the Public Health Ethics Committee, its membership composition, history and function. The Committee serves an important role by providing a broad range of perspectives to important public health issues and provides advice to the Pima County Health Department Director, Dr. Theresa Cullen.

If you have any questions regarding the Ethics Committee or the attached information, please contact my office, Deputy County Administrator Dr. Francisco Garcia or Dr. Cullen.


CHH/anc


Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator  
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works  
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,  
Health and Community Services  
Terry Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Pima County Health Department

Date: March 1, 2021

To: Chuck Huckelberry  
County Administrator

From: Theresa Cullen, MD, MS   
Health Department Director

Via: Francisco Garcia   
Deputy County Administrator

Re: Purpose and Function of the Pima County Health Department Ethics Committee

On November 30, 2020, the Pima County Health Department convened its first Public Health Ethics Committee to provide advice to the Director, and quickly pivoted to COVID-19 response and vaccine distribution.

Establishing an ethics committee was originally part of preparation for Public Health Department re-accreditation that includes attention, evaluation of and integration of ethical practice into day-to-day public health practice. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, situations arise that require decision-making about distribution of scarce resources.

Based on best practice guidance for public health department ethics committees, members of the committee were recruited to represent a diverse range of perspectives, interests and areas of expertise. Individual members include representatives from tribal communities, faith based leaders, members of the Pima County Board of Health, academic partners, health care providers, local law enforcement and first responders, school districts, community service providers and advocates, members of the business community and peak agencies representing key constituent groups such as the elderly.

Currently, the Committee meets regularly to review guidance on vaccine distribution and to consider local context and concerns. Local health departments are encouraged to review the CDC and State guidance. The Committee offers advice to the PCHD Director, which has been invaluable during the challenge of COVID-19 mitigation and vaccine distribution. The Ethics Committee will continue to have an essential role to play beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future. Ultimately, the role of the Committee is advisory to myself and final decisions are made by the Director based on the County's statutory public health authority.

## **Pima County Health Department Ethics Committee Overview**

### **Background**

Part of Public Health Department accreditation includes attention, evaluation of and integration of ethical practice into day-to-day public health practice. Historically, some public health departments have created ethics committees in response to this accreditation process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, situations arose that required decision-making about distribution of scarce resources. In response to these situations, as well as the recognition that ethical practice should be a more integrated component of our County Health Department, the Pima County Health Department established our first Ethics committee advisory to the PCHD Director. Additional reasons for creating the committee include:

- Recognition of the importance of the ethical practice to enhance the quality, performance and professionalism of public health efforts.
- Intentional integration of ethical public health values and metrics in the day-to-day decision-making and activities.
- Increased engagement with community stakeholders to surface and discuss ethical concerns, define problems, generate and implement solutions and share results.
- A forum to present and consider the ethical challenges and health equity issues the County is facing with COVID-19 response and vaccine rollout.
- Meeting the dimension criteria for reaccreditation of any accredited health department that requires a Public Health Department to have an Ethical Public Health Practice and Code of Ethics development.

### **Committee composition**

Based on best practice guidance for public health department ethics committees, members of the committee were recruited to represent a diverse range of perspectives, interests and areas of expertise. Individual members include representatives from tribal communities, faith based leaders, members of the Pima County Board of Health, academic partners, health care providers, local law enforcement and first responders, school districts, community service providers and advocates, members of the business community and peak agencies representing key constituent groups such as the elderly.

### **Current Membership**

• Dr. Theresa Cullen- Committee Co-Chair, PCHD Director *
• Dr Adalberto Renteria- Medical Director Pascua Yaqui Tribe
• Wavalene Saunders- Vice Chairwoman Tohono O’odham Nation
• Jacob Bernal- Executive Director, Tucson Indian Center
• Alethea Do- Southern Arizona Aids Foundation
• Carolyn Trowbridge- PCHD Board of Health
• Charles Geffrion- PCHD Board of Health
• Brittany Kelly -Banner (North) Pharmacist, Banner Northwest Medical
• Leila Barraza, MD University of Arizona College of Public Health faculty
• Doug Hanna Captain Pima County Sheriff’s Department
• Sharon McDonough- Deputy Director Tucson Fire/EMS
• John Carruth- Superintendent Vail school district
• Pastor Grady Scott, Baptist Church, Tucson
• Dr Paul Melendez, University of Arizona Eller College faculty

• Nathan Ares- Prep and Pastry, local Tucson restaurateur
• Dr Dan Derkson, MD - University of Arizona College of Public Health Director, Arizona Center for Rural Health and Health Sciences Associate Vice President for Health Equity
• Mark Clark CEO/President - Pima Council on Ageing
• Mia Hansen- Disability advocate
• Vicki Cuscino - Direct Advocacy and Resource Center- Disability community
• Mona Arora, University of Arizona, College of Public Health faculty in undergraduate and graduate courses in Emergency Preparedness.
• Pending Representative - PCC
<b>Staff representatives to Committee</b>
• Bonnie Bazata Pima County Ending Poverty Now Program Manager, Community and Workforce Development
• Kevin Koegel- PCHD Grants and Contracts -staff representative
• Manuel Montano- PCHD staff representative
• * Pending Identification of Additional Co-Chair

**Committee History and Function**

On November 30, 2020, the Pima County Health Department convened its first Public Health Ethics Committee to provide advice to the Director, and quickly pivoted to COVID-19 response and vaccine distribution. Committee members were provided with online training and educational materials as part of their onboarding to support their role in ethical decision making, including the Public Health Ethical Code of Practice, draft Terms of Reference including guidance on ethical decision making, role expectations, guidelines for participation, and online training links.

Currently, the Committee meets regularly to review the latest guidance on vaccine distribution from the CDC and the Arizona Department of Health Services, and to consider local context and concerns. Local health departments are encouraged to review the CDC and State guidance. The Committee informs the discussion, allowing a broad range of perspectives, and offers advice to the PCHD Director in areas of:

- promoting health equity and reducing disparities in vaccine uptake and hesitancy
- modifying priority groups based on evidence that show they are disproportionately impacted
- considering requests from community groups on behalf of particular populations.

To date the Committee has provided specific input on:

- lowering the age required to be considered a senior in Native American communities
- broadening the definition of people needing long term care with severe disabilities and high risk medical conditions in home and community settings eligible under 1A.3
- Including faith and spiritual leaders/healers ministering to the sick and dying at high risk for exposure as part of health care support workers 1A.1
- Including funeral, morgue and mortuary workers as part of health care workers 1A.2
- Adding veterinarians and vet staff as Essential Workers- 1B.2a
- Adding 911 call center and court personnel to prioritized essential workers 1B.1b
- Including social service workers added as essential workers 1B.2a
- Making farm workers explicit as food and agriculture workers due to high risk and high vulnerability as Essential Workers 1B.2a
- Approaches to sub-prioritize Essential Worker categories.

Future work of the Committee will entail additional training on ethical public health decision-making and refinement of the Terms of Reference. The PCHD Ethics Committee will continue to have an essential role beyond the COVID-19 pandemic in the future.