

## Q&A with Richard Carmona on his new role as a senior adviser to the governor

University Communications  
September 2021

Gov. Doug Ducey has appointed Dr. **Richard Carmona** as senior adviser on public health emergency preparedness, calling on him to lead a statewide effort to boost vaccine and public health awareness in Arizona.

Carmona, a Distinguished Professor of Public Health, served as the 17th U.S. surgeon general from 2002 to 2006. Since spring 2020, he has been a key adviser to President **Robert C. Robbins** on COVID-19 mitigation and reentry efforts.

In his new role, Carmona will work to bring the science-based mitigation strategies in place at the University to communities across the state.

With Carmona "marshalling our resources to defeat this virus and get Arizonans vaccinated, I'm confident we just got a lot closer to putting the pandemic behind us," Ducey said in a [news release](#) [1].

In this Q&A, Carmona talks about his new role and what it means for the state and the University.

### **Can you describe the work you'll be doing as Gov. Ducey's senior adviser on public health emergency preparedness?**

Applying all of the public health mitigation strategies that we know, and using them appropriately throughout the state. So, that's my big job. The overall issue is public health emergency preparedness. That includes the decreasing transmissibility of disease, preventing disease, making sure that the resources are appropriately allocated throughout the state.

### **As part of this role, the governor has asked you to lead a statewide effort to boost vaccine and public health awareness in this state. What challenges do you see?**

Probably the biggest challenge is this thing we call vaccine hesitancy and it's different for each of the groups. We have some groups that unfortunately look at it as a political agenda: there's no trust for government, they don't believe it's really a virus. They think it's a hoax. I hear all of these things and I hear some outlandish things, where people think the government is going to inject chips in you to follow you. And then you have people with legitimate concerns, people of color, who have had not the best relationships with government. And then there's those that felt that, until it was fully approved, they didn't want the vaccine. I've heard it said, "We don't want you experimenting on me. I want to know for sure that it's safe."

We need to convince those people, inspire people, that this is in their best interest, making sure that people understand that not only for your health but (that) you being vaccinated protects your family and friends. You being vaccinated collectively in a community allows your schools to stay open safely, allows your university to stay open, allows your restaurants and your businesses to stay open.

### **What are some possible interventions?**

We know that using public health mitigation strategies based on the local public health guidance – wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing depending on the environment that you are in – work.

The interventions are the same things that we've been talking about here at the University for the past year, year and a half – all the mitigation things that we know from science. Those are the things that we're looking at now in engaging a wider population.

The governor has agreed that he wants this to happen. We are perfectly aligned on this issue that everybody needs to be vaccinated that can be vaccinated, that all public health communication strategies be used commensurate to what the threat is in your community, and we all pull together on this one because this is not a Democrat or Republican issue or an independent issue. We must come together as Arizonans. We must come together as one because we are at war with invisible threat.

### **What role will the University play in those efforts?**

One thing we're looking at now is the wastewater testing – which we really pioneered in the United States – that allows us to have early warning about COVID being, for instance, in a dormitory or a building. But what do you do with that information when you get it? When I was at the state the other day, I spoke with the governor's staff about it. How do you relate the amount of wastewater contamination with the amount of cases? That's the data we're giving to the state, to come up with protocols so that we can automate this and start using it more widely and using it in a predictable way.

That is a perfect example of how the University of Arizona is going to be directly involved.

**Will you remain involved in the University's COVID-19 response efforts? If yes, how?**

I'm still very, very much involved. I'll go to up to Phoenix once in a while but probably a lot of my interaction will be on Zooms and Microsoft Teams and phone calls. I will still be based here and my commitment is still to the UA, but I'm also going to help the state.

**Any final thoughts?**

Get vaccinated. Please, everybody, please get vaccinated. The quickest way to ensure that football can go on, that basketball goes on, that the restaurants on University and bars on University and recreational opportunities stay open is to get vaccinated. That's the best tool we have right now, so please, all of you, get vaccinated.

---

**Source URL:**<https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/qa-richard-carmona-his-new-role-senior-adviser-governor>

**Links**

[1] <https://azgovernor.gov/governor/news/2021/08/governor-ducey-names-don-herrington-interim-adhs-director-taps-richard-carmona>