

Investigator: Jennifer Hunter, MPH, DrPH(c)

Project Title: Classifying Local Health Department Functions during Emergency Responses and Urgent Events

Executive Summary

Increased attention to public health threats in recent years has been met with both public investments in preparedness and heightened expectations of public health agencies' ability to prevent, detect, and contain disease threats. However, the expected functions of local health departments across different types of emergencies or urgent events are not well described. In an attempt to fill this gap, the proposed research aims to characterize the functions of local public health departments using recent historical emergencies and urgent events.

- Aim 1. To characterize the types of emergencies or urgent events requiring a response from local public health departments within the past five years.
- Aim 2: To describe the roles and responsibilities of local public health agencies in response to each emergency or urgent event.
- Aim 3: To develop a typology public health emergency or urgent event based on the roles and responsibilities of local health departments.

This research will draw upon the nation's 2,332 local governmental public health departments (LHDs) that participated in the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) 2008 National Profile of Local Health Departments, represent 83% of the 2,794 LHDs in the United States [1]. LHDs will be purposively sampled to include agencies from each of the ten Health and Human Services (HHS) Regions. A web-based survey will be developed and administered to LHDs to collect information on recent historical emergencies or urgent events during the past five years. The survey will address the following domains: 1) Event Characteristics, 2) Event Epicenter, 3) Organizational Involvement, 4) LHD Response Roles and Responsibilities, 5) Previous Experience. Additional organizational characteristics of LHDs will be accessed through the NACCHO LHD Profile and County Health Rankings [1, 2].

In addition to a descriptive analysis of public health agencies and events, a cluster analysis will be used to develop a typology public health hazards and events based on the roles and responsibilities of local health departments. Other domain predictors of public health centrality will also be explored.

Investigator: Donata Nilsen, MPH, DrPH (c)

Project Title: Translating Research into Action: Promoting a Culture of Preparedness and Response through Interorganizational Relationships and Effective Communication with Community-based Organizations Serving the Homeless in Alameda County

Executive Summary:

Research translation is a critical component and extension of research that is often not emphasized in the research process. This proposal centers on the practical application and translation of research data and findings building upon research from PERRC Project 1 focusing on organizational structure and communication. With multiple models to draw from, this project will examine various steps and stages of the research translation continuum to apply to new knowledge and research results from the pilot project *Building, Enhancing and Leveraging Interorganizational Relationships for Disaster Preparedness and Response: A Study of Community-based Organizations Serving Vulnerable Populations; a Focus on the Homeless*. In translating research results into practice, knowledge passes through several stages using an inclusive approach consisting of study participants, the intended target population(s), the researchers, and the infrastructure in which the practical application of the intervention is carried out. Confronting translation issues early on in the research process is imperative, particularly when engaging community organizations; a broad range of stakeholders need to be engaged. The aims of this project include convening an advisory committee to assist in reviewing research results and recommending appropriate intervention strategies, development of a flowchart of the translation process, holding a community forum as an outlet for research results and intervention(s) and engaging stakeholders for sustainability.

Project AIMS:

Aim 1: Convene an advisory committee. The advisory committee will assist in reviewing research results and recommending appropriate intervention strategies and tools to enhance current disaster preparedness and response activities.

Aim 2: Develop a clear flowchart of the translation process involved for this pilot project.

Aim 3: Hold a community forum as an outlet for research results and for practical application of results into actionable steps.

Aim 4: Report results of community forum to county stakeholders, advisory committee and project partners for continued and sustained actions.

Investigator: Alina Engleman, MPH, DrPH(c)

Project Title: Emergency Preparedness Communication for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Executive Summary

The goal of this project is to assess and improve all-hazards preparedness communication access for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (HH) using a participatory, community-directed approach. The project aims to explore how deaf/HH people can access critical information before emergencies and in the process, become more educated, empowered, health literate and resilient in response to emergencies. Given that first responders often don't know how to communicate with deaf and hard-of-hearing people, educating and empowering the deaf community to take more action before emergencies arise tackles the problem in a more focused way.

Background:

Standard all-hazards emergency preparedness risk & response communication efforts don't always reach deaf or hard-of-hearing people with barriers relating to literacy, language, culture or disability. There is anecdotal evidence of a higher risk of injury, death, property loss for 32 million Deaf/HH Americans and for 90 million Americans with low-literacy skills.

However, rather than viewing people who are deaf/HH from a deficit-based model, we need to reframe the problem of access from an assets-based perspective. As Lakshmi Fjord wrote, there is an often erroneous conflation of special needs with vulnerable: "While the concept of 'vulnerable persons' illustrates an inequitable distribution of harm, it can also imply that their losses are expected losses based on cultural assumptions about their "lacks" or deficits".

Deaf/HH people themselves are actually an asset to the emergency preparedness and response system: The most efficacious preparedness and response strategies arise out of the cultural knowledge of those who negotiate and adapt creatively everyday to changing circumstances – that is, the very persons considered most "vulnerable" are actually those with the greatest expertise for disaster mitigation.

Despite the scope of the problem, there are significant research gaps: there is a lack of research on linguistic, cultural, and functional relevance of preparedness materials for Deaf/HH. Given the paucity of peer-reviewed literature on emergency preparedness for the deaf and the fact there is no agreed-upon standard for evaluating health-related tools, this evaluation can further research on the development of accessible education materials. There is also a lack of research on factors that promote or hinder preparedness communication capacity of CBOs and deaf/HOH individuals. On a system-wide level, there is a lack of information about national/state guidelines for emergency communication for Deaf and hard of hearing groups. While there are anecdotal documentation of the problems the deaf and hard of hearing face in emergencies, it's not theory driven.

Specific AIMS:

AIM 1: Conduct a literature review to assess health literacy and emergency preparedness needs and gaps in emergency preparedness literature.

AIM 2: Conduct a content analysis of video materials in American Sign Language with subtitles to identify and evaluate the resource usability of currently available, accessible health literacy tools for the deaf/HH.

AIM 3: Conduct a qualitative analysis/evaluation of training of first responders.