Adapting to Extreme Heat: A Structured Toolkit for Establishing Safe and Effective Cooling Center

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Background

Extreme heat events pose significant risks to vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, and individuals with pre-existing conditions. Communities across Arizona at the frontline of extreme heat; the summer of 2023 was the hottest summer on record.[1] Pima County Health Department partners with 39 community organizations such as libraries and neighborhood centers to provide relief during heat season (generally from May to September). Cooling centers, provide critical relief by offering safe, air-conditioned environments and critical resources to the communities. Recognizing the need to better inform our partners in establishing safe cooling spaces, our team conducted a review of existing cooling center guidelines and protocols to develop a Cooling Center Guidebook.

1. Source: https://mcusercontent.com/44a5186aac69c13c570fca36a/files/ada1d47f-83f5-4189-d835-1eec1552aeea/2024.03.01_Extreme_Heat_Prepardeness_Plan.pdf

Why Cooling Centers Matters

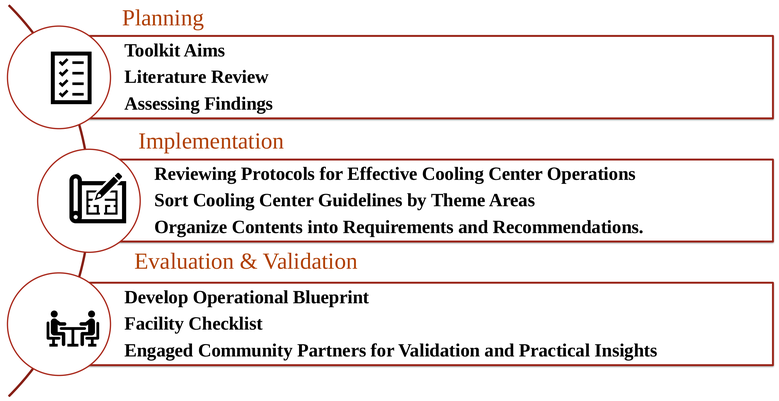
- 2024 set a record with 112 days above 100°F in Pima County.
- Limited operational guidelines exist for community facilities acting as cooling centers.
- National guidelines, while effective, need to be adapted for local organizations and communities.
- Specific needs, such as sanitation, infection prevention, and services for Access and Functional Needs (AFN) populations, are often overlooked.

Objectives

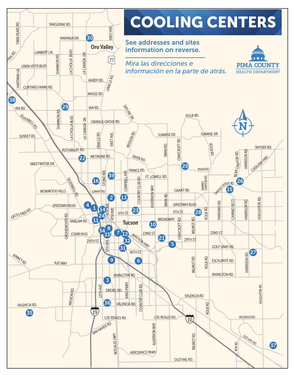
- Review existing recommendations and guidelines for implementing cooling centers.
- Tailor existing guidance for local community organizations that are voluntarily activating as community cooling centers.
- Validate cooling center guidebook contents through key informant interviews with cooling center representatives.

Methodology:

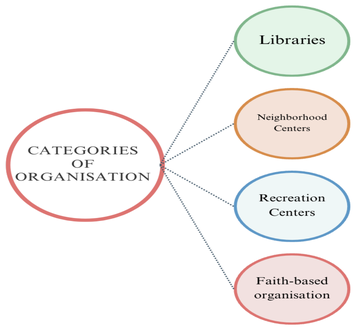
- The review encompassed local, county, city, and state heat relief programs, using search terms such as cooling centers, facility guidelines, heat relief programs, center management, staff training, and community cooling center planning.
- Obtained input from cooling center representatives to ensure guidebook is salient and easy to use.



"Water bottles and electrolytes were provided by the Health Department. For communities that don't have health department support, [they] may need to look for donors or other community partners."
- Community Partner



Source: https://www.pima.gov/2307/Cooling-Centers



Please scan the QR code
to view the Cooling Center Guidebook
and share your suggestions and feedback.
Thank you!

PS: the QR code is not updated on this version.
Supplemental Data
Stay tuned for the conference!

Key Findings

- There is a dearth of publicly available standard operating procedures for cooling center operations.
- Many cooling centers are providing services using existing, limited resources and without additional funding.
- Cooling centers are providing a wide array of services including Narcan, food, and hygiene supplies.
- Additional guidelines and best practices on ensuring safety and hygiene are needed to manage increased foot traffic on high-heat days.
- Additional training is also needed on recognizing heat risk and trauma-informed care.

Toolkit Features

1. **Facility Evaluation Checklist**: Guidelines for accessibility, resources, and safety.
2. **Health and Safety Guidelines**: Integration of existing resources for monitoring heat-related illnesses and maintaining hand hygiene, sanitation, and infection prevention.
3. **Inclusive Environment Strategies**: Methods for creating engaging and inclusive spaces.

Future Directions

- Pilot test the draft Guidebook with existing cooling centers to assess applicability and implementation feasibility.
- Develop a repository of protocols and operating procedures.
- Expanding partnerships with additional community organizations to expand heat relief services across the community.
- Explore partnership with Medical Reserve Corps and American Red Cross to provide training and on-site services during heat season.

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