

Pima County Board of Health Minutes
February 24, 2021
Teleconference / MS Teams Meeting / In-person
Abrams Building, Room 2359
3950 S. Country Club Road
Tucson, Arizona 85714

1. Call To Order

Dr. Horwitz called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M.

Attendance:

Mr. Bin An-Absent
Mr. Rene Gastelum,
Mr. Charles Geoffrion, Vice President
Ms. Mary Lou Gonzales
Dr. Paul Horwitz, President
Mr. Mike Humphrey
Dr. Kathryn Kohler
Mr. Miguel Rojas
Dr. Gail Smith
Ms. Carolyn Trowbridge

A quorum was established (9)

Non Board Members:

Dr. Francisco Garcia, Deputy County Administrator, Pima County, Absent
Dr. Theresa Cullen, Pima County Public Health Director
Ms. Paula Mandel, Pima County Health Department, Deputy Director

Presenters

Ms. Jennie Mullins, Pima County Health Department, Program Manager

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Due to Teleconference Meeting the Pledge of Allegiance was not conducted.

3. Minutes Adoption

- Adopted Board of health Minutes January 27, 2021

A motion was made and seconded (Mr. Rojas/ Dr. Smith) that the January 27, 2021, Board of Health Minutes be adopted as presented. The motion carried 9-0.

4. Call to Audience

- No speakers for call to the audience

5. Director's Update

- Dr. Cullen started her update by going over the current COVID-19 trends. The numbers continue to decrease and we are still in the red on the dashboard for cases. Dr. Cullen mentioned this should switch to yellow soon with the most recent data update that will be going in this week. The positivity rate is still 12%. The good news is that the disease statistics are trending in the right direction.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that there is still an increase in COVID related deaths in the community but these numbers have stabilized. Hospital bed and ICU bed use is declining.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that the indicator for case investigation went to green. Contact tracing is going well in Pima County. Overall things look good from disease perspective and no known cases of the variant are in Pima County.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that 5-10% of the positive PCR tests are going to TGen. The test sent over are selected with an arbitrary approach. This is being funded through the CDC. The Arizona state lab is also doing some genomic variant testing.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned at the next Board of Supervisors meeting they will be discussing testing. The health department has been looking at the numbers for testing and cost. Testing numbers are decreasing in Pima County.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that long-term care testing will be moving away from PCR testing to BinaxNOW antigen testing which is appropriate for use in congregate settings. Pima County currently has 300,000 antigen test from the state. Pima County in the next week will move all long-term and assisted living to antigen testing. These facilities could still choose to do weekly or twice a week PCR testing but would need to cover the cost. Pima County will switch to PCR automatically when an outbreak occurs within a facility.
- Dr. Cullen updated the Board of Health on vaccine. Around 220,000 vaccine have been administered in the county. Close to 70,000 people are fully immunized. Dr. Cullen shared that the U of A is strictly a Pfizer site. Due to weather complications the other week there was a large shipment of vaccine that arrived to Pima County recently. The county saw about 31,000 doses come in. To reach the minimum amount outlined in the vaccine acceleration plan the county needs at a minimum 40,000 doses a week and 70,000 a week to reach the peak of immunization plan.
- Dr. Cullen shared that Mr. Huckelberry provided the Board of Supervisors the vaccination plan for vaccine equity for vulnerable populations. In this plan, it outlines how the health department is specifically identifying vulnerable populations.
- Dr. Cullen shared that St. Johns was the first county run mobile point of distribution (POD) and three more will be occurring this weekend. The county was scheduled to do two mobiles last weekend but canceled due to delay in shipping. The health department is also picking up the assisted living facilities not covered by the federal program. They have completed one round of vaccine in all 62 facilities that did not get vaccine through the federal program. Public Health nurses along with volunteers were providing the vaccinations for those facilities.
- Staffing for vaccine sites is shared by the county and whoever is providing the vaccine and sponsoring the event. The large POD staffing is being supplemented by FEMA and state registered volunteers. Dr. Cullen believes we will continue to need FEMA and state volunteers

for the present and near-term future. Premier Medical Group (PMG) is the contractor for the vaccine. They are helping run the mobile POD sites. Dr. Cullen mentioned it is difficult to rely on a fully volunteer response for mobiles with the number of vaccines we want to administer.

- Dr. Cullen shared that she is still not sure how many vaccines the county will receive next week. This week in Tucson, there are 50,000 vaccines. The health department sends the state what is needed in terms of vaccine every Tuesday. There is currently very little insight into how the state allocates vaccine.
- Dr. Cullen shared that the county is currently in a second shot vaccine wave right now. The county is hearing a lot of concern and chatter from people who cannot get first appointments. The lack of appointments is primarily due to the need to provide second doses.
- Dr. Cullen and Dr. Garcia with CDC and FDA are having internal conversations about delaying second vaccine. Right now, no one believes delaying second vaccine is advisable. Currently folks have about 42 days to get their second vaccine. Dr. Cullen is looking at the numbers to see if we can arrange second shots to be within those 42 days, to open up some space for first shots. There is a significant number of people over 75 who want the vaccine but are not immunized because they are in a line waiting. This is believed to be around 15,000 people.
- Dr. Horwitz asked how far down the line are we in eligibility.
- Dr. Cullen responded that it is 65+ and everyone else who came before. This includes protective services, assisted living, and teachers. The ethics committee is currently working on the definition of disability as well as essential workers. The next group to come on board will be essential workers.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned the county received permission from the state to do prioritized phases within the essential worker category. The county is still a ways away from entering into essential workers phase.
- Dr. Cullen shared that there are currently 15,000 -18,000 people in the queue waiting to get a shot. This does not count those who have gone to the state pod to register. Many people are waiting to register until they know they can get an appointment.
- Dr. Cullen also recently found out there are educators who never registered who want a vaccine. With the 65+ population there are roughly about 20,000-22,000 folks who have self-declared as wanting a shot. The actual number wanting the shot is believed to be higher.
- Mr. Humphrey asked if opening additional sites equals additional vaccine or are we cutting what we get into smaller amounts.
- Dr. Cullen responded the vulnerable acceleration plan prioritizes assisted living first. The second priority are people that are more at risk due to living in an area with a high Social Vulnerability Index and/or being part of a racial/ethnic group that data reflects is having a difficult time accessing the vaccine. Right now in Pima County, 13.9% of vaccinated people are Hispanic. The Hispanic population is larger than this in Pima County. The Alaskan Native and American Indian population probably reflects the population because the tribes have their own immunization programs. For the African American population, it is about half of what it should be in terms of representation.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned it is difficult to answer the question because we do not control what goes to the state pod. That we need to get allocations for the mobile PODS from the state or else we are going to have to pull from the larger PODs allocations.

- Dr. Cullen mentioned there are shots in arms and shots in arms in an equitable fashion. When you look at the state numbers, 3% of folks vaccinated at the large PODs are Hispanic.
- Mr. Humphrey asked about treatments available for people who become infected with COVID-19 that help people stay out of the hospital.
- Dr. Cullen responded that there is a county webpage dedicated to the monoclonal antibody therapeutic. That right now this treatment is administered through a 1-2 hour IV infusion. Pima County is working closely with TMC, Banner, the federal government and state to make sure we have adequate access to the monoclonal antibody therapeutic. TMC does not charge for this treatment. If you have a positive result of COVID-19, when the county calls you, they will tell you based on age and other questions that you may be eligible to receive this treatment. The person then needs to follow up himself or herself. The health department has done as much advertising as they can think of for this. This program in Pima County is considered a model program.
- Ms. Gonzales asked about what is being done to find homebound populations in Pima County and are shots going to be given to them in their homes.
- Dr. Cullen shared that the health department is working on this. The health department will be releasing a website with a qualtrics survey people can fill out to let the county know they are homebound. People are currently calling the health department to let us know they are homebound. Assuming we have vaccine, we will be doing a pilot project up in Catalina with the fire department and with Premier Medical Group to do the delivery. There are 10,000-20,000 homebound people in the county. The county is working with Meals on Wheels and other orgs to identify home bound. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine will be a good vaccine to use for this effort.
- Dr. Smith commented that she struggled to use the current website to get her husband a vaccine appointment. She mentioned she was jumping from site to site. This made her concerned to what is happening to those without a computer. She wants to know what the county is doing for this population.
- Dr. Cullen responded that there are about 48 places on the internet right now you can go look for vaccine on and none of these sites is connected. Dr. Cullen mentioned if you call the 520-222-0119 number on our website and let them know you do not have internet, they will facilitate getting you an appointment. The health department is currently in conversations with the U of A to set up a vaccine navigator program using community health workers.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned the only metric the federal government and state are concerned about is vaccine in arms, not whose arms. The fastest way to get people vaccinated are through these large PODs.
- Mr. Geoffrion mentioned at some point we need to understand how we can avoid this multiplex of registration sites for future disasters. We need to have discussions to centralize for a smoother process.
- Ms. Trowbridge asked where the three mobile pop-up sites are going to be.
- Dr. Cullen responded that they are going to occur in highly vulnerable census tracts.
- Dr. Kohler asked how it is determined what shot folks get and what vaccine the sites get.
- Dr. Cullen responded that it has to do with what is available. The U of A is always a Pfizer site and the mobile sites are always Moderna. But people are getting whatever vile is open when they arrive. Pfizer is only given to Banner North, U of A, and TMC. TCC has Moderna only.

Banner North and TMC have both Pfizer and Moderna. For the second shot people will always get the same shot.

- Dr. Cullen provided an update on health department efforts not related to COVID-19. The health department is re-looking at the org chart for the department and working on a new strategic plan. Dr. Horwitz is helping with plan representing the Board of Health. The department has 55 new temporary positions of 6-12 months that are focused on COVID-19. The hope is that these new positions will allow those who have been on the COVID-19 response to go back to their original duties. This will allow the department to open up other services that have been languished because of the pandemic. In the past 3-4 weeks vast majority have of these positions have been filled and people have started.
- Dr. Cullen shared that Mr. Huckelberry has asked human resources to look again at the org chart to see what we can do to become more efficient and effective.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that public health nurses are still significantly helping with COVID-19 but it is hard to recruit nurse practitioners due to the pay scale. Pima County does not have a competitive pay scale. The pay for a nurse practitioner is pegged to 25% of average government pay for a nurse practitioner. Request will be made to improve pay scale to 50%. People are interested and applying but the county is not competitive from a pay perspective.
- Dr. Horowitz mentioned that the conversation about pay came up two years ago. He will be happy to remind Mr. Huckelberry to revisit this issue.
- Ms. Trowbridge mentioned that it was brought up during the budget process last year and has been brought up multiple years.
- Dr. Smith asked if it would help if the Board of Health sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors to look at the pay grades for public health nurses when they are doing the budget. She wants to ask them to at least match what it is in the rest of the community. She mentioned this is a terrible time to not be able to higher healthcare workers.
- Dr. Cullen says she defers to Dr. Horwitz.
- Dr. Horwitz mentioned it would not hurt to bring it up again. This will be something included on the next Board of Health agenda so formal actions can be taken by the board.
- Mr. Geoffrion wanted to remind the board that two years ago the Board of Health had a budget subcommittee that focused on this issue. The sub-committee for budget review in the previous two cycles have made formal request for pay equity for the public health nurses.
- Mr. Humphrey mentioned he has a new supervisor and would like to have something to give to him directly explaining the issue.
- Dr. Horwitz said as part of the next meeting something can be put together. Dr. Horwitz said he will work on finding the history and background of this issue so it can be discussed at the next meeting.
- Mr. Humphrey asked have the numbers changed related to pay since those recommendations were made.
- Ms. Mandel mentioned that two years ago two slight increases were made to the nurse's matrix. They were given first a raise which was 50 cents two years ago and then the second raise a year ago which was higher. This helped to increase the pay rate but the rate is still not competitive with a community health center and urgent care.
- Dr. Horwitz clarified with the group on how broad this conversation needs to be next month.

- Dr. Smith mentioned that right now the focus needs to be on frontline healthcare workers. Pima County needs to get people salaries they need to want to work for the county.
- Ms. Gonzales asked Ms. Mandel if the medical assistant and support personnel pay was still competitive.
- Ms. Mandel said she is not sure but she can pull that information and provide it at the next meeting.
- Mr. Humphrey commented that we should be looking at the issue like what staff are crucial to carry us through the pandemic and who is going to be needed to be ready for the next one.
- Dr. Horwitz mentioned as we go forward with non-pandemic issues for Public Health 3.0 the Board of Health should cast eyes on anything that comes to mind so that the county is competitive and forward thinking.
- Mr. Rojas commented that the federal government has provided money to localities for these issues to be dealt with. Maybe this is one place where the county can tap some of that money specifically for this purpose.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that she made the decision in the fall to waive all co-pays for childhood immunizations. This decision was made when childhood immunization numbers were falling off. Around \$28,000 in potential payments was lost. Dr. Cullen is proposing to waive co-pays for immunizations moving forward and to still charge insurance if it is available.
- Ms. Mandel mentioned that no one is turned away at clinics for inability to pay. The clinics do ask everyone when they come if they have health insurance and will bill appropriately. The Pima County Health Department does not turn anyone away for service.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned the conversation stops after they ask for insurance. The question does not come up to pay.
- Dr. Smith and Ms. Gonzales agree with waiving co-pays for vaccine.
- Mr. Geoffrion wants to know if vaccination numbers have gone up since co-pays have been waived.
- Dr. Cullen is not sure what she could compare the data to because the county did not give immunizations for a period of time because of COVID-19.
- Ms. Mandel mentioned what she does know, is that there has been a decrease in individuals coming in for family planning services and immunizations. She mentioned she is not sure why that is. It could be COVID-19, limiting people in lobbies, and limited appointments. The health department does not have data to speak to this.
- Dr. Horwitz asked if we would not know because schools were closed and parents were not thinking about immunizations.
- Ms. Mandel agreed that the school season is a busy time for vaccinations. The busy time usually lasts from May-September. The May-September rush was not seen this year and it was unclear what school would look like.
- Mr. Humphrey commented when insurance is presented there is a copay on the card. He asked does the health department check for copay and is a copay asked to be paid.
- Ms. Mandel answered the question saying the health department does not.
- Dr. Horwitz suggested asking people if they can afford to pay to do so but if not waive the fee.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that she will follow up with more information. It would be interesting to do a comparison. She wants to decrease any perceived impediment vaccine. Dr. Cullen will be coming back with info on the flu in the fall.

- Dr. Cullen mentioned there are some models out there to encourage immunizations but none known for childhood immunizations.
- Mr. Geoffrion asked if there is a mechanism in place if there is suddenly an outbreak due to the decline in immunizations, such as an outbreak of measles.
- Dr. Cullen said if it is something that has to be reported to the state, the health department will be notified within 24 hours. Reportable diseases come in and measles is a reportable disease.
- Dr. Smith made the comment that people are coming to the health department for services because they do not have the extra money. She does not want to make people feel bad by asking them to pay or dissuade them from seeking services.
- Mr. Rojas mentioned he is waiting to see if there will be another epidemic due to children not receiving their immunizations. We need to figure out quickly how to get kids immunized. The community will pay the price if they do not.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned that it has been a hard year, the health department continues to lose personnel and some in critical positions such as disease investigation.
- Dr. Cullen mentioned vaccinations are not the only concern but also communicable diseases and STI's. We need appropriate investigations of our STI's. She mentioned that there currently are cases of congenital syphilis in Pima County. Dr. Cullen mentioned she will get a report ready for the next meeting on STI's.

6. Ethics Committee Update- Standing Item:

- Ms. Mullins provided an update on the ethics committee. She mentioned the update to the 1.A.3 guidance the ethics committee voted on. This update includes those living with a disability according to the ADA and has one of the chronic illnesses identified by the CDC who are receiving long-term in-home care to be eligible to receive the vaccination. The health department is working on questions to be able to identify this group.
- Ms. Mullins shared that right now the committee is working on how to screen essential workers and further prioritize that group. The ethics committee partnered with MEZCOPH to give preliminary guidance and evidence based approaches on how to further sub-prioritize this group. There is a team that has been formed around rolling out vaccination to essential worker categories.
- Dr. Horwitz asked how the homeless population is being approached which vaccination.
- Ms. Mullins responded that if they are in the age qualifications they can get vaccinated now but that they will be covered when congregate settings begin to get vaccinated. Congregate settings includes people in homeless shelters or who are homeless.
- Ms. Mullins answered that they are creating a high level document that describes work of the ethics committee. Once the document is finalized it will be shared with the group. The ethics committee is also looking at the feasibility of establishing an exception process by exploring what other states and counties are doing around an exception.
- Dr. Horwitz asked if there are any thoughts of a position that will continue to monitor and think about these things once the committee goes away.
- Dr. Cullen responded that the ethics committee is going to stay. It is not something that is going to go away. That the frequency of the meetings may be what changes but the committee will continue.
- Dr. Smith commented that the ethics committee should never be dissolved.

7. Declaring Racial & Ethnic Inequities & Income Inequality In Pima County To Be a Public health Crisis- Standing Item

- Dr. Cullen mentioned that an extension of this is the vaccine acceleration plan for vulnerable populations. She will be sure to send this plan out to the Board of Health. In this plan you can see the rubric that is being used for mobile clinics and outreach. Due to the focus of vaccine not much has been done on this item.
- Mr. Humphrey mentioned that the primary population the Health Department serves are the underserved and hard to get to.
- Mr. Geoffrion commends Dr. Cullen and staff for leading efforts in the state for this kind of agenda.

8. Summation of Action Items and Proposal of Future Agenda Items

- Talk about pay scale for frontline workers and nurses to retain them and to help with recruitment.
- Dr. Cullen will bring up childhood immunizations data next meeting
- Dr. Cullen will also share workload data at the health department. This continues to take a hit due to the lack of staff.
- Discuss what the PCHD can report out to the Board of Health each month creating a long-term plan for this. Information to be provided on an annual-semiannual basis.

9. Adjournment

The motion was made and seconded (Dr. Horwitz / Ms. Gonzales) that the February 24, 2021 meeting adjourn. Motion carried 9-0.

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 24, 2021, at 3:00 P.M.