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From zero to over a thousand molecular tests a day [1]

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Recognizing the scarcity of molecular testing on the Island and with the concern that the number of tests needs to be increased to lessen the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Research Trust and its Puerto Rico Public Health Trust (PRPHT) program have joined forces in a collaboration with CienciaPR, Yale, and a group of academic scientists under the **COVID-19 Clinical Laboratory Working Group**. This effort seeks solutions to existing barriers to conducting molecular testing for SARS-CoV-2 with an initial goal of

exceeding 1,000 tests per day as soon as possible.

"Scientifically, it is only with molecular testing that we can determine true active positive patients by measuring the presence of SARS-CoV-2 virus," said Dr. José F. Rodríguez Orengo, executive director of PRPHT. "Once people resume their daily routines, infections may increase. It will be necessary to do molecular tests during the next few weeks and maybe months in order to have a picture of the real situation in Puerto Rico, particularly now with the staggered opening of the economy," he explained.

It is for this reason that the clinical reference laboratories within the **COVID-19 Clinical Laboratory Working Group** have sought solutions to considerably increase the testing of the virus, negotiating and purchasing kits; and acquiring new equipment. Thanks to the group's efforts, these laboratories have the medical technology staff, the reagents and the appropriate instrumentation to produce hundreds of samples per day. Together, these laboratories already produce more than 1,200 samples per day. The group of laboratories are: Borinquen Laboratories, Core Plus Laboratories, Immuno Reference Laboratories, Ponce Health Sciences University, Quest Laboratories, and Toledo Laboratories.

The main objectives of the **COVID-19 Clinical Laboratory Working Group** include:

- resolve barriers to obtaining the reagents, procedures, controls, and sample collection materials necessary to increase the capacity to perform COVID-19 testing in Puerto Rico
- establish partnerships with academic centers, research laboratories and companies, to ensure the capacity and resources needed to carry out screening
- coordinate among group members and with government agencies to ensure efficiency and risk mitigation plans in the processes of collecting and distributing samples and in conducting screening tests
- advise the public, the health community and government offices on the use of evidence-based scientific methodologies for the detection and diagnosis of COVID-19

This increase in testing does not yet contemplate the pooling or aggregation methodology presented by Dr. Marcos Lopez, Research Manager of PRPHT that could increase diagnoses by up to five times.

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