TACCHO: The Collective Voice for Local Health Departments

The Texas Association of City & County Health Officials (TACCHO) is the premier member organization of Texas local public health departments (LHDs). LHDs are governed by municipalities and/or county government and Boards of Health. TACCHO and members work in partnership with state and federal agencies to enhance state and local public health practice in Texas with the ultimate goal of improving the health of Texans living in their communities. TACCHO members provide local public health services to, and protect, over 80% of the Texas population and employ public health professionals, including specialists in epidemiology, environmental health, chronic and infectious diseases, men’s and women’s health, nurses, doctors and more. TACCHO members serve as the subject matter expert and resource on issues affecting local public health.

Local Health Departments conducted preparedness and response in the community during Harvey:

- TACCHO Member LHDs were directly impacted by the hurricane/storm wind and rain, affecting a population of over 6.6 million and a current estimated cost impact to LHDs at $7 million+.
- TACCHO Member LHDs were indirectly impacted by acceptance of evacuees, seeing over 7200 evacuees and incurring a current estimated cost impact to LHDs at $600,000+. Additional members were prepared to accept evacuees if needed.
- TACCHO Member LHDs provided surge capacity support (50 staff members) to directly impacted communities.
- TACCHO Member LHDs were ready to deploy an additional 56 staff members, if needed.

Local Health Departments experienced success during Harvey:

- LHDs had good collaboration with Emergency Management.
- Public health support for shelter operations was quickly up and running.
- Regular epidemiological surveillance of shelters was conducted.
- 7,000+ evacuees received services from LHDs that were indirectly impacted by the affects of the storm.
- Rapid response occurred from LHD staff and Medical Reserve Corp for staffing shelters, providing immunizations, and conducting vector control.
- 8000+ vaccines were provided by LHDs to responders and the public.
- LHDs implemented phone banks to proactively identify community concern and plan response actions.
Challenges for LHDs During Harvey

- Lack of adequate public health staffing levels in some areas of need.
- Lack of behavioral and mental health support.
- Logistical support to responders (need for high water vehicles, food, materials).
- Long-term intensive case management needed.
- Roles and responsibilities of LHDs in evacuee/shelter response not clear.
- Issues with evacuee support (transportation, shelter beds, pharmaceuticals, medical/behavioral support, cost of housing).
- Coordination with Red Cross regarding shelter setup, roles and responsibilities.
- Primitive conditions for deployed staff (lack of power, water, housing).

Lessons Learned From Harvey

- More training for all public health staff needed to respond to large events.
- Streamlined and open communication channels needed between entities.
- Establish medical shelters and pharmacy contracts sooner.
- Indirectly impacted LHDs need to be considered as impact zones to receive materials/flexibility in rules to service evacuees.
- More training for City/County officials regarding emergency response rules and procedures.
- Filter EMS/Medical Support requests through the Health District in order to better coordinate and deploy resources.
- Method should be established regarding the setup and tracking of shelters.

Recommendations to Improve Preparedness and Response to Public Health Emergencies

- Maintain or increase funding for preparedness actions that includes:
  o immediate funding for disaster case management.
  o provision of medical and dialysis services.
  o faster reimbursement process and response to requests.
  o Emergency Housing Vouchers for displaced populations.
  o public health preparedness training.
  o use of emerging technology during disaster to assist with volunteer management, resources and supplies.
- Increase knowledge of city/county elected officials on how the emergency response system works.