MEMORANDUM

Date: September 16, 2026

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Lesher
County Administrator

Re: **Update on Heat-Related Illnesses and Deaths in Pima County for 2026**

The attached Memorandum from the Pima County Health Department (PCHD) provides a situational update regarding the number of heat-related illnesses and deaths reported in Pima County as of September 8, 2026.

2026 is the warmest year on record for average high temperatures in Pima County. As such, we have seen unprecedented early heat impact data in Pima County, with seven heat-related deaths being reported from March through May. Despite ongoing multi-jurisdictional efforts to mitigate the health impact of extreme heat events in our community, the total number of related deaths in 2026 (currently 123 deaths), now exceeds the 117 total heat related deaths recorded in 2025.

The Pima County Health Department, in coordination with partners through the Heat Relief Network, continues to be active in the community, monitoring the health impacts of heat exposure and providing services for heat relief to those vulnerable to extreme heat conditions.

JKL/dym

Attachment

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
Chad Kasmar, Deputy County Administrator
Theresa Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Health Department

PIMA COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Date: September 16, 2026

To: Jan Lesher
County Administrator

From: Theresa Cullen, MD, MS
Health Department Director

Re: Update on Heat-Related Deaths in Pima County for the 2026 Heat Season

This memo provides situational awareness regarding the status of heat-related deaths and illnesses in Pima County. The Pima County Health Department (PCHD) receives weekly updates from the Office of the Medical Examiner (OME) on the number of confirmed heat-related deaths in Pima County. This report includes basic demographic information collected during investigations, data on the primary and secondary causes of death, and whether the death occurred indoors or outdoors. Data on heat-related illnesses comes from querying the CDC's BioSense Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community based Epidemics (ESSENCE). This information is reported by the Office of Heat Response and Relief during weekly heat briefings to the Pima County Heat Relief Network.

The 2026 season began early, with four heat-related deaths in March for the first time in Pima County. They were followed by three more in April–May. On September 8, 2026, OME reported 123 deaths, exceeding the total of 117 heat-related deaths recorded in all of 2025. At the time of reporting, there are also 100 pending death investigations. Pending investigations may take up to 8 weeks to determine if they are heat related. Pima County has also recorded 930 cases of heat-related illnesses as of September 9, 2026, exceeding the 825 heat-related illnesses detected for the same time period in 2025.

The table provides data from our preliminary review, indicating an increase in deaths where the primary cause of death (COD) is excessive heat exposure, as opposed to heat exposure contributing to another primary cause of death (heat-contributed deaths). So far this year, 38 (31%) heat-related deaths have been caused by excessive heat exposure compared to 28 (24%) in 2025.

Heat-Related Illnesses and Deaths year-to-date 2025/2026 comparison		
Year	**2025 Count (%)**	**2026 Count (%)**
Heat-Related Illnesses (HRI)	825	930
Heat-Related Deaths (HRD)	95	123
Excessive Heat as Primary Cause	28 (24%)	38 (31%)
Overdose HRD	26 (37.1%)	36 (42.3%)
Indoor HRD	43 (45.3%)	58 (47.2%)

Deaths where heat was the secondary cause and overdoses were the primary cause of death increased from 26 in 2025 to 42 at this point in 2026. Indoor heat-related deaths have also risen from 49 cases in 2025 to 58 cases at this point in 2026.

2026 is the warmest year on record so far in Pima County for average high temperatures. While there have been more days reaching 100°F compared to last year, the number of 105+ and 110+ days has remained the same or decreased. Many documented illnesses and deaths are occurring within the 100–105°F range days, underscoring that severe health outcomes are not limited to extreme or record-breaking temperatures.

PCHD's Office of Heat Response and Relief continues to be active in the community to address the heat, including monitoring cases of heat-related illness and deaths, conducting partner briefings, operating cooling centers, distributing heat relief supplies, providing public messaging, and coordinating the Pima County Heat Relief Network. Heat relief partners will be asked to remain open through the end of the season and to extend their hours of operation when possible. PCHD's Heat and Epidemiology teams will also continue to analyze heat related illness and death data to better identify and mitigate risk factors for heat vulnerability. PCHD continues to explore long term solutions to the underlying health, economic, and systemic factors that Pima County residents face that contribute to heat vulnerability.

Theresa Cullen, MD, MS
Pima County Health Department Director

c: Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator