

Jacksonville Case Study

COVID-19 Testing Pilot

Built for Zero | Quest Diagnostics

August 2020

Community Solutions has partnered with Quest Diagnostics on a pilot program to expand COVID-19 testing capacity to more effectively diagnose positive cases of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness, to ensure delivery of appropriate tracing and treatment, and to effectively implement quarantine and isolation measures to mitigate transmission in high-risk congregate living spaces. Quest provided access to test kits and expedited lab results, while community-based partners coordinated to conduct testing in congregate shelters and facilitated communication and follow-up plans when a person tested positive.

Background

The Jacksonville homeless services providers looked for tests for nearly a month before Community Solutions facilitated a connection with Quest Labs. The community received a donation of 1,200 tests to be targeted toward people experiencing homelessness living in congregate environments. Prior to this donation, only five tests had been made available for people experiencing homelessness.

Jacksonville used the tests to conduct a “testing blitz” across seven shelters and two urban rest stop locations during the first week of May. During this time, all elective surgeries were cancelled, freeing up University of Florida Health partners to staff four out of the nine testing locations. Of the 687 individuals tested, no positive cases were confirmed. At the time of this report, Florida’s cases are spiking, leading the Jacksonville team to believe the results would be different if they conducted another testing blitz now.

Pilot Activities

Community Solutions facilitated a partnership between Quest Labs, Changing Homelessness Inc., and the Sulzbacher Center, which resulted in a donation of 1,200 tests to be targeted toward people experiencing homelessness living in congregate environments and literally homeless individuals who receive services from two urban rest stop locations.

To coordinate the logistics of testing, the partners assembled an Implementation Team of key decision makers, including representatives from:

- CoC Lead Agency (Changing Homelessness Inc.)
- CEO of Jacksonville’s largest organization dedicated to ending homelessness (Sulzbacher Center)
- Chief Health Office of the Sulzbacher Center’s Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)
- City of Jacksonville
- City of Jacksonville Department of Health
- University of Florida (UF) Health
- Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office

Prior to the donation, the Implementation Team had established:

- Northeast Florida Continuum of Care COVID-19 Shelter Protocol which included:
 - Screening at every organization including key questions and temperature checks

- On-call provider for individuals that did not pass screening at any of the locations
- Plan for the quarantine or isolation of potentially positive cases

Within two weeks of receiving the donation, the Implementation Team:

- Established Sulzbacher Health Services as the lead for the testing
- Gained commitment for UF Health to staff four testing sites
- Developed a schedule and protocol for testing at homeless organizations' sites and the two urban rest stop locations. Some of the key elements of the protocols include:
 - Decision to utilize Quest's online portal to enter orders, resulting in few manual requisitions
 - One point of contact at each organization responsible for communications, obtaining complete client paperwork, and managing the queue on testing day
 - System for distributing requisitions, lab labels, and test numbers on popsicle sticks that clients could hold to be matched to their results
 - Naming convention to report each organization's information and to determine if the tests belonged to a staff member or a client
 - Use of Mobile Health Vehicles as common centers, which had computer and internet access to enter orders for "walk-in" testing requests.
- Received delivery of test kits, manuals requisitions, and label printers from Quest
- Acquired tents, tables, and chairs for each testing site
- Created a tracking system for administering tests across nine unique sites
- Strategized how they would communicate test results to clients.
- Established survey questions to capture key data for UF Health and Sulzbacher studies
- Arranged for police presence at the sites in case of any safety issues

The Implementation Team credits their ability to act quickly to their existing membership in the Mayor's Taskforce on Downtown Homelessness, which built relationships and established a collaborative framework. Another key to their successful collaboration was establishing formal roles for test sites. Each test site dedicated one person to be the point of contact for daily coordination and additional roles to support testing operationally (e.g. someone to direct the queue of clients, someone to collect data, etc.). The Sulzbacher Center and UF Health together visited each test site and met with the organizational contact to determine how the testing site would be configured and assess what supplies were needed.

To attract clients toward receiving a test, Jacksonville partnered with Community Solutions and The Home Depot Foundation to provide a \$10 gift card incentive to each person willing to be tested. By the end of one week, Jacksonville had administered 687 tests across seven different homeless organizations systems at nine separate sites.

Surprisingly, the Sulzbacher Center, which had taken up the central organizing role, had little trouble finding appropriate staffing for the testing blitz. The Sulzbacher Center staffed five of the sites with existing Health Services employees, Board Physician volunteers, and community nursing volunteers. Volunteers from UF Health who were scheduled for elective surgeries cancelled due to the virus were qualified and available. One of the keys to successfully staffing testing sites was to make sure people familiar with the homeless population are the ones directly recruiting clients to the testing site and managing "crowd control," such as staff from homeless services organizations, on the day of the testing. However, processing COVID-19 tests incurred lots of additional expenses, as few clients in Jacksonville qualified for Medicaid. The City of Jacksonville stepped in to cover processing tests for uninsured people using CDBG-CV funding.

Moving forward, the Jacksonville team continues to improve their testing protocol. The Sulzbacher Center continues to monitor testing and manage data on the number of tests needed each week. For all the organizations in the CoC, Changing Homelessness, the Sulzbacher center now tests all clients prior to entering a program. The team is also incorporating a higher level of involvement from the Health Department to develop more robust contact tracing.

Notable Themes

Cross-System Leadership

During the testing blitz planning period, the Mayor's Taskforce met twice weekly to develop the testing protocol. Including hospitals, police departments, city government, and service providers in crafting the protocols ensured that each stakeholder was bought-in.

Coordination across systems also led to new opportunities. Because UF Health was concurrently running a study on testing in underserved/minority neighborhoods, the community was able to collect better data. The Sheriff's Office deemed shelter workers "essential workers" so those workers would be covered under the city testing policy.

Resourcefulness and Creativity

The Jacksonville team reconfigured systems quickly to operationalize the testing blitz. When they faced problems communicating test results back to clients (who do not always have access to working phones or an internet connection), they worked together to create a new consent form allowing test results to be shared with homeless service providers. Then, using site identifiers in the test code for each client, the testing site was able to print off the results for their clients and deliver the results to wherever the client sheltered. To help control infection, the sites implemented a 24-hour call rule for positive cases so the person could be isolated as quickly as possible and more accurate contact tracing could be performed.

Coordinated Strategy

Endowed with decision-making power, the Mayor's Taskforce was able to develop, document, and distribute plans and protocols quickly. Among other activities, the group:

- Provided a schedule and protocol for testing at shelters
- Developed a plan for isolation and quarantine for positive clients and their contacts
- Created a "provider script" for the community rollout
- Devised a tracking system for administering tests by agency
- Developed a plan for alerting clients of their test results

The group distributed the plan to each agency to be reviewed on existing team calls, such as the standing Shelter Task Force call.

Learning for Spread and Scale

- The small size of the team interfacing with Quest was crucial for seamless communication and scheduling. Small team size also allowed for rapid response to events, though this required trust and an existing communication infrastructure with the larger planning group.
- Because the Sulzbacher Center is also a Federally Qualified Health Center, medical personnel already staffed the shelter. It also made ordering test kits much simpler, as medical staff were already familiar with billing codes and medical ordering systems.
- The Department of Health had a limited response to COVID-19 containment, and took guidance from the state, which wasn't always aligned in strategy with what had been learned in other communities. Thus, it took a longer time for the Implementation Team to gain their buy-in.

Phoenix Case Study

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Background

Maricopa County Government and Circle the City, the local Healthcare for the Homeless program, began planning their response to containing infection among people experiencing

homelessness in early March. Circle the City identified its first positive case on April 3. By mid-April, Maricopa County had set up quarantine and isolation facilities and a shelter for persons under investigation. Testing was limited solely to persons exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, and the goal of testing was ensuring that the quarantine facility and congregate shelters were free of COVID-19.

Extent of transmission and infection was difficult to track within congregate shelter environments because test kits were in short supply, staff trained to administer the tests were already stretched, and test results sometimes came too late to notify the homeless individual of their results and properly isolate them. With so little information, a plan to effectively implement infection control was difficult to develop.

Pilot Activities

Community Solutions facilitated a partnership between Sonora Quest Labs (SQL), Maricopa County, and Circle the City, which resulted in a donation of 300 tests to be targeted toward people experiencing homelessness living in congregate environments.

To coordinate the logistics of testing, the partners assembled an Implementation Team of key decision makers, including representatives from:

- Maricopa County (including representatives from the Public Health Department and the Human Services Department)
- Federally Qualified Health Center's Healthcare for the Homeless Program (Circle the City)
- Primary behavioral health/crisis agency (Community Bridges, which facilitated billing to Medicaid/Medicare and provided transportation/shelter)
- Day shelters

After iterating upon and refining the process, the Implementation Team developed a routine process, clear roles, and strategy for conducting tests. Maricopa County would order tests from Quest, which the local Federally Qualified Health Center would administer to people living in congregate shelter environments throughout Maricopa County. Clients could

voluntarily enter a quarantine unit to await their testing results. Because the clients resided in a known location during this time, Circle the City was able to communicate test results effectively, even when test results were delayed.

The Implementation Team began testing on April 22 with 48 of the most vulnerable symptomatic people experiencing homelessness at their Human Services campus. The next week, they tested 89 individuals, performing a total of 150 completed tests by May 7. About 6% results returned positive within that time frame.

Circle the City identified the day shelter at the Human Services Campus as the most popular touchpoint for people experiencing homelessness in the area. Because they intended to use the day shelter for the testing blitz and as a center for more vulnerable people to rest, staff needed to ensure it was a COVID-free environment. They started an infection containment strategy, administering health questionnaires and testing at their clinic location, while also operating mobile testing vans, which rotated between different shelter providers at regular intervals and on-demand. The goal of the initial testing strategy was to separate people who had tested positive or who were exposed from people without symptoms or exposure. The weekly "testing blitz" began on May 8 after completing the infection containment strategy within the day shelter.

Maricopa County and Circle the City have established a system to access additional test kits and have expanded testing to asymptomatic clients and staff, as well as additional locations like dining halls and day centers. Maricopa County has issued a request for proposals for vendors to continue supporting this system. At the time of this report, weekly testing is regularly available at the Human Services Campus and at regular intervals in other shelters across the county. Testing is made available to individuals exposed to someone with COVID-19 and to anyone else who wants one.

Notable Themes

Coordination Between Providers

Maricopa County credits the success of the testing pilot to the partnership formed with Circle the City, Sonora Quest Labs, and the local homeless services community. The initial 300 test kit donations from Quest was a catalyst for getting county government and Circle the City on the same page about moving forward in lockstep on testing strategy.

Communication

The ability of all partners to talk through issues and make decisions together quickly allowed for standing up the testing program in a matter of weeks. The success of the testing pilot hinged on consistent communication.

For example, the group established a daily “command center” phone call at 8:30 a.m. to talk about the previous day’s test results and decide how to contain infection in response. They also communicated through sharing data. In accessing the public health database during the daily calls and cross-checking with HMIS, the group was able to determine which people experiencing homelessness had presented at the hospital with a positive test. Sharing information in this way helped to target tests toward those clients who had potential exposure to the positive person while in congregate shelter.

Each call resulted in concrete action points: whom to move, whom to test, where to clean, etc. Because all key providers attended the call heard the same information at the same time and had the opportunity to ask questions, miscommunication was minimized.

Navigating Funding Streams

While the costs of the tests for people experiencing homelessness were covered due to Sonora Quest Labs’ donation, Circle the City had to develop a way to pay for the tests administered to staff at the testing sites.

Circle the City, as a Healthcare for the Homeless program at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), regularly bill Medicaid for clinic services for their recipients, which is often used to cover testing costs. However, Medicaid would not reimburse Circle the City for services provided to people who were not experiencing homelessness but still presented at the clinic for COVID-19 testing, like the staff of provider organizations. As an FQHC, Circle the City received funding for “testing only” through a grant from the federal government, which helped to recoup these costs..

Circle the City strove to make every test administered during the blitz a billable encounter. For established patients, staff could add COVID-19 screening and testing as part of a regular visit. For those not already established at the clinic, Circle the City entered consenting patients into the primary care system so these patients could receive a COVID-19 screen and test while also getting the client essential medical care for other needs whenever possible.

Learning for Spread and Scale

- Upon reflection, the Implementation Team learned that creating initial buy-in among a small number of partners and solidifying a plan before presenting the idea to a larger group would have resulted in fewer overall delays.
- Celebrating collaboration and developing a phased approach to bring along more conservative partners helped deepen and spread buy-in among providers. To that end, the Implementation Team co-wrote a press release highlighting all the partners that came together.
- In June, Maricopa County and Circle the City experienced delays in receiving testing results, which made relocating and contact tracing difficult. To better control infection, they work with Sonora Quest Labs on getting results back within 24 hours. Further, they developed a protocol allowing the lab to reach out directly to the shelter at which the client was residing so the staff there could ensure the client got their results and could be quarantined or isolated, as appropriate.
- The Implementation Team recommended that other communities looking to replicate this model have awareness of what other testing initiatives are launching at the regional or state level and how those initiatives could affect lab and staff availability. In Phoenix, the state's "testing blitz" slowed momentum in continuing the testing pilot in shelters.