Strengthening Emergency Preparedness: Overcoming Barriers and Fostering Partnerships

Thursday, March 12th, 2026

2:00-3:00pm Eastern / 11:00-12:00pm Pacific

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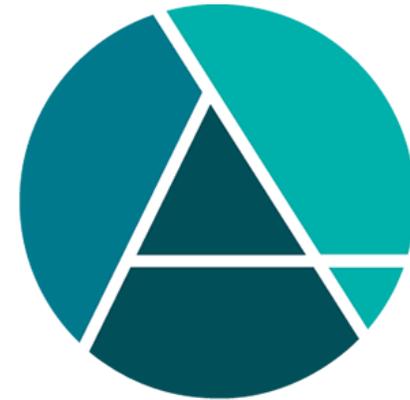
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- The views expressed in this presentation are those of the presenters and may not reflect official policy of Community Health Center, Inc. and its Weitzman Institute.

- We strive to create a respectful and welcoming learning environment. If anything in today's session makes you feel uncomfortable, please let us know via email at nca@chc1.com.

- We are obligated to disclose any products which are off-label, unlabeled, experimental, and/or under investigation (not FDA approved) and any limitations on the information that we present, such as data that are preliminary or that represent ongoing research, interim analyses, and/or unsupported opinion.

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WHAT WE DO.
IT'S WHO WE
DO IT FOR.

Learn More at mwhs1.com

MOSES/WEITZMAN Health System

Always groundbreaking. Always grounded.

Community Health Center, Inc.

A leading Federally Qualified Health Center based in Connecticut.

CeCN

A national eConsult platform improving patient access to specialty care.

The Consortium for Advanced Practice Providers

A membership, education, advocacy, and accreditation organization for APP postgraduate training.

National Institute for Medical Assistant Advancement

An accredited educational institution that trains medical assistants for a career in team-based care environments.
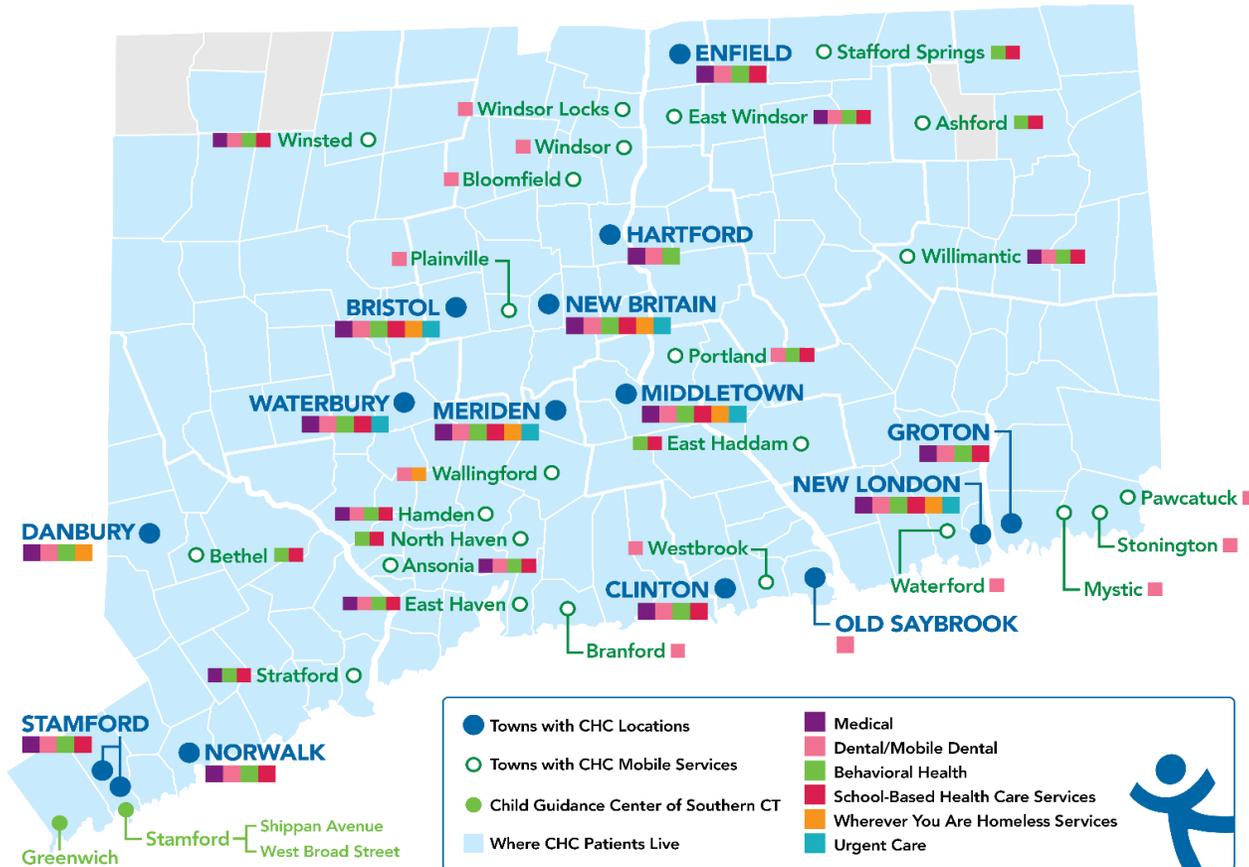
The Weitzman Institute

A center for innovative research, education, and policy.

Center for Key Populations

A health program with international reach, focused on the most vulnerable among us.

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Locations & Service Sites

Map legend:
- ● Towns with CHC Locations
- ○ Towns with CHC Mobile Services
- ● Child Guidance Center of Southern CT
- Where CHC Patients Live
- ■ Medical
- ■ Dental/Mobile Dental
- ■ Behavioral Health
- ■ School-Based Health Care Services
- ■ Wherever You Are Homeless Services
- ■ Urgent Care

THREE FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

1 Clinical Excellence	2 Research and Development	3 Training the Next Generation

Overview

- ◉ Founded: May 1, 1972
- ◉ Staff: 1,400
- ◉ Active Patients: 150,000
- ◉ Patients CY: 107,225
- ◉ SBHCs across CT: 152

Year	2022	2023	2024
Patients Seen	102,275	104,917	107,225

National Training and Technical Assistance Partners (NTTAP)
Clinical Workforce Development

Provides **free** training and technical assistance to federally funded health centers and look-alikes across the nation through webinars, activity sessions, communities of practice, trainings, publications, and more!

To learn more, please visit https://www.weitzmaninstitute.org/nca.

Speakers

Matthew Griswold, CHFM, CHSP
Facilities Director, Community Health Center, Inc. (CHCI)

Joseph Reppucci, MSEM, CEM, RI-CEM
Lead Fire, Emergency Management, & Security Consultant, Jensen Hughes

Learning Objectives

- Gain knowledge on the challenges impacting community health and how they intersect with organizational preparedness.

- Understand approaches for overcoming barriers and developing meaningful partnerships that support emergency preparedness.

- Learn actionable steps for integrating emergency preparedness into organizational planning to support effective response and continuity.

Foundations of Emergency Preparedness

Missed It? Catch Up on Our Previous Webinar

- March 20, 2025, | Understanding Emergency Preparedness within Health Centers: Foundational Principles, Financial Strategies, and Operational Continuity Webinar
  - Slides
  - Video

Defining a Disaster

In the healthcare setting, a disaster is any emergency event which overwhelms or threatens to overwhelm the routine capabilities of the health center.

Emergencies in Health Center Context

Health centers are vulnerable to a wide range of emergencies that can disrupt normal operations and compromise patient care.

Natural Disasters
- Hurricanes
- Earthquakes
- Wildfires

Public Health Crises
- Pandemics
- Disease Outbreaks
- Biological Attack

Human-made Emergencies
- Power Outages
- Chemical Spills
- Acts of Violence

Infrastructure Failures
- Water Supply Interruption
- Gas or Electrical System Malfunction
- Building Structural Issues

What is Emergency Preparedness?

- Preparedness is defined as:

"A continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action in an effort to ensure effective coordination during incident response."

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2024, September 17). Plan and Prepare for Disasters. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov/plan-and-prepare-disasters

Principles of Emergency Management

Recovery: Activities that occur following a response to a disaster that are designed to help an organization and community return to a pre-disaster level of function.
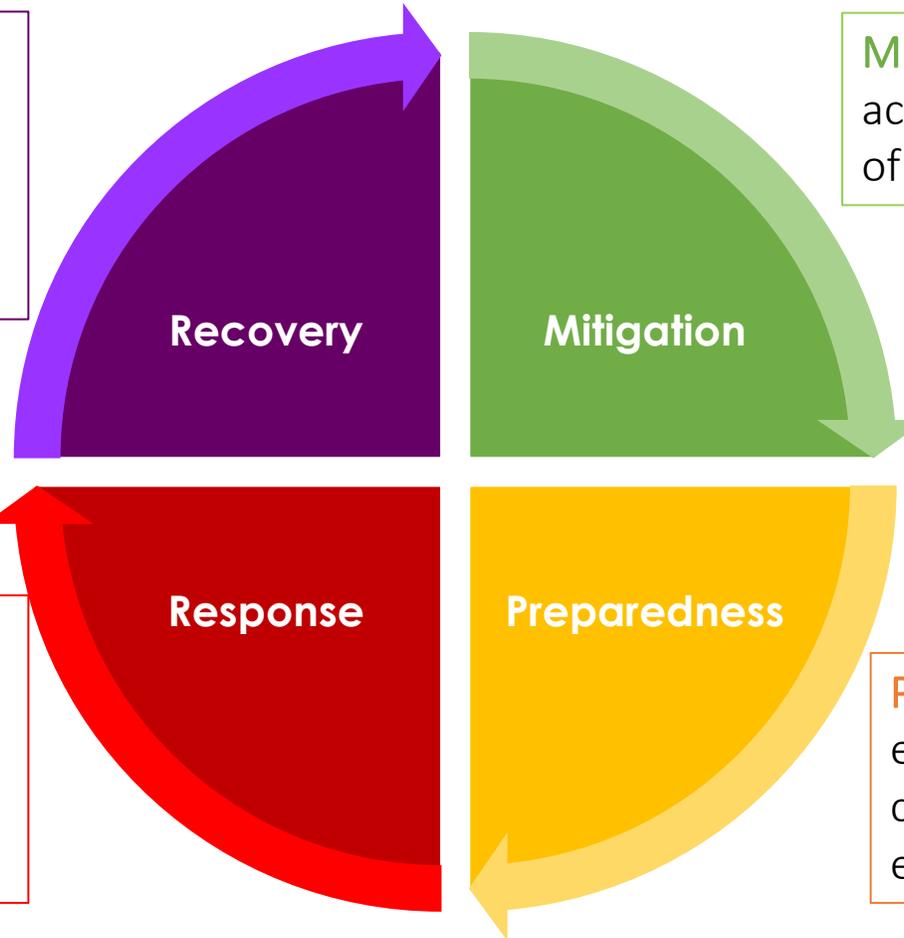
Mitigation: Pre-event planning and actions which aims to lessen the effects of potential disaster.

Response: Responding to emergencies involves taking immediate actions to save lives, protect property, and meet basic human needs in the face of immediate and short-term effects.

Preparedness: Preparing ahead for emergencies by engaging with the community to ensure a thorough and effective response.

Recovery

Mitigation

Response

Preparedness

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Why Health Centers Face Unique Preparedness Challenges

Serve the highest-risk patients
- Complex chronic conditions
- Limited English proficiency
- Limited resources to weather disruptions

Operate on thin margins
- Little financial buffer for emergency-related downtime or unplanned costs

Rely heavily on grant funding and HRSA compliance requirements
- Making preparedness both a mission AND a regulatory obligation

Manage care across multiple sites, school-based health centers, and mobile units
- Each with different vulnerabilities

Face chronic staffing shortages
- Meaning the same staff covering clinical care are often the emergency response team

Serve as the safety net
- When a health center closes, there is often no alternative for patients

Key Reasons for Prioritizing Emergency Preparedness

➢Timely, coordinated reactions to various events

➢Site-specific plans based on roles, responsibilities, and training levels

➢Integration of external resources for comprehensive responses

➢Ensuring safety for patients, visitors, and staff during emergencies

➢Rapid restoration of essential services and property protection

➢Meeting requirements for a healthcare facility

Best Practices for Preparing for Emergencies

➢ Implementing regular training programs to ensure all staff are well-prepared for various emergency scenarios

➢ Conducting drills and simulations to practice emergency response procedures

➢ Maintaining an updated and comprehensive inventory of emergency supplies and resources

➢ Establishing clear communication protocols within the health center and with external partners

➢ Ensure compliance with accreditation standards, such as those set by the Joint Commission, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) , and other relevant entities

Overcoming Barriers & Building Partnerships

Our Purpose + Principles

PEOPLE
We are committed to a culture of trust, integrity and professional growth.

CLIENTS
We serve as trusted advisors to our clients, value our relationships with them, strive to exceed their expectations and deliver world-class technical solutions.

INDUSTRY
We lead by championing best practices, advancing innovation and shaping the standards that keep our world safe, secure and resilient.

PERFORMANCE
We reinvest in our people, clients and industry by delivering profitable growth.

JH Healthcare

(https://www.jensenhughes.com/healthcare)

- From solving new construction design concerns and conducting Life Safety Code® assessments, to working with Facilities, Health Systems, or regional Health Care Coalitions on emergency preparedness, we support you by understanding your needs and developing seamlessly integrated solutions and technology.

Capabilities	
Emergency Management	Commissioning
Life Safety Code Assessments and Survey-ready Drawings	Code Consulting
Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) Representation and Plan Review	Fire and Life Safety Systems Design
Surgical Fire Prevention and Response Programs	Fire, Smoke, and Egress Modeling
Fire Safety Training	Mock Surveys
Building and Fire Code Training	Security Systems Design
Commissioning	Accessibility and Universal Design

Barriers to Preparedness in Practice

- Preparedness competing with daily clinical demand

- Limited staffing depth and ongoing turnover

- Budget realities and resource tradeoffs

- Facility and infrastructure constraints

- Managing preparedness across multiple locations

Where Preparedness Really Fits

- Preparedness must work within real constraints

- Systems should support operations, not fight them

- Awareness is the step toward improvement

Why Preparedness Belongs
at the Leadership Level

- Emergency decisions are executive decisions

- Preparedness supports continuity, not just compliance

- Not a revenue generator — but a cost avoider

- Leadership alignment accelerates response

Leadership Reality & Competing Priorities

- Limited executive bandwidth

- Competing operational pressures

- Preparedness is often reactive, not embedded

How Barriers Show Up During Real Events

- Decision-making slows under pressure

- Same staff covering multiple roles

- Communication challenges between sites

- Resources stretched unevenly

Where Decisions Get Stuck

- Authority is unclear in practice

- Plans slow response instead of guiding it

- Reality does not follow flowcharts
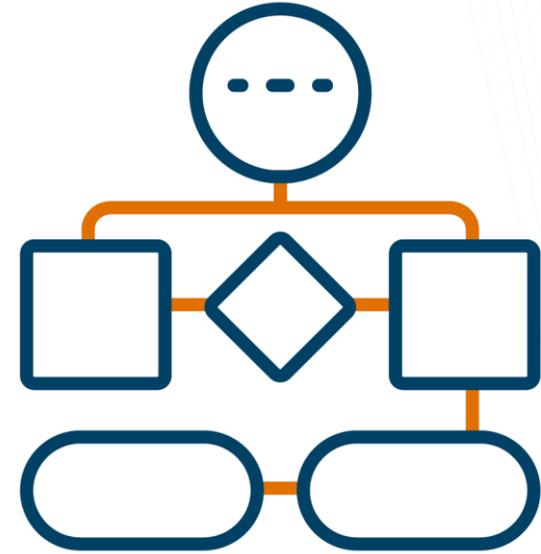
Why Preparedness Can't Sit With One Person

- Preparedness requires shared ownership

- No single role can manage it alone

- Operations, IT, facilities, clinical leadership involved

- Internal coordination matters first

- External partners help absorb strain

Using Systems That Actually Work

- Use structures staff are trained on

- Don't force frameworks without practice

- Simplicity supports speed

What Makes Partnerships Work in Practice

- Expectations established ahead of time

- Roles understood before disruption

- Regular communication, not just during crises

- Trust built through experience, not paperwork

Who to Partner With & How to Start

Key Partners for Health Centers

- **Local Emergency Management** — city/county emergency managers, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regional contacts
- **State/Local Department of Public Health (DPH)** — regulatory body AND potential resource/support during emergencies
- **Healthcare Coalitions (HCCs)**— regional networks for resource sharing and mutual aid
- **Other Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)** — peer learning, shared protocols, patient overflow agreements
- **Hospitals & Specialty Care** — care escalation and transfer protocols
- **Information Technology (IT) & Telecom Vendors** — downtime planning, backup systems, recovery Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

How to Start

1. Map who you already have relationships with — don't start from zero
2. Attend your regional HCC meetings — they exist for this purpose
3. Put contact information in writing before you need it — Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), shared protocols
4. Include partners in at least one tabletop exercise per year
5. Don't wait for a crisis to make the introduction

Strategies that Actually Work

- Plans staff can use under stress

- Clear authority for decision-making

- Preparedness built into existing operations

- Continuity as the priority

Using Exercises to Strengthen Preparedness

- Focus on systems, not individuals

- Identify gaps before real events

- Improve coordination and communication

Case Study: Operational Disruption

- Event disrupts routine operations

- Communication becomes critical

- Downtime procedures activated

- Leadership coordination required

Lessons Learned After the Event

- Roles and responsibilities clarified

- Communication pathways improved

- Downtime tools easier to access

- Stronger coordination across sites

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

- ✓ These challenges are common
- ✓ Partnerships reduce pressure
- ✓ Integration strengthens response
- ✓ Progress over perfection

Your Next Steps

1

Assess Where You Are

Pull out your current Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP). When was it last updated? Does it reflect your current sites, staffing, and threats?

If you don't have one — that's your answer. Start there.

→ *Schedule a 30-min review with your team this week*

2

Identify Your Gaps

Pick your highest-risk scenario — power outage, cyber incident, severe weather. Walk through what would actually happen.

Where does the plan break down? Who doesn't know their role?

→ *Name one gap and assign an owner to address it*

3

Make One Connection

Reach out to one external partner — your local emergency manager, DPH contact, or Healthcare Coalition coordinator.

Introduce yourself. Ask what resources or meetings are available to health centers.

→ *Progress over perfection — one step forward matters*

Questions?

Wrap-Up

Activity Session: Strengthening Emergency Preparedness: Overcoming Barriers and Fostering Partnerships

- Join Matthew Griswold, Facilities Director, Community Health Center, Inc. (CHCI) for an interactive 60-minute activity session on innovative approaches to emergency preparedness. Through case studies and best practices, this session will highlight how to build partnerships and develop a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan that will strengthen your health center's response and long-term sustainability.

- To register, click here!

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Explore more resources!

National Learning Library:
Resources for Clinical Workforce Development

National Learning Library

CLINICAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Transforming Teams, Training the Next Generation

The National Training and Technical Assistance Cooperative Agreements (NCAs) provide free training and technical assistance that is data driven, cutting edge and focused on quality and operational improvement to support health centers and look-alikes. Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC, Inc.) and its Weitzman Institute specialize in providing education and training to interested health centers in Transforming Teams and Training the Next Generation through;

National Webinars on advancing team based care, implementing post-graduate residency training programs, and health professions student training in FQHCs.

Invited participation in Learning Collaboratives to advance team based care or implement a post-graduate residency training program at your health center.

Please keep watching this space for information on future sessions. To request technical assistance from our NCA, please email NCA@chc1.com for more information.

CHC has curated a series of resources, including webinars to support your health center through education, assistance and training.

Learn More

https://www.weitzmaninstitute.org/ncaresources

Health Center
Resource Clearinghouse

https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/

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Contact Information

For information on future webinars, activity sessions, and communities of practice: please reach out to nca@chc1.com
or visit https://www.chc1.com/nca