

READY TO RESPOND

The Wisconsin Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Program Supports Hospitals on the Front Line of Emergency Response

Hospitals are the community's safety net 24 hours a day, every day of the year. When disaster strikes, hospitals must be ready to respond—not only by treating the sick and injured, but also by coordinating with community and regional partners to ensure that medication, supplies, and personnel are deployed to meet the demand for medical services. Support from local, state, and federal government helps to ensure that hospitals are able to provide an immediate and effective response.

In 2002, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) established the Wisconsin Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Program (WHEPP) through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As administered by DHS in partnership with the Wisconsin Hospital Association and other stakeholders, WHEPP's mission is to support the emergency preparedness efforts of hospitals and other health care partners by providing equipment, supplies, resources, training and infrastructure. Over the last 15 years, WHEPP has provided millions of dollars to Wisconsin hospitals and health care systems for emergency preparedness.

Wisconsin's state of readiness includes stockpiles of essential equipment and medicines, computerized inventory systems for tracking strategic resources and equipment, advanced communication systems, national, state, and local communication/response protocols, and surveillance and data collection systems for tracking the size and impact of the emergency event.

This high level of preparedness and training has proved invaluable in responding to Wisconsin disasters over the last decade, including severe weather events, multi-vehicle highway crashes, H1N1, and even active shooter incidents. Hospitals continue to train for ongoing possible risks.

**Wisconsin maintains
a high level of
preparedness to
respond quickly to
disasters.**



WHEPP Resources

The goal of WHEPP is to save lives by making sure hospitals and other health care and emergency-response partners have the resources and training they need to respond effectively to emergencies. This means quick access to needed supplies and deployment of emergency response staff, including first responders, hospital medical personnel, and trauma and public health teams. WHEPP has become one of the best emergency preparedness programs in the nation, thanks to:

- **EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANS**—these include identifying indicators for plan activation, alert, and notification processes, response procedures, and resource acquisition and sharing
- **NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS)**—WHEPP helps health care organizations understand how to interact with NIMS, including training and exercises that facilitate operational coordination with public safety and emergency management organizations
- **HAZARD VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS**—this systematic approach identifies hazards or risks that will have likely impact on the demand for health care services, or the health care delivery system’s ability to provide these services, during an emergency
- **TRAINING AND EDUCATION**—WHEPP supports training and education of health care organizations to address health care preparedness and response gaps—for example, burn management, trauma management, responder safety, decontamination, ventilation and hospital incident command systems
- **EXERCISES**— WHEPP supports coordinated, realistic exercises to assess the health care delivery system’s readiness, such as emerging infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense threats, active shooter scenarios, and medical surge capacity
- **WISCOMM**—this redundant, interoperable radio communication system at hospitals throughout the state allows emergency department personnel to communicate with other key emergency responders during an emergency and also function as an alternative communications system
- **WI-TRAC**—the Wisconsin Tracking Resources and Communication System allows hospitals to communicate with each other and with emergency response partners and public health agencies during emergency events to report bed counts, issue alerts and request resources
- **PATIENT EVACUATION AND RELOCATION PLANS**—detailed plans for evacuating or relocating patients when continuity planning efforts cannot sustain a safe working environment
- **MEDICAL SURGE PLANNING**—provides plans for determining medical surge capacity and approaches for caring for a dramatic increase in patient volume that exceeds normal operating capacity
- **INFECTIOUS DISEASE PREPAREDNESS**—comprehensive strategies for responding to infectious disease outbreaks that stress the capacity of the health care delivery system—for example, H1N1, Ebola, Zika and Elizabethkingia

Collaborative Success

Hospitals are on the front line of health care and emergency response. In addition to maintaining inventories of critical equipment and supplies, they must be administratively prepared to manage emergency response plans quickly and efficiently. Speed is essential for deploying personnel and resources and containing emergencies. The ability to do this by working together with other health care facilities in the region requires considerable collaboration, training and planning.

To facilitate this collaboration, Wisconsin is divided into seven regional health care coalitions (HCCs) or healthcare emergency response coalitions (HERCs). An “HCC” or “HERC” is a group of individual health care and response organizations (for example, hospitals, EMS, emergency management organizations and public health agencies) in a defined geographic area. These HERC members work together to assist with large-scale emergencies. The HERC ensures that each member has the medical equipment and supplies, real-time information, communication systems and personnel needed to respond to emergencies.

The HERC coordinates regional emergency response plans for large-scale disasters and streamlines information flow during the crisis, making sure members do not suffer from confusing (or outdated) “information overload.” Within the HERCs are medical coordination centers, which collate and disseminate information and coordinate patient movement, equipment movement and technical assistance during a disaster. Members all have the same goal of using

this information to present a uniform and unified response to an emergency and to support their communities before, during and after the health-related crisis.

Always Ready to Respond

Wisconsin hospitals are often responding to an event or situation that draws on their emergency response training. As an example, over 150 hospital, public health, and various first responder personnel from the South Central Wisconsin HERC—including 19 hospitals—recently gathered at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison to practice the state’s plan for the appropriate transport and care of a suspected or confirmed Ebola patient. During the height of the Ebola epidemic, the primary risk factor for contracting Ebola was serving as a health care practitioner. In addition to hosting the exercise, the South Central Wisconsin HERC made federal funding available to hospitals and their regional partners for developing an efficient and safe response to the threat of Ebola or other highly infectious and pathogenic diseases, including SARS and MERS-CoV.

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Even though Wisconsin health care organizations contribute as much as they can to the cost of improvements, technology upgrades, training, and exercises for emergency preparedness, WHEPP receives most of its funding from federal grants. Since 9/11, these grants have contributed millions of dollars toward ensuring Wisconsin is prepared for the most serious natural disasters and terrorist acts.

Wisconsin hospitals and other health care organizations have never been better equipped to respond to an emergency, but it is an ongoing mission. Funding must continue in order to ensure the protection of Wisconsin's citizens in the event of an emergency.

Wisconsin Hospital Association Resources

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) supports hospitals and health care systems with emergency preparedness information and resources and provides coordination and communications assistance related to response efforts.

WHA has an ongoing relationship with DHS to maintain a critical communications bridge that links DHS to Wisconsin hospitals during a crisis. For example, when the H1N1 pandemic hit the nation in 2009, WHA worked with DHS to set up statewide meetings with hospitals and clinics to provide information about the disease, but also to meet and discuss the distribution of the H1N1 vaccine, which was in short supply. Beginning in 2014, WHA worked with DHS and other state agencies to identify and develop systems of care in the event a Wisconsin citizen contracted Ebola.

WHA has the capability to communicate directly with every hospital in the state at many levels, from the executive suite to emergency department.

WHA will continue to be a resource to not only its members, but also to state and local agencies, as they prepare for and respond to crises.

Hospitals are central to a community's ability to respond to an emergency. The community looks to the hospital not only to mobilize the resources necessary to care for the ill and injured, but also to coordinate relief and recovery efforts.

