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Tips for Community Health Centers: Kickstarting your Social Media Strategy

Social media has become an invaluable tool to share information quickly, helping healthcare organizations deliver timely information to the communities they serve. During emergencies, there is often a need to use different communication methods to reach patients, staff, and partners. Establishing a social media presence can help to ensure that your community has different ways of finding information, resources, available services, or information on operating status when disasters affect your area.

There are many social media outlets that Community Health Centers (CHCs) can use to reach various audiences and strengthen their community presence by supporting information sharing. With its ability to allow for faster dissemination of health messages, social media can help CHCs expand their reach, foster engagement, and increase access to credible, scientifically-based health messages. Especially in moments of crisis where the speed at which CHCs can disseminate information, social media is a vital tool that offers multiple ways to share messaging.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide CHCs with information, tools, and resources that can help strengthen knowledge of effective social media strategies, understand various social media channels, and build social media tactics into a broader communication plan.

Developing a social media strategy

Your organization's social media strategy for crisis communications should be developed with your CHC's broader communication plan in mind.¹ Some [key considerations](#) your CHC should think about when developing a social media strategy include:

1. Who are your target audiences?
2. What are your objectives?
3. Which outlets will you use?
4. How much time and resources can your CHC invest in social media?

Having a strong sense of these considerations will help your CHC build your strategy. Because the answers to these questions may change depending on the campaign or the crisis at hand, your social media strategy will likely change over time, including in which phase of the disaster cycle (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) your CHC is in. How you define your target audience, and your campaign objectives will help your CHC determine which outlet you use and how much time you can allocate to the campaign. Additionally, the ways in which people interact with various social media channels may also change over time, potentially dictating how your CHC participates in certain social media channels.

¹ A communications plan is a requirement of the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Emergency Preparedness Final Rule](#).

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For additional guidance in developing your social media strategy, refer to this [Social Media Communications Strategy Worksheet](#).

Social media channels and tools

There are many social media channels and tools your CHC can leverage to build your social media presence before, during, and after a disaster. Regardless of which channel or tools your CHC chooses to engage with, it will be important that you identify which platform is most appropriate for your target audience and your objectives.

Take the time to assess which social media platforms your community engages with the most. For example, if your community is extremely active on Twitter, then your CHC may choose to strategically build your Twitter presence rather than Facebook or Instagram. Simply having a presence on social media is useful for communicating with your audience during times of disaster. Some information you share may include hours of operation and contact information for affected individuals. This “lite” social media presence allows for quick and simple interaction with one’s target audience.

Some of the most commonly used social media platforms include:



Facebook: Create a profile for your CHC and invite users to “like” your page. Share posts, exchange messages, and engage with “friends”.



Twitter: Stay connected with groups or individuals by sharing short messages. Users can “like” or “re-tweet” your messages.



Instagram: Your CHC can share images or videos to users who follow your profile. Post “stories” to provide updates or share other users’ posts.



LinkedIn: A professional networking platform that allows your CHC to share resources, collaborate on ideas, and engage in messaging boards.



YouTube: Share videos on your page, or view other’s videos. CHCs can post recordings from webinars, meetings, or trainings.

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Created with adaptations from <https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Social-Media-Toolkit-for-LHDs-2019.pdf>

There are many other platforms available for your CHC; however, the platforms described above are typically free to use and can help you reach a range of audiences during various disasters or public health emergencies. Once you determine which platform your CHC will use, consider exploring the many tools available that can help your CHC effectively communicate.

Commonly used tools include social media graphics, buttons and/or badges, the use of #hashtags to increase your reach and promoting links or URLs to connect users to additional resources.

Quick tips for creating a strong social media campaign by leveraging tools:

1. Create graphics in several sizes, including standard advertisement sizes and sizes developed specifically for certain social media platforms
2. Write simple, yet catchy health messages that can stand alone and be widely disseminated across multiple channels
3. Use colorful and attractive images or designs that can be viewed on a number of sites and in a number of sizes
4. Include a URL on messages to link users back to your website
5. Develop [buttons and badges](#) to strengthen user experience on your website
6. Research commonly used hashtags in the healthcare space and add them to your messaging #PrepYourHealth

See below for examples that demonstrate the use of graphics and images in social media campaigns.

Example #1: Extreme Heat Safety Tips

EXTREME HEAT SAFETY TIPS

HEALTHCARE READY
STRENGTHEN. SAFEGUARD. RESPOND.

SCAN ME

TIP 1: Check the local news and @NWS for extreme heat alerts.

TIP 2: Learn the signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses. If you see someone suffering from a heat emergency call 911 (children may die if their temperature reaches 107 degrees, so act fast). Get trained in first aid to treat heat-related emergencies.

TIP 3: NEVER leave anyone in a parked car, especially children and pets.

TIP 4: Check-in on those at high-risk for heat-related illness including people 65+ years, infants, children, pets, anyone who spends a lot of time alone, and anyone without A/C.

Visit www.211.org or contact your local Office of Emergency Management to find cooling centers near you.

Example #2: Tips on Preparing for a Blackout

TIPS ON PREPARING FOR A BLACKOUT OR BROWNOUT

HEALTHCARE READY
STRENGTHEN. SAFEGUARD. RESPOND.

SCAN ME

01 Freeze bags of water to keep your fridge cool.

02 Stock up on filtered water if you can't boil it.

03 Keep important phone numbers on hand.

04 Keep phones and medical equipments charged.

05 Have a backup power source.

06 Tell your electric company you have home medical devices that require energy.

07 Avoid using electronics and appliances during brownouts as this could damage them.

For more info on power outage safety from the CDC, use your phone to scan the QR code to the right:

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Building social media into your communication plan

Once your CHC determines your social media strategy, it will be important to integrate that strategy into your broader communication plan, a requirement of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Emergency Preparedness Final Rule. Having your strategy documented in your CHC's communication plan ensures that campaigns, activities, tactics, and priority networks/platforms are well documented. A well-documented social media strategy serves as a reference for staff during a disaster and can also help to ensure continuity of communications if there is staff turnover at your facility.

For more information on strategies for integrating your social media strategy into your communication plan, see this [Social Media Toolkit](#) from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)

Monitoring and evaluating social media strategies

After you have implemented your social media strategy and have started sharing information via social media platforms, your CHC should implement strategies to measure and assess your social media campaigns' effectiveness. Measuring your social media strategies can help measure successes and identify opportunities for improvement.

Tips for monitoring and evaluating your CHC's social media strategies:

1. **Set goals** before you start a campaign. Similar to establishing objectives, make sure your CHC has an understanding of what you hope to accomplish through your social media campaign. Depending on your goal, you may utilize different tactics to measure success.
2. **Establish metrics to measure your goals:** Most social media platforms provide users with analytic tools to help them measure things like reach, exposure, and engagement. Using your goals, identify which metrics will help you measure success for each campaign.
3. **Analyze your campaign:** Once you have determined which metrics you will use to measure your success, and you have completed your campaign, use the appropriate tools to analyze the campaign itself.
4. **Identify opportunities for improvement:** After you have analyzed your campaign, review the findings and identify areas where your CHC can improve communications for the next disaster. Work with your team to develop new tactics or strategies to help meet your goals. For example, if your metrics show that engagement is significantly higher during the morning hours, consider prioritizing the dissemination of disaster-specific messages in the morning during future events.