

Engagement of Health Clinics in Medical Surge Activities



Nearly 1,400 Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-funded health centers, 4,200 rural health clinics, and 1,200 free/charitable clinics (referred to as “health clinics” in this document) deliver affordable healthcare to millions of patients in every U.S. state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Basin. Their extensive geographic coverage, strong community ties, and ability to serve medically underserved areas suggest that health clinics may play essential roles in ensuring a coordinated response should an emergency strike the communities they serve.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR)’s Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange ([TRACIE](#)) conducted 175 online surveys with health clinic leaders from 38 states to collect their perceptions about their facilities’ role in supporting the health and medical response to disasters or public health

emergencies. Among these respondents, 25 participated in one-on-one in-depth telephone interviews and provided additional detail on their survey responses. Questions in the survey and follow-up interviews fell under four categories: (1) health clinic role in emergency response; (2) health clinic infrastructure and scope of emergency response; (3) emergency preparedness procedures and collaborations; and (4) health clinic characteristics.

A key finding from this study was that health clinics have a role in addressing healthcare needs during emergencies and disasters, but the level of perceived and actual capacity for response varies significantly. The following questions and answers can help health clinics and healthcare coalitions and other response partners collaborate on and support each other's preparedness and response efforts. The responses also identify resources and offer suggestions to assist health clinics in effectively planning to maintain continuity of their operations and integrate into their community's emergency management framework during disasters.

Additional Resources

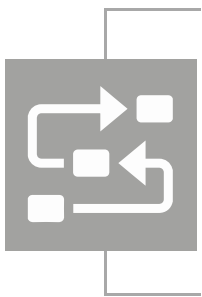
- Medical Surge and the Role of Health Clinics [Report](#)
- Medical Surge and the Role of Health Clinics [Summary](#)

Resources for Health Clinics



As a health clinic leader, who should I contact to express interest in contributing to the community's healthcare system emergency preparedness and response activities?

- Your local [healthcare coalition](#)
- Nearby hospitals
- Your local health department
- Your local emergency management agency
- Your local emergency medical services (EMS) agency



What steps can I take to improve the readiness of my health clinic?

- Evaluate risks, hazards, and vulnerabilities within your community on an ongoing basis and plan how your clinic would respond during likely scenarios.
- Review existing policies, procedures, or protocols used during normal operations and evaluate their applicability to emergency response operations.

- Create emergency contact lists with staff information and include guidance for contacting staff during an emergency incident and off hours when the facility is closed. Consider whether social media may be a useful tool in maintaining contact with your staff.
- Develop a plan for communicating with the public and the media whether your clinic is open or closed during an emergency.
- Develop and maintain onsite emergency response kits and supplies.
- Provide emergency preparedness training to staff (e.g., Incident Command) and encourage participation in drills and exercises.
- Ensure your clinic is signed up to receive emergency notifications from local preparedness and response partners and agencies.
- Determine whether your clinic is eligible for priority restoration of utilities, receipt of fuel for generators, and other services.
- Participate in coordinated emergency preparedness activities with various partners such as: other health clinics in your area, healthcare coalitions, the local health department, and the local emergency management agency.
- Collaborate with supply chain vendors to create contingency plans that allow for rapid re-orders and delivery of critical supplies.
- Establish relationships with relief organizations (e.g., Direct Relief, Americares, local chapters of the American Red Cross) that may be able to assist with supplies and other resources.
- Review resources in ASPR TRACIE's [Hazard Vulnerability/Risk Assessment](#), [Emergency Operations Plans/Emergency Management Program](#), [Social Media in Emergency Response](#), [Emergency Public Information and Warning/Risk Communications](#), and [Exercise Program](#) Topic Collections.

Relevant ASPR TRACIE Topic Collections

- [Continuity of Operations \(COOP\)/Failure Plan](#)
- [Emergency Operations Plans/Emergency Management Program](#)
- [Emergency Public Information and Warning/Risk Communications](#)
- [Exercise Program](#)
- [Hazard Vulnerability/Risk Assessment](#)
- [Social Media in Emergency Response](#)
- [Training and Workforce Development](#)

What steps can I take to develop an emergency plan for my health clinic?

- Conduct a hazard assessment to identify risks, threats, and vulnerabilities to your clinic and within your local community.
- Seek planning guidance from community partners (e.g., local health department, hospitals, emergency management agency, EMS).
- Enhance existing or develop new protocols, checklists, and guidelines for your staff to refer to during incidents more likely to occur, such as how to:
 - Implement site and personnel safety
 - Switch from electronic to paper medical records
 - Cope with loss of communication, internet, and electronic systems
 - Safely put on and take off personal protective equipment
- Secure pharmaceuticals, vaccinations, and other temperature-sensitive supplies during a power outage (potentially for multiple days)
- Lockdown the clinic
- Manage incidents of violence at the clinic
- Respond to victims of a mass casualty incident presenting directly to the clinic
- Shelter in place during severe weather or no-notice incidents
- Identify backup systems for critical utility systems used within your facility, including electronic health records.
- Ensure access to generators and diesel fuel.
- Plan for contingency staffing, water/smoke/damage mitigation, and other situations that will allow the clinic to remain open or re-open rapidly following a disaster.
- Determine where patients will be referred if your clinic has to close; consider creating memoranda of understanding with nearby facilities.
- Review resources included in ASPR TRACIE's [Emergency Operations Plans/Emergency Management Program](#), [Hazard Vulnerability/Risk Assessment](#), and [Continuity of Operations \(COOP\)/Failure Plan](#) Topic Collections. Additional information can be found in the [ASPR TRACIE Evaluation of Hazard Vulnerability Assessment Tools](#).





What training is available for my employees?

- Access free online training on the [incident command system and other emergency management topics](#) through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Management Institute.
- Identify training offered through your local or state emergency management agency and healthcare coalition(s).
- Ask to be included in local, state, or regional primary care association or health center controlled network sponsored trainings.
- Review resources included in ASPR TRACIE's [Training and Workforce Development Topic Collection](#).



How can I test my health clinic's emergency readiness?

- Conduct internal drills that test procedures and protocols specific to your health clinic.
- Participate in community-based exercises developed by local preparedness and response agencies.
- Ask community partners to include you in their drills and exercises.
- Review resources included in ASPR TRACIE's [Exercise Program Topic Collection](#).



What can I gain through my participation in preparedness activities?


- A culture of preparedness among staff.
- An awareness of ways to improve emergency readiness at your clinic.
- The ability to maintain operations and revenue stream despite infrastructure or other challenges during an emergency.
- A plan for the orderly referral of patients to other facilities if the clinic is forced to close in a disaster.
- A better understanding of community/region needs and vulnerabilities.
- The opportunity to make a difference in the community.
- Recognition and respect for your capabilities.

- Access to information and expertise from local partners.
- Opportunities for networking and professional development.
- Access to resources such as supplies, training, assistance in meeting regulatory/compliance requirements, exercise opportunities, and/or funding.



Where can I find information about healthcare coalitions and the nation's healthcare system preparedness and response framework?

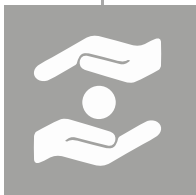
- ASPR [Hospital Preparedness Program \(HPP\) Information](#)
- ASPR [2017-2022 Healthcare Preparedness and Response Capabilities](#)
- Select ASPR TRACIE [Healthcare Coalition Resources](#)



What resources are available to help my health clinic meet the requirements of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Emergency Preparedness Requirements for Medicare and Medicaid Participating Providers and Suppliers Final Rule (the CMS Final Rule)?

- ASPR TRACIE – [CMS Rule Resource Page](#)
- CMS – [Emergency Preparedness Rule](#)
- National Association of Community Health Centers – [Emergency Management/Continuity of Operations](#)
- National Nurse-Led Care Consortium – Emergency Preparedness [Webinar Series](#) and CMS Final Rule [Guide](#)
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services – CMS Final Rule Rural Health Clinic/Federally Qualified Health Center [Toolkit](#) and [Workbook](#)

Resources for Healthcare Coalitions and Other Partners



How can health clinics contribute to healthcare emergency preparedness and response activities in my community?

- Reduce demand on local emergency departments by maintaining operations and providing additional surge capacity through modifications to existing space or extended operating hours.
- Provide expertise in treating certain patient populations such as children, older adults, people experiencing homelessness, and non-English speakers.
- Improve community resilience by providing continuity of care to the populations they serve during a disaster.
- Engage in risk communication to existing patients and their loved ones.
- Provide behavioral health support and treatment.
- Support local prophylaxis/vaccination efforts.
- Provide follow-up care during the recovery phase of an emergency.
- Establish and/or staff temporary medical stations or triage sites.



What factors would initiate health clinic involvement in emergency response?

- An incident occurring at or near the clinic resulting in the need to provide emergency care at the location.
- Responding to meet the needs of existing patients affected by a community incident.
- Request from a local, state, or federal emergency management or public health agency.
- A request from a health system partner.



What is the best way to reach out to health clinics?

- Direct contact with personnel.
- Existing relationships with health clinic personnel.
- Establish relationships with [state](#) and [national associations](#) to assist in identifying health clinics in your area.
- Through local public health agencies who have established relationships with health clinics.



How can community partners engage health clinics in ongoing preparedness activities?

- Review health clinic capabilities and consider the feasibility of establishing formal or informal agreements for patient transfers and referrals.
- Invite health clinics to participate in:
 - Healthcare coalition activities
 - Exercises and drills
 - Emergency preparedness training opportunities
- Local hazard assessment activities (hazard vulnerability assessment, threat and hazard identification, and risk assessment)
- Provide emergency planning and response guidance and technical assistance to health clinics.
- Include health clinics in your planning activities to identify what they are willing and able to contribute.
- Ensure health clinic personnel are signed up to receive emergency notifications and alerts about emergencies in the area.
- Offer access to community-wide resources, such as supply caches, radio networks, priority fuel deliveries for generators, or emergency operations centers.

What support can partners provide to improve health clinics' ability to participate in and sustain an emergency response?

- Educate health clinics on healthcare coalition and jurisdictional emergency operations plans.
- Share guidance and technical assistance from local subject matter experts to inform health clinic preparedness activities.
- Include health clinics in notification/information sharing activities.
- Include health clinics in exercise and training opportunities.
- Enable access to disaster supplies and equipment.
- Provide guidance on seeking reimbursement for response activities.
- Encourage health clinic leadership investment in continuity of operations (COOP) planning to lay a foundation for coordinated community preparedness including relocating/reconstituting clinic services if their facilities are inaccessible.
- Exchange experiences and lessons learned while promoting mentorship of health clinic staff with less experience in emergency management.
- Increase awareness of the significant role health clinics can play in emergency response and recovery.



What challenges might prevent health clinics from participating in emergency preparedness and response activities?

- Variations among health clinics based on location, size, and opportunities and capacity to engage with other healthcare response partners.
- Inability to keep up with anticipated demand from existing patients during a response.
- Personnel may not be accessible or able to report during a response.
- Staff may have limited knowledge or understanding of health clinic roles in an emergency.
- The clinic location(s) may be closed due to an incident that affects personnel or the clinic's infrastructure.
- The health clinic's setting/ capabilities may not be adequate to support necessary emergency response activities.



- Lack of or inadequate funding available to incentivize or allow for participation in emergency preparedness activities.
- Limited administrative commitment to emergency preparedness activities.
- Logistical challenges associated with storing supplies (e.g., limited on-site space).

Additional Information

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