

State of California

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR



MARK A. GHALY MD, MPH
SECRETARY

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September 8, 2020

Dear Mayor Schaaf, Supervisor Chan, Assemblymember Bonta, and Dr. Iton,

Thank you for taking the time to report your concerns and challenges to the California Health and Human Services Agency, and we apologize for the delay in our response. We share in your concerns and are working on a few ways to address them and other equity-related areas. Ensuring that people in California have appropriate access to expedient testing per our testing prioritization guidance is the primary goal of the California Coronavirus Testing Taskforce. Your letter highlights several potential areas of improvement. I outline below some of the steps we have taken or will take to address some of the concerns you have raised.

Accessibility of Platform

In addition to English and Spanish, Verily updated their platform to include Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog, Khmer, Korean, and more, as we understand the importance of providing accessibility to the different communities. Verily also worked with their call center vendor to simplify the five-step process for residents to register via telephone. We are also working on ways to improve communication with patients including those who test negative by offering results via text message, phone call, or email.

Data Security and Community Trust

To address the privacy concerns, we are working with testing vendors to include alternative methods for data collection from community members including phone call appointments and on-site digital screenings. These methods will collect important demographic information (e.g. race/ethnicity, occupation, and address), and identifiable information will be kept confidential and only sent to necessary entities such as local health departments, labs, and CalREDIE. This will improve the quality of collected data and help us to address disparities facing our vulnerable communities.

To improve community trust, we continue to make sure the testing sites are partnering with community leaders and reputable local organizations.

Operational Challenges

In early May, the Testing Task Force received your feedback regarding the operational challenges encountered at the Roots Community Clinic in Oakland. We understood the “drive-in” language on the Verily website caused confusion; therefore, we immediately worked with Verily and updated the language on May 11, 2020.

Decreasing Turnaround Times

As you know, during the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, the demands for testing nationwide exceeded laboratory processing capacity. This resulted in delayed turnaround times (TAT) across the country and California was no exception. California took quick action to address the root causes of the delayed TAT, including securing additional supplies, publishing a list of laboratories with available fast capacity, working on redirecting testing traffic to less impacted laboratories, and developing a dashboard for lab-specific TAT that will be posted publicly soon.

Additionally, the State has been working with PerkinElmer, a diagnostic company, to bring a new laboratory online that will increase California's capacity to process COVID-19 tests by 150,000 per day, with a guaranteed turnaround time of 24-48 hours. This will help equitably address, in a cost-effective manner, the current capacity shortage and the anticipated increase in demand as flu season approaches. Our goal is to make the lab available to providers and organizations serving underserved communities and in support of the state's overall pandemic response.

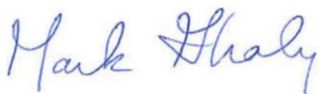
Recommendations

As priorities evolve throughout this pandemic, the task force has noted lessons learned as well as collected extensive insights through collaboration with the local/community leaders. Your continued feedback directly influences testing vendors to improve existing processes, so they, and we, can better serve the diverse communities in California. Below are actions the task force has implemented and is implementing to improve testing for Californians:

1. Engaging in continued collaboration with our local/community leaders to gain valuable input/feedback;
2. Developed a request for proposal to solicit a mobile testing vendor for rapid response to outbreaks while mandating testing platforms are flexible and accessible, appointments are flexible for residents with or without technology access, and residents' data is protected;
3. Developing a request for proposal to solicit vendor(s) for future fixed testing while mandating testing platforms are flexible and accessible, appointments are flexible for residents with or without technology access, and residents' data is protected; and
4. Developed a Testing Equity work-stream to further identify measures to address racial disparities and to ensure testing equity for California.

Again, thank you for sharing your challenges/recommendations. We appreciate your partnership to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keeping California safe. Please reach out if you have additional questions/concerns.

Sincerely,



Mark Ghaly MD, MPH
Secretary