

# **Including Outreach Workers and Community Health Workers in Health Center Emergency Preparedness and Management**

**Tip Sheet by  
Health Outreach Partners and MHP Salud**

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**H**health centers have an important role in emergency preparedness. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), “*Health centers must have risk management policies and procedures in place that continually and proactively identify and plan for potential and actual risks to the health center in terms of its facilities, staff, clients/patients, financial, clinical, and organizational well-being.*”<sup>1</sup> Health centers need policies and procedures in place to prepare for and manage emergencies. These policies and procedures help health centers protect their staff and patients and continue their ability to deliver health care during and after emergencies. This tip sheet outlines how health centers can include outreach workers, community health workers, and/or *promotores(as)* in emergency preparedness\*. Throughout the document (except in headings), these groups will be referred to as simply “outreach workers”. Other organizations that have outreach workers may also find this tip sheet relevant.

This tip sheet focuses on how outreach workers can support three of the basic emergency management expectations for health centers, including:

1. **Emergency Management Planning:** engage in a continuous process to ensure that emergency management plans (EMPs) meet the needs of underserved populations.
2. **Linkages and Collaborations:** maximize linkages and collaborations with other agencies, entities, and populations in the community.
3. **Communications and Information Sharing:** have policies and procedures for communicating and sharing information with internal and external stakeholders.

These basic management expectations are part of HRSA’s Health Center Emergency Management Program Expectations. Health centers may have additional requirements by other entities such as accrediting agencies or funding sources.<sup>2</sup>

The tips presented are broad and can be applied to a variety of health centers and other organizations. The tips are guidelines and not requirements or an all-inclusive plan. Every health center is different and should plan according to its location, size, staff, type of services and resources available. Remember - **emergency preparedness is a process, not a destination!**

## What is an “Emergency”?

There are many definitions of an “emergency.” According to HRSA, an “emergency” is defined as “*an event affecting the overall target population and/or the community at large, which precipitates the declaration of a state of emergency at a local, state, regional, or national level by an authorized public official such as governor, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, or the President of the United States.*”<sup>1</sup> In this tip sheet, emergencies refer to events that disrupt the traditional functioning of the health center or community. Examples of emergencies may include:

- Earthquakes
- Fires
- Floods
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Droughts
- Heat waves
- Influenza (or other infectious disease outbreaks)
- Food-borne illness outbreaks
- Immigration raids



Some emergencies may affect certain groups--especially underserved populations--differently within the community.

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\*Outreach workers, community health workers, and *promotores(as)* refer to individuals used by Community Health Centers and other community-based health organizations in a variety of capacities and roles to promote health care access and reduce health disparities. They may be paid staff or volunteers who work full-time, part-time, year-round, or seasonally. Some staff or volunteers work primarily in the community; others spend significant time assisting patients in the health center setting.

# Why Outreach Workers and Community Health Workers?

Health center grantees are expected to make special provisions for underserved populations.<sup>3\*\*</sup> Outreach workers help connect underserved populations to these services while also serving as the community's link to the health center. Outreach workers are especially effective in helping health centers fulfill basic emergency management expectations for a variety of reasons. Outreach workers can:

- Serve as a link between health centers and underserved populations
- Have established trust and rapport with underserved populations
- Facilitate planning and preparation
- Help to empower the underserved
- Assist with educating underserved populations and creating awareness about emergencies
- Speak the language of underserved populations
- Advocate on behalf of underserved populations

Outreach workers do not need to become emergency preparedness experts to play this vital role in sharing information and connecting underserved populations to services.

## Tips for Incorporating Outreach Workers and Community Health Workers



### *Before an emergency*

#### ***Emergency Management Planning***

**Include outreach workers in the development of emergency management plans.** Outreach workers can speak to the needs of underserved populations, can represent the community on planning committees, or can identify others to serve on such committees.<sup>4</sup>

**Have outreach worker roles and responsibilities clearly outlined in the emergency management plan.** Define how the center will include outreach workers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of emergency drills and real emergencies.<sup>5</sup>

**Collect census information through outreach workers.** Census information includes: who lives in the community, where houses are located, and who may have special needs during an emergency (i.e. pregnant women, elderly, handicapped, those who lack transportation, etc.). For example, outreach workers can assist with mapping farm and labor camp locations since addresses may not be reliable in rural locations.<sup>6</sup> If possible, have outreach workers conduct an assessment of environmental hazards in the community.

**Assess the needs of the community.** Outreach workers can assist with determining what emergency supplies are already available and what is needed. Additionally, outreach workers can help collect and manage emergency supplies for the health center. These supplies should be distributed to underserved populations in case of an emergency.<sup>5</sup>

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\*\*In this tip sheet, underserved populations include, but are not limited to, HRSA's definition of special populations. These consist of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, those living in public housing, and Native Hawaiians. For more information, see the Health Resources and Services Administration's *About Special Populations*: [bphc.hrsa.gov/about/specialpopulations/](http://bphc.hrsa.gov/about/specialpopulations/).

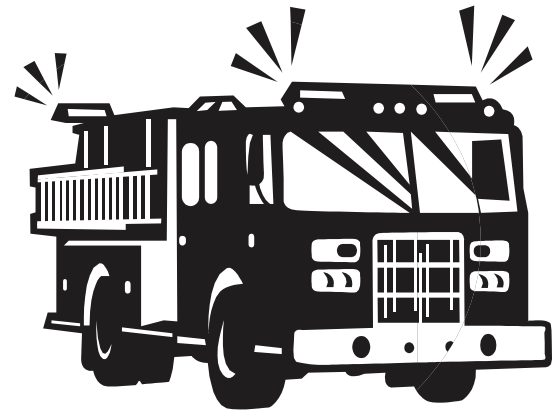
## Linkages and Collaboration

**Create a list of aid organizations such as food banks, emergency shelters, and other resources for underserved populations in emergencies.** Outreach workers can help contact these organizations, as well as plan for how underserved populations would get to them.<sup>7</sup>

**Some companies already have specific evacuation plans and shelter - outreach workers can help ensure they include workers from underserved populations.** Outreach workers can work with the companies, as well as hold educational/awareness-raising events with employees to make sure they know and understand the plan.<sup>8</sup>

**Connect outreach workers with “key partners” to ensure smooth running of the emergency response system.** Connection can take place in a variety of ways. For example, outreach workers can be involved in emergency planning discussions or arrange meetings with key partners. Outreach workers can also serve as a link or point of contact between the health center and key partner entities. Examples of key partners may include the following:

- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Emergency/Disaster Preparedness
- Department of Agriculture
- AmeriCares and Direct Relief USA
- Local businesses
- County-level emergency managers
- Religious organizations
- Local organizations that serve similar populations such as food banks, community centers, and schools.
- Community leaders such as local elected officials
- Local chapter of the American Red Cross
- Community collaboratives



If you have more formal arrangements with partners, clearly outline emergency response contacts, roles and responsibilities of each partner. This can be done through a memorandum of understanding or other formal documentation.<sup>5</sup>

## Communications and Information Sharing

**Share information with underserved populations in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.** Outreach workers can translate, post, and distribute emergency procedures in areas often frequented by underserved populations including<sup>8</sup>:

- Health centers
- Grocery stores
- Laundromats
- Farmworker camps and packing facilities
- Churches
- Local businesses



**Provide verbal emergency and evacuation procedures to underserved populations in the areas where they live and work.** For example, farmworkers in labor camps may respond well to *pláticas*, or informal small group discussions traditionally delivered in a community setting.<sup>9</sup> Outreach workers can facilitate the *pláticas*, focusing on emergency preparation topics and strategies including<sup>10</sup>:

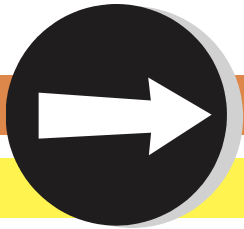
- The creation of a phone chain to disseminate information quickly to underserved populations
- Forming family emergency plans, including a time and place to meet if other lines of communication are cut off
- General emergency preparedness practices and needs
- What emergencies and services they can expect locally

It is important that the information is presented in a clear and simple format and that it helps underserved populations better prepare for emergencies rather than create panic. Also, it is important to perform recurring *pláticas* because some underserved populations (especially farmworkers and homeless populations) often change from season to season.

**Facilitate the utilization of federal or local mass emergency notification systems.** While the criteria may vary by state, outreach workers may be eligible to enroll in federally or locally-managed emergency alert systems. Examples of such programs include the following listed below. Check the listed websites for eligibility:

- Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) Health Alert Network, [www.bt.cdc.gov/han/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/han/)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) mobile alert systems, <http://m.fema.gov/>
- Nixle (for agencies only), [www.nixle.com/](http://www.nixle.com/)

**Make sure outreach workers receive adequate training.** Consider developing an outreach worker training program on emergency preparedness. Recruit and train existing outreach workers in the community or form your own program if none are available. If you are looking to collaborate with other outreach worker groups, contact these groups directly or put out an announcement through community listservs. Also, maintain a contact list of trained outreach workers and groups as part of your emergency management plans.<sup>11</sup> If in-person training is not an option, FEMA offers an online course (<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is909.asp>).<sup>12</sup> Trained outreach workers can later provide emergency preparedness trainings to the community and key community members.



## ***During an emergency***

### ***Linkages and Collaboration***

**Inform underserved populations about emergency services available to them.** This can include where they can receive services, how to go about getting them, and for how long they can expect to receive them. Outreach workers can specifically:

- Help underserved populations apply for services
- Refer underserved populations to services for which they are eligible
- Help clarify any confusion or concern with regards to possible perceived threat of receiving services due to immigration status
- Gather information about patient mobility. For example, outreach workers can help determine if patients will be moving out of the area. They can provide information about eligible services, as well as alert providers to the incoming patients in the new area.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Communications and Information Sharing***

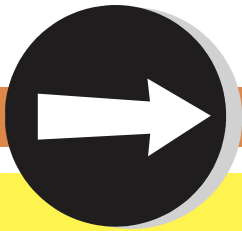
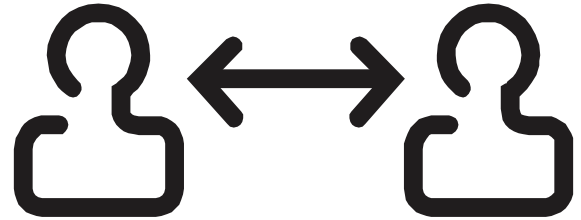
**Maintain open lines of communication within the organization.** Outreach workers are the eyes and ears of the community. They have important knowledge of what people are experiencing during and after an emergency. Therefore, it is important that outreach workers be able to communicate this information to upper management at their organization. This can be done by including outreach workers in staff meetings, emergency planning meetings, and annual evaluations of the emergency plans.

**Work with local media to help disseminate messages.** Outreach workers can help media outlets such as the local Spanish newspaper or a community radio station in interpreting and translating messages and in incorporating more visual cues to counter literacy concerns. Outreach workers can also ensure messages are relevant to underserved populations. Forming relationships prior to an emergency is an important step in facilitating this process.<sup>11</sup>



Health centers may not have extensive emergency services available during a disaster. **Outreach workers can help underserved populations access the services they need and refer them to the appropriate sites.**<sup>14</sup> For example, outreach workers can:

- Educate underserved populations about which services they may be eligible to receive.
- Assist the community with locating necessary resources such as food, shelter, clean water, etc.
- Serve as a relay point for information between local relief agencies and the community, delivering information in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.



## ***After an emergency***

### ***Emergency Management Planning***

**Make sure outreach workers clearly document the work they do** and are included in evaluation of emergency drills, projects, and actual emergency assessments.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Linkages and Collaboration***



**During the emergency recovery period, outreach workers can assist community members with connecting to relief services.** This can include helping underserved populations access and fill out applications for assistance. Outreach workers can also make referrals to mental health resources and provide social support.<sup>15</sup>

Outreach workers are essential to health center emergency preparedness and management. They not only help underserved communities gain access to much needed services, but they also are the eyes and ears of a health center in the community they serve. Outreach workers can gain trust in communities and often have language and cultural ties to the populations they serve. Outreach workers can support health centers before, during, and after an emergency. By involving outreach workers, health centers can ensure that their plans and policies are rooted in the community's needs and respond adequately in times of an emergency. Because emergency and population needs vary from community to community, health centers should tailor their plans to the local needs and resources. Continuous planning and evaluation should be done to keep information current. It is important for organizations to update any information they collect or distribute and to practice emergency drills at least once per year.



# Resources

- <sup>1</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration. *Health Center Emergency Management Program Expectations: Policy Information Notice 2007-15*. <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/policiesregulations/policies/pin200715expectations.html>
- <sup>2</sup> National Association of Community Health Centers. *Essential Components of Emergency Management Plans at Community Health Centers Crosswalk of Plan Elements*. <http://www.nachc.com/client/Essential%20Components%20of%20CHC%20EM%20Plans%20October%2010.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration. *About Special Populations*. <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/about/special-populations/>
- <sup>4</sup> NORC Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis. *Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Emergency Preparedness Planning Guide*. <http://www.norc.org/PDFs/publications/FILLABLEMigrantandSeasonalFarmWorkersEmergencyPreparednessPlanningGuide.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> California Primary Care Association. *Emergency Operation Plan*. <http://www.cpcsa.org/index.cfm/emergency-preparedness/resources/>
- <sup>6</sup> National Consensus Panel on Emergency Preparedness and Cultural Diversity. *Guidance for Integrating Culturally Diverse Communities into Planning for and Responding to Emergencies: A Toolkit*. <http://www.healthpolicyinstitute.org/files/OMHDiversityPreparednessToolkit.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Public Health Workbook To Define, Locate, and Reach Special, Vulnerable, and At-risk Populations in an Emergency*. [http://www.bt.cdc.gov/workbook/pdf/ph\\_workbookFINAL.pdf](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/workbook/pdf/ph_workbookFINAL.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> Public Health Seattle and King County. *Ethnic Media*. <http://www.apctoolkits.com/vulnerablepopulation/>
- <sup>9</sup> Eisenman et al. *Improving Latino Disaster Preparedness Using Social Networks*. [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(09\)00606-0/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(09)00606-0/abstract)
- <sup>10</sup> Emergency and Community Health Outreach, Association on Minnesota Counties. *Communicating Without English in an Emergency: A Webinar for Government and Community Organizations*. <http://www.echominnesota.org/webinar-communicating-without-english>
- <sup>11</sup> Montgomery County Health Department. *Montgomery County, Maryland Advanced Practice Center for Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response*. <http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/phs/APC/index.asp>
- <sup>12</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency. *Community Preparedness: Implementing Simple Activities for Everyone*. <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is909.asp>
- <sup>13</sup> The National Center for Farmworker Health. *Developing a Farmworker Disaster Plan: A Guide for Service Providers*. <http://www.ncfh.org/?plugin=ecomm&content=item&sku=3083>
- <sup>14</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. *Farmworker Coordination Program Functions*. <http://www.outreach.usda.gov/farmworker/functions.htm>
- <sup>15</sup> National Healthcare for the Homeless. *Disaster Planning for People Experiencing Homelessness*. [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CFUQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcitesee rx.ist.psu.edu%2Fviewdoc%2Fdownload%3Fdoi%3D10.1.1.183.7242%26rep%3Drep1%26type%3Dpdf&ei=7yj7T-iIJYq62wX5penvBg&usg=AFQjCNGDsWTLA9keAm5sXLi178TSt5r\\_9Q](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CFUQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcitesee rx.ist.psu.edu%2Fviewdoc%2Fdownload%3Fdoi%3D10.1.1.183.7242%26rep%3Drep1%26type%3Dpdf&ei=7yj7T-iIJYq62wX5penvBg&usg=AFQjCNGDsWTLA9keAm5sXLi178TSt5r_9Q)

**Check out our websites!**

**[www.outreach-partners.org](http://www.outreach-partners.org)**

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