

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORK SESSION HELD ON
THURSDAY, AUGUST 14, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Thursday, August 14, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, County Administrator
Denise Riden, Civil Deputy County Attorney
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Barbara Lang, Health Director
Rafael Melendez, Deputy Finance Director
Stacy Fenhaus, Budget Manager

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Board of Supervisors

1. Discussion and possible direction regarding the Health & Social Services Department Informational Update and Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget.

The Board and staff discussed the county's financial position, including Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS) liabilities, the proposed jail tax, and the importance of limiting taxes. The Board raised questions about whether certain health department activities, such as sponsoring community events, were within the proper role of government. Supervisor Gomez discussed the importance economic development projects, like the port of entry, being the key to lowering taxes and providing services.

Barbara Lang, Health Director, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Lang outlined a five-year review of the health department budget, noting an even split between grants and general funds. She stated increases from 2021 to 2026 were attributed mainly to inflation and a temporary spike in COVID-related grants, which have since dropped. She stated organic growth from factors like salary adjustments, market increases, and fleet costs accounted for most changes and the budget rose 21% over five years, but only 9% when excluding mandatory cost increases.

Rafael Melendez, Deputy Finance Director, stated the budget review began in FY21 as the base year, since COVID impacts started between 2020 and 2021. He compared this growth to the national cumulative CPI of 21.85% over five years, noting the department's general fund growth was 25.61%. He stated that mandatory organic cost increases, which the department cannot control, should not be counted against its budget growth.

Ms. Lang confirmed that two grant-funded positions that were added during COVID were both eliminated when the funding ended. No other hires occurred during that period. The department's personnel count remains the same as in 2021, at approximately 87 or 88 employees.

Chairman Antenori raised concerns about a \$5 fee for residents to drop off sharps at county facilities. Ms. Lang explained the fee is required under Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) guidelines but waived if someone cannot pay, with most drop-offs occurring free of charge. She stated the charge helps offset disposal costs through Stericycle, which are higher than the fees collected. She stated the health department also accepts items like EpiPens and large quantities from community cleanups, with organizations typically paying the fee.

The Board discussed balancing budget cuts with the need for economic development in the county. The Board raised concerns regarding the reduction of spending and that the county must create conditions that attract businesses, jobs, and residents, particularly in economically stagnant areas. The Board discussed the role of the government in providing a temporary safety net without fostering dependency, along with the importance of reviewing specific department programs to ensure efficient use of resources.

Ms. Lang stated that statutorily required services are funded through the general fund, while grant-funded programs typically cover social services. She emphasized that although grants support certain positions, the funding still comes from tax dollars.

Ms. Lang described a collaboration with the University of Arizona and the McNeal Co-op to bring locally grown fruits and vegetables into school lunches, starting with healthy snacks and progressing to salad bars and full lunches. She stated the program is funded through a Department of Education grant. She stated the program aims to improve children's nutrition, support local farmers, and promote food sustainability. She also outlined a "Keeping Care Local" initiative, including a marketing campaign and a planned online database to help residents find medical services within Cochise County, reducing the need to travel elsewhere.

Ms. Lang shared that the health department's marketing campaign is wrapping up soon, with hopes of securing a grant to launch a first-of-its-kind local healthcare website featuring QR codes for easy public access. She described a planned "Justice Care Collective" event to help homeless individuals resolve noncriminal warrants, access medical care, and connect with treatment and job opportunities. She stated there is a Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) outreach at Canyon Vista Hospital to enroll new mothers more easily, and the importance of early childhood nutrition. She also noted that the department manages a fully equipped emergency preparedness center in Bisbee, ready for public communication during local disasters.

The Board and staff discussed the distinction between emergency preparedness and emergency management, noting that the health department works alongside but does not duplicate the latter's mission. The Board and staff discussed covered livestock and vector disease prevention, with the health department coordinating closely with the USDA and state agencies to monitor cattle, test insects, and address potential threats.

Ms. Gilman acknowledged suggestions from Supervisor Gomez and Ms. Lang to hold quarterly work sessions with the health department.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 9:59 a.m.

APPROVED:

Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board