

Working with Your Community

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE



How This Guide Can Help Your Health Center:

This guide can help you strengthen links with the organizations in your community. It provides tips on establishing relationships with first responder agencies, identifying community organizations to partner with, and connecting local leaders with emergency preparedness training. If you make connections with the broader community in advance, you'll be ready to work together when emergencies take place.

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Keys to Success

Companion Resources Available From CHCANYS:

(Available at www.chcanys.org in the Emergency Preparedness section.)

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Template & Writing Guide
- Patient Brochure *What to Expect from Your Health Center in an Emergency*
- Emergency Preparedness Vocabulary Sheet

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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Get to Know Your Community Resources

In an emergency, your community will need to work together as a team under stressful conditions. If you take the time to get to know your community and its available resources in advance, you will be able to mobilize them effectively when a disaster takes place. Develop relationships with identified organizations in your area with the intent of developing a comprehensive community-wide emergency response plan. Your primary goal should be to establish good working relationships with a variety of community leaders and organizations so that you can all work together more easily when emergencies take place.

Begin the process before a disaster or emergency occurs so that the structure will already be in place to communicate effectively and respond efficiently during times of crisis. When you establish relationships in a non-stressful environment first, lines of communication will be more open during a crisis situation.

When we think about emergency preparedness, we often break down community needs into four phases, 1. preparedness, 2. response, 3. recovery, and 4. mitigation. The relationships you foster with organizations outside your Center such as local schools, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and fire and police departments can have an impact in all four of these emergency preparedness areas.

What Are “Linkages”?

You may hear the term “linkages” used by people working in emergency preparedness. Linkages exist where relationships between different agencies (for example, a health center and a neighboring hospital, nonprofit organization, or fire department) have been established with a shared expectation for working together in emergency response. Linkages usually work best when they have been formalized in writing so that everyone understands the expectations and responsibilities of those involved and is aware of the plans for redundant communication that will be utilized. A linkage is generally formalized in writing through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement that outlines each party’s expectations and responsibilities and is signed by all parties involved.

Coming Together “Around the Table”

Every organization brings different perspectives and expertise to emergency planning. Health centers can bring an important focus on public health issues into the discussion and offer expertise in working with diverse community populations. But having different perspectives and priorities can sometimes be a challenge when different organizations work together. Coming to the table with the understanding that these different perspectives exist can help everyone keep focused on the goals of collaborating.

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WORKING WITH FIRST RESPONDER AGENCIES

How to Make Connections with First Responder Agencies

First responder agencies, such as fire departments, police, and hospitals, are the most important organizations for you to develop formal linkage partnerships with.

Tips for making connections with fire departments, police, and hospitals:

- **Start Local**
The best way to start is to make contact at the local level. You likely already know which police stations, fire stations, and hospitals are near your Center site. These are the best sites to get in touch with first.
- **Try to Meet Face-to-Face**
Use personal contacts to start the dialogue. This networking can take place in a variety of ways. If you are already in contact with staff members at these agencies, give them a call and ask who coordinates emergency preparedness for them. If you don't already have contacts, try to meet agency staff at meetings, conferences, or social events, and talk to them one-on-one so they can get to know who you are and what your Center provides to the community.
- **Offer to Help Them**
One of the best ways to establish a good working relationship with these agencies is to offer to incorporate their own community outreach efforts into some of your own work. If you hold community health fairs in your area, they may want to offer a demonstration or distribute literature at your event. If you hold workshops at your center, you may want to ask them if they are interested in conducting one on a topic they are concerned with such as fire safety or child abduction prevention. You may also want to offer to distribute their written materials to patients in your waiting areas. These kinds of collaborations can solidify your relationship and pave the way for working together on emergency preparedness.
- **Conduct Drills Together**
When your Center plans emergency preparedness drills where external participation could be part of the scenario, ask these agencies if they would be willing to take part in your drill. If police or fire departments already conduct larger local or regional emergency preparedness drills that involve external organizations, find out if your Center can be a participant. Your local hospitals probably already conduct drills to meet JCAHO accreditation requirements; find out if you can coordinate with them in their next drill by offering triage or surge capacity assistance.
- **Make Expectations Clear**
When the relationship is in place and everyone's expectations are clear, draw up a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Meeting With Your Local Police

When you develop relationships with police officers and decision makers within the police force, you help to ensure added security or support for your community in the event of a

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disaster. The first step is to contact your local police department or sheriff's office to determine which staff members there work with the community. Find out which departments or staff members can lend support to your clinic or community in an emergency. When you get in touch with the person or department who is responsible for community outreach, let them know who you are, why you are contacting them, and what you hope to begin fostering. When you are in extended dialogue with them, explain how you perceive your role (your organization's role) in emergency response. Take the time to build a contact list of the staff at your local police department and understand the different roles each staff member plays.



Many police departments also sponsor their own training on emergency preparedness, bioterrorism, and other topics that are available to the public. Participate in these trainings if they are available. Also, invite local officers to help your organization develop its emergency response drills. Regular emergency preparedness drilling, especially with the participation of outside agencies such as the police, is the best thing you can do for your Center's preparedness—as your center becomes more accustomed to responding to different scenarios, it will help solidify your staff's confidence in their response. Having the police involved in drill exercises on an ongoing basis makes working together more routine when emergencies take place.

Most police departments either host or attend regular community meetings where community groups, local business owners, elected officials, and local residents can voice concerns or discuss issues with police community liaison staff. If you don't already have a relationship with your local police, these meetings are a great way to make contact. You can find out when and where such meetings are held by contacting your local police force or your city or county government. You can even use this forum to introduce your own new emergency preparedness initiatives or to promote services provided by your facility. At these meetings you will be able to find out about different programs implemented in the community and how they may relate to your own activities.

Your local police may also regularly attend or sponsor community social events. Those forums may not be the best place to get involved in emergency planning details, but they can be great ways to make initial contact with police department staff.

In the New York City Police Department (NYPD), specifically, each individual police precinct has a separate community affairs department. The precincts in each borough usually conduct a monthly community meeting at the local precinct site. This department is a great way to make contact with the precinct staff. Utilize the community affairs contacts to introduce your Center to the other departments in the precinct.

Meeting With Your Local Fire Department

Developing relationships with local fire departments is also an essential component in developing a comprehensive response plan. Developing a relationship with the local firehouse can help facilitate the training process for your staff relating to fire safety issues and concerns.

You may already know your local firefighters through coordinating with them for EMS services for patient transport or from your own fire drill procedures. If you don't yet have the contacts you need, start by



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calling your local fire department, volunteer fire department, or fire safety office and asking who the best contact is for emergency preparedness issues. Keep in mind that volunteer fire departments may be more strapped for resources outside of actual fire response activities—be sure to be sensitive to their time constraints.

Keep an eye out for social events regularly attended by or sponsored by your local fire department, such as fundraisers for the department or fire safety demonstrations. Social events are great ways to make initial contact with your local firefighters, start developing relationships, and get the right contacts for emergency preparedness activities.

In the New York City Fire Department (FDNY), specifically, most firehouses do not have a separate community affairs department at their individual location in the way the NYPD does. Instead, there is a single communications bureau that is responsible for addressing community concerns and questions. The communications bureau is also responsible for addressing questions on drilling and fire safety and for establishing linkages with the firehouse. FDNY has also developed a free non-certifying CPR course for laypersons, funded by FDNY. They will arrange for certified CPR trainers to come to your center or community and train groups of individuals in CPR free of charge.

Coordinating with Your Neighborhood Hospitals

You and your neighboring hospitals may need to coordinate patient care in an emergency—you may need to get severely injured patients to emergency departments or you may want to offer to take non-urgent care cases off of their hands. It may be helpful to note that many JCAHO-accredited hospitals are encouraged to partner with community organizations like Community Health Centers when formulating their emergency preparedness plans. The Greater New York Hospital Association (<http://www.gnyha.org>) and similar hospital-related organizations may be able to provide more information on this issue.



You are probably already familiar with hospitals in your area from the referrals you make to your Center's patients. Most hospitals have an emergency preparedness coordinator (or bioterrorism coordinator). Call the hospital(s) nearest to your center and ask to speak with their emergency preparedness coordinator. Explain that you are in charge of your health center's emergency planning and that you would like to discuss ways in which your efforts might be coordinated.

If you are not already in contact with specific individuals at the hospital, local or regional conferences on emergency planning (or even on public health issues) where hospital representatives are likely to attend are a good place to start making contact. Send a representative from your center to conferences and meetings; while they are there they may be able to talk one-on-one with hospital representatives about coordinating emergency preparedness efforts and get the dialogue started.

Hospitals may be particularly interested in seeing whether your Center could help them with surge capacity issues during an incident. You may want to bring this up early on in the emergency preparedness dialogue to illustrate how they can benefit by working with your Center. You may also want to discuss triage, medications transfer, patient transport, and other issues where collaboration could be beneficial. In addition, you should be sure to ask if your center is already included in the hospital's emergency management plan, since some hospitals may have included you in the plan based on emergency planning guidelines without necessarily working out a detailed agreement with you—you'll want to be sure everyone has the same expectations.

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WORKING WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community organizations can be important and effective partners in health center emergency management. Creating linkages with businesses, faith-based organizations, schools, and nonprofit organizations can play an important role in emergency response.



What Organizations May Be Able to Offer

Here are a few of the resources community organizations may be able to provide and the roles they may be able to play in emergency response. As you review this list, think about which of these resources and roles you are likely to find most valuable and start prioritizing the community linkages you would like to foster.

- **Preparedness Promotion**

Even before an emergency situation takes place, local community organizations can do a lot to help your neighborhood prepare for disasters. For example, they can work with the public to promote household and family emergency preparedness or provide information on topics the public is anxious about, such as pandemic flu or bioterrorism.

- **Meeting Places or Temporary Work Space**

In some instances, organizations may be able to offer meeting space, sites for Points of Dispensing (PODs), or temporary work space during or after a disaster. Community centers (YMCA's and other Y's, neighborhood community centers, after-school programs, etc.) may be particularly well-suited to offer space as a resource.

- **Getting Information to the Community**

During an emergency and its aftermath, your staff will be extremely busy. Local organizations can help provide information to the community. Announcements and updates may be distributed at local schools, places of worship, community centers, and senior centers.

- **Contacts with Specialized, At-Risk or Hard to Reach Populations**

Community-based organizations may be in touch with specific populations that your center might have difficulty contacting. If you need to get word out to the public about infection control precautions or vaccine availability, these organizations may be able to help contact people outside of your regular patient base.

Real-World Examples:

During Hurricane Katrina community-based and faith-based organizations pitched in to respond to the crisis. For example:

- *The Louisiana Environmental Action Network, a nonprofit organization in New Orleans, helped acquire and coordinate donations of medical supplies to the trapped residents of St. Bernard, Plaquemine, and Washington Parish.*
- *Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, provided work space for over 200 Lutheran/Episcopal Disaster Response (LEDR) volunteers who coordinated efforts to bring food, free medical care, home repairs, and casework to hurricane victims.*

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- **Established Communication Linkages with Large Groups**
Some organizations such as schools or unions may have regular contact with large groups of residents and may therefore have contact information for significant portions of the local population. Some may even have the auto-dialing services that could send out a recorded message to the phone numbers of their constituents.
- **Translations**
You may need to communicate disaster information in multiple languages or to hard-of-hearing populations. If there are languages used in your community that your staff are not able to communicate in easily, look for organizations you could partner with for possible volunteer translators.
- **Providing Your Staff with Food or Services**
Consider asking local restaurants to provide food, water and support to your staff or local residents during an emergency or its aftermath.
- **Referring Patients to Your Center**
Mental health services may be needed in communities that have experienced a disaster. In the aftermath of an event, you may want to reach out beyond your usual patient base to offer counseling, treatment, or referrals to mental health resources; local organizations can help direct people to your center for these services or referrals. Distributing patient education materials that explain what depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorder are and how to recognize the signs of these conditions can also be very helpful to your community; local organizations can help with this distribution. The more they know about what services your center provides, the more effectively they will be able to connect patients to you.
- **Social and Spiritual Support**
Your patients may find significant mental health support after a disaster through connecting with their faith communities or social groups. You may want to encourage faith-based organizations and social organizations to prepare post-disaster programs for their constituents.
- **Providing Needed Services Your Center Can't**
Nonprofit organizations in your area may be able to help your patients with their non-medical needs following a disaster, such as housing assistance or food assistance. You can refer patients who need such services to the appropriate agency.
- **Connections with Potential Volunteers**
If you are interested in connecting with potential volunteers to aid your organization in an emergency (or at other times), you may find natural partnerships with some organizations in your community. Organizations that run volunteer placement programs, clubs or scouting programs, faith-based organizations, and senior centers may be particularly well-suited to offer volunteers. In addition, colleges with medical, EMT, or health education programs may even be able to offer volunteers with clinical skills to your Center. Also, AmeriCorps/HealthCorps/VISTA volunteers may be able to assist your center in these areas; they may be available to your site for a full term of service or to help for a shorter period as a service project.

Real-World Examples:

One private-sector business that has played an active role in supporting responding agencies during a disaster is the McDonald's restaurant franchise. During recovery work after the World Trade Center disaster, McDonald's provided over 750,000 meals to responders and generated over 2 million dollars in financial support.

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- **Drill Participation**

Large organizations that are an integral part of your community may be interested in joining in your drill exercises. Schools, in particular, are likely to have comprehensive emergency plans already in place, and may be interested in participating in community emergency preparedness drills along with your Center.

Identifying Potential Organizational Partners & Community Leaders

A good first step in identifying both community leaders and organizations with which to start establishing linkages is to get your staff together and create a list of all the community organizations and community leaders you are already in contact with. Your existing relationships are your greatest asset in building linkages.

The organizations with which you want to establish partnerships may vary depending on your Center's location and patient population. Here are some ideas for organizations and community leaders you may want to partner with:

- **Large nonprofit organizations** (the American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, or Meals on Wheels, for example)
- **Grassroots community-based nonprofit organizations**
- **Schools**
- **Faith-based organizations**
- **Community centers** (YMCA's or other Ys, neighborhood community centers, or after-school programs, for example)
- **CERT: Community Emergency Response Team**
- **City Councils, Community Councils, Community Boards, Neighborhood Associations, or other regional groups**
- **Local public officials' offices/staff**
- **Unions**
- **Large membership organizations** (the Rotary Club or Lion's Club, for example)
- **Local businesses**
- **Senior citizen groups and retirement communities**



How to Make Contact:

- Utilize current relationships and associations
- Know your community resources in advance: keep an up-to-date contact list
- Get ideas from your staff members who make referrals or connect patients with social services
- Network in the community
- Research who is/which organizations are active in emergency preparedness
- Attend local Community Council or Community Board meetings

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CONNECTING COMMUNITY LEADERS WITH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TRAINING

Working with Leaders and Providing Training

As you work with local leaders, you may find that they are interested in getting more background information on emergency preparedness. Community leaders may also need training and education on specific emergency preparedness issues. You don't have to provide training and information to them yourself—there are many resources available.

Programs that cover a wide range of preparedness topics are available, each with a different focus and involving different time commitments. Here are a few examples of programs commonly available in New York State; you may have additional resources in your community:



- **American Red Cross**

The American Red Cross (ARC) has developed several community awareness and emergency response courses. The courses available range from first aid for pets, AED training, and introduction to disaster services. Most of the programs are developed for families and individuals, but they can be adapted for schools, businesses, and healthcare facilities. Most of the programs are available for free, but there are a few trainings which have fees associated with them. To find out more about the available courses and to locate the local office for the American Red Cross visit: <http://www.redcross.org>. The ARC has centers located throughout New York State (<http://www.redcross.org/where/chapts.asp#NY>).



One ARC training program of particular interest that is available in the greater New York area is the Disaster Services Training Program. Red Cross Disaster Service Volunteers can receive more than 40 hours of free, specialized Red Cross training to prepare them to execute vital tasks in field operations, disaster assessment, mass care, sheltering and mental health operations. The first step is to contact them to schedule an interview and information session. For more information for the NYC and Mid-Hudson area, visit their website <http://www.nyredcross.org>, email disastertraining@arcgny.org, or call 1-877-REDCROSS. For info concerning training opportunities in Northeastern NY, visit <http://www.redcrossnyny.org>.

- **New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS)**

New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) provides mitigation education and preparedness training to clergy, religious leaders, houses of worship, and faith-based agencies, building their capacity to respond to all hazards with spiritual care,

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emergency relief, and long-term recovery services. For more information visit their website <http://www.nydis.org>, email info@nydis.org, or call 212-669-6100.

- **Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)**

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is a program developed through the Department of Homeland Security that helps train people to be better prepared to respond to emergency situations in their communities. When emergencies happen, CERT members can give critical support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site. CERT members can also help with non-emergency projects that help improve the safety of the community.



New York State CERT: CERT programs are organized throughout the state by local county and city government entities. Contact your local office of emergency management to be put in touch with the closest CERT program or check the federal Citizen Corps website for CERT listings by state:

<https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert>.

New York City CERT: NYC CERT teams are groups of neighborhood and community-based volunteers that undergo an intensive, 11-week training program in disaster preparedness and basic response techniques. Please contact nyccert@oem.nyc.gov or call 311 for information.

- **FEMA Online Training**

Online training programs in emergency preparedness are available from FEMA through the FEMA National Emergency Training Center Virtual Campus (<http://training.fema.gov/VCNew/firstVC.asp>).

- **CHCANYS Online Resource Library: Risk Communication Links**

Risk Communication/Crisis Communication is probably the most important topic for community leaders to be familiar with so that they can communicate effectively with their constituents when disasters occur. CHCANYS lists resources for Risk Communication in the library of materials and links available in the emergency preparedness section of our website (www.chcanys.org). One resource we recommend is the Center for Disease Control's Risk Communications training curriculum; they have posted downloadable curriculum materials on their website (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/erc/>). Community leaders can review resources like these to prepare themselves to communicate information during a crisis situation.

Check the emergency preparedness section of the CHCANYS website for updates to these and other training programs, resources, and downloadable materials throughout the year!: www.chcanys.org.

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KEYS TO SUCCESS

Formalizing Your Connection: Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)

Once relationships are in place, you will likely want to create a formal agreement on paper between your health center and the organization you plan to work with. Having a formal agreement is especially important with hospital, police, and fire department agencies to clarify your relationship and mutual expectations. Written agreements are also helpful when staff turnover takes place at either site so that it is clear to everyone what has been agreed upon in the past. This type of written agreement is called a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A template MOU and an MOU customization guide are available on the CHCANYS website in the emergency preparedness section (www.chcanys.org).

The Basics: What to Set Up at Your Center to Facilitate Linkages

Putting these basic structures in place will help facilitate creating and maintaining your community linkage relationships:

- Set up an emergency preparedness committee.
- Have regular emergency preparedness committee meetings.
- Assign one or two staff members to be responsible for creating and maintaining linkage relationships. All staff may be able to contribute contacts and resources, but one or two should be responsible for follow up actions.
- Have a written emergency plan that includes procedures for how you will work with external agencies.
- Think about how you will communicate with your organizational partners if power or phone lines are interrupted during an incident.
- Include emergency preparedness issues in your employee orientation and ongoing staff training — let staff know which community organizations and leaders you are partnering with.

Maintaining the Connection

Make contact regularly with community organizations and first responder agencies to keep relationships fresh. Your emergency preparedness coordinator(s) should:

- Invite community agencies to emergency preparedness meetings on a regular basis.
- Keep contact names and information current:
 - Distribute printed copies and electronic copies of contact information to all relevant staff. (Remember that you may not have access to your work computer or even your clinic building during an emergency, so duplicate copies of contact information and emergency plans should be stored off site.)
 - Identify redundant forms of communication with each contact (for example, phone, fax, email, and cellphone number).

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- Incorporate new staff members into your emergency preparedness plans—make emergency preparedness a part of every employee orientation.
- Formalize your linkages by putting them in writing—draw up an MOU for both parties to sign.

Tips:

- **Build on existing relationships.**
If you or your staff are already in contact with these organizations, contact the people you already know and ask them who you should reach out to in regards to emergency preparedness issues at their agency.
- **Don't let slow progress discourage you.**
Building relationships is a long-term process and a long-term investment. It may take more work than anticipated to make these kinds of connections and develop rapport with different organizations, but the benefits pay off when unexpected incidents happen. Keep reaching out!
- **Try to meet face-to-face at least once in a while.**
Face-to-face contact, especially in the early stages of getting to know each other's organizations, can really help build relationships.
- **Remember that everyone is coming to the table with their own perspectives and priorities.**
Not every organization or agency will have public health as their first priority; you can offer a public health perspective to the emergency planning process.
- **Give them a sense of your Center's emergency preparedness plan.**
Make sure they have at least a general understanding of how your Center expects to operate in an emergency and a sense of your emergency plan strategy for working with external agencies (for example, do you expect to help hospitals with surge capacity? what patient transport options do you have? are you willing to be a POD site for mass immunization? etc.).

Keep in Touch with Your Primary Care Association and Your State and Local Departments of Health

Your local Primary Care Association (PCA), such as CHCANYS, the New York State Department of Health, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and local Departments of Health are also important resources in your emergency management planning. They may offer trainings and guidelines in emergency preparedness or convene regional meetings to coordinate health-related emergency response. Stay informed of the emergency preparedness resources and trainings that they provide.

For CHCANYS members, CHCANYS offers drill scenarios implementation, training programs, an online information library, an emergency preparedness event notification listserv, and much more. Many of these resources are also available to non-members. Call us (212-279-9686) or visit our website (www.chcanys.org) to learn more about how we can help your Center with emergency preparedness.



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Developing a Culture of Preparedness

Emergency preparedness takes time, resources, and energy, but, just as primary health care is crucial to an individual's health, preparedness activities are an investment in your Center's organizational health that have clear long-term benefits. Engaging in regional emergency planning is about building a culture of preparedness, a culture that can help your entire community work as a team. Not only can building community linkages result in effective disaster response, it can bring community organizations closer together and help you work on everyday issues as well.



Keep in mind that the resources indicated in this report are only suggestions. It is recommended that you use this report as a guideline, but your decisions should be based upon available resources in your community and the capabilities of your site. It is these relationships that you and local community organizations build together that will ultimately strengthen the disaster response of your entire community.