Federal COVID-19 Testing Report

Why did we do this report?

The Pandemic Response Accountability Committee’s Health Care Subgroup examined COVID-19 testing efforts for six federal health care programs, which provide benefits or care to about 64 million individuals combined.

The report is intended to inform policymakers of federal COVID-19 testing efforts over the first seven months of the pandemic.

How can this report inform comprehensive and sound testing practices?

- What factors may hinder the rapid development and deployment of COVID-19 tests? Our data reveals challenges related to regulations, access, public health infrastructure, and private market incentives.
- Will testing be available to populations most impacted by COVID-19?
- What payment policies are appropriate for testing during a public health emergency?
- What data is needed to ensure effective and efficient testing efforts?

What did we find?

The number of tests administered by the six health care programs mirrored the volume of testing in the United States from February through August 2020.

COVID-19 testing was slow to ramp up in the first seven months of the pandemic.

PHASE 1
February–March 2020. Testing in the six federal health care programs mirrored national testing, which was relatively low during the first months of the pandemic.

PHASE 2
April–early July 2020. COVID-19 testing of federal beneficiaries in these health care programs increased starting in mid-April as the virus began to spread in the United States.

PHASE 3
Mid-July–August 2020. After the peak in July, five of the six federal health care programs saw a plateau or decline in tests administered.

From February through August 2020, six federal health care programs paid for or administered 10.7 million COVID-19 tests, which constituted 12.7% of all tests performed in the United States during that time.