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Identifying Partnership Needs & Fostering Relationships During Steady-State and Disasters

Tip Sheet for Community Health Centers

In preparing for emergency events and responding to disasters, it is essential to have a strong network of reliable partners to encourage an efficient response and a fast recovery with minimal impact on healthcare delivery or services. Thinking through what needs you'll encounter in an emergency is a useful exercise in emergency preparedness planning, and can lead to a more cohesive response and support needs being met during a disaster.

Partners can fulfill a variety of needs that arise in a disaster, and can help to support a multitude of functions across a facility, including and not limited to: Procurement during times of shortages (e.g., via resource sharing), access to volunteers or additional staff to support patient tracking during evacuation, enhancing situational awareness during natural disasters, identifying cyber-related risks and informing your community health center (CHC) on mitigation tactics, and more. In short, partnerships are incredibly valuable to successful disaster responses and building resiliency in communities.

The purpose of this tip sheet is to guide Community Health Centers (CHCs) to identify partners, assess needs, and foster and maintain relationships before, during, and after disasters.

Identify potential partners

There are many stakeholders in the emergency preparedness, healthcare, and public health spaces – and determining who to partner with can be overwhelming at times. When identifying a potential partner, it is important that your CHC spends time learning about the potential partners' organization to assess whether they would be a good fit to partner with your CHC to support preparedness and response efforts. The practice doesn't have to take long, but it's beneficial to have a sense for the organization's mission, goals, target population, and culture.

Your CHC may identify potential partners across the following areas:

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<p>Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health departments • Emergency management agencies • Health Care Coalitions
<p>Healthcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers (hospitals, dialysis, long term care) • Supply chain (manufacturers, distributors, GPOs)
<p>Critical Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utility providers (power, water, communications) • Transportation
<p>Community Leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith-based organizations • Colleges and universities • Community-based organizations and NGOs

There may be many other potential partners your CHC is considering building a relationship with, depending on your geographic location and/or the types of disasters you frequently experience. While there is no “right” or “wrong” way to identify potential partners, it is important your CHC takes the time to learn your potential partners’ capabilities to better understand how successfully you could work together.

Identify needs of the CHC and those of partners

After your CHC has identified potential partners, it is important that your organization has a clear understanding of what you hope to gain from the partnership (your needs) and how your partner will benefit from engaging with your CHC (their needs).

Consider documenting each partners’ goals of entering into the partnership to ensure all parties have a clear understanding about roles, responsibilities, and intended outcomes. This process can also help each partner determine the time commitment and feasibility of the partnership.

One tool to help identify each partners’ needs is to go through a partnership mapping exercise in which your CHC lists a specific partner, describes the needs they support, and what activities that partner would undertake to meet those needs. For example:

Partner	Needs Supported	Activities
Supply chain vendors	Pharmaceuticals, supplies	Delivery of medical products and supplies
Transportation providers	Movement of patients	Assist with evacuations in the event of an emergency

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Utility Providers	Power and water supply	Report system outages during a disaster, provide restoration timelines, support
Telecommunication	Telehealth, Emergency Notifications	Help CHC deliver health care and services to patients who cannot physically a health facility

The mapping exercise helps your CHC develop a comprehensive list of partners and builds a jurisdictional profile of key stakeholders. In addition to identifying what needs your partners may help your CHC meet, this exercise can also help determine how your CHC can help meet your partners’ needs during a disaster or public health emergency.

Fostering and maintaining relationships

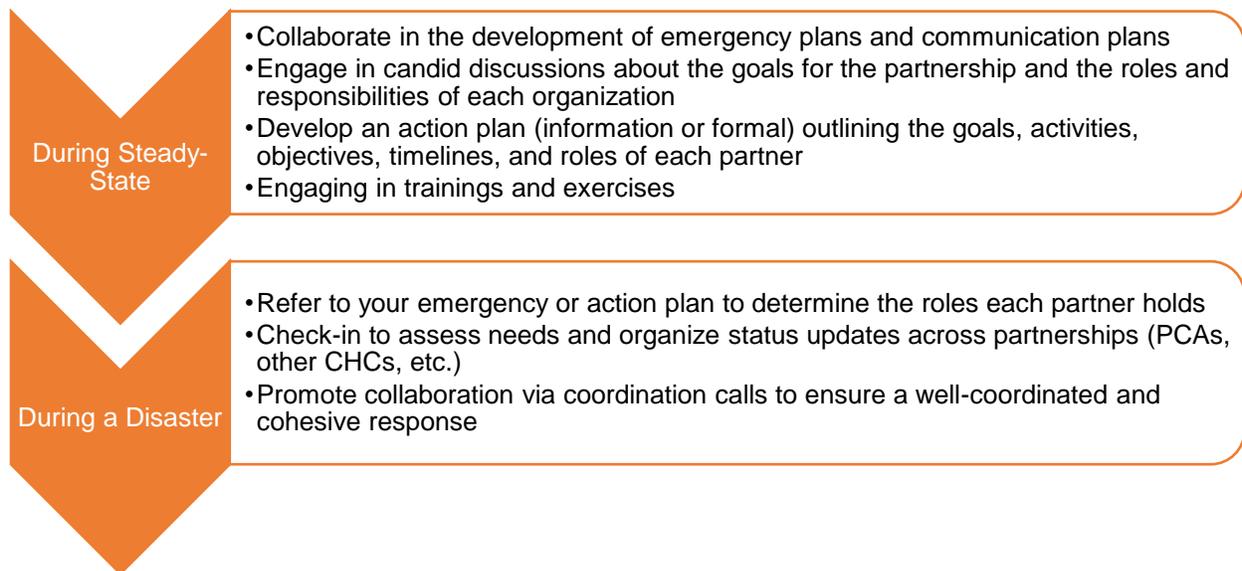
Once you begin your partnership, it will be important that your CHC takes the necessary steps to maintain relationships over time, especially during preparedness, response, and recovery phases. Maintaining partnerships over time requires that you be clear in your communication, adapt to changing needs, support information sharing, and continue to check-in on the value of the partnership.

- 1. Be clear in your communication:** Communication is critical to the success of a partnership. From the start of your partnership, you should identify how your organizations will communicate (email, phone call), how often you will meet (weekly, monthly), and the appropriate points of contact for each partner.
- 2. Adapt to changing needs:** With so many competing priorities in the health space, many organization's’ capabilities, priorities, or availability may shift over time, or over the course of the disaster cycle. Your CHC should seek feedback from partners to discuss successes and opportunities for improvement, and adjust as needed.
- 3. Support information sharing:** Bi-directional information sharing is critical to ensuring successful collaboration. Your CHC should be ready and willing to share relevant information with your partners that can support their mission. In exchange, your CHC should also be communicating to your partners your information needs to ensure both partners are benefiting.
- 4. Check-in on the value of the partnership:** At least annually (or every other year), your CHC should assess how your partnerships are performing. Conducting this evaluation can help your CHC identify where new partnerships may be able to support unmet needs or adjust current partnerships as needed.

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Depending on whether your CHC is operating during steady-state (i.e., normal operations) or during a disaster, you may look to engage with partners in different ways. Recognizing the needs of your CHC or your partners may change during a disaster, how you coordinate and communicate with them will likely differ.

Examples of how your CHC may engage with partners during steady-state vs. during a disaster are below:



Ultimately, there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to partnerships – there are many different ways to identify new partners, expand existing partnerships, and maintain mutually helpful relationships over time. We recommend that your CHC use this tip sheet, the expertise of your staff, and the many other publicly available resources to help guide your health center’s partnerships strategies over time.