

Engaging Community Partners in Preparedness Planning

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Abstract

Disasters and epidemics are immense and shocking disturbances that necessitate the moral courage, judicious action, and practical innovations of large numbers of people, not simply those who serve in an official capacity. The civic infrastructure—comprised of the public’s collective wisdom and capability to solve problems; voluntary associations (both virtual and face-to-face) that arise from shared interests or a public good; and social service organizations that look out for the well-being of various groups—is essential to managing a mass health emergency. This talk will outline the *Working Group on Community Engagement in Health Emergency Planning’s* judgments and recommendations to government decision makers on why and how to catalyze the civic infrastructure for an extreme health event. Community engagement—defined here as structured dialogue, joint problem solving, and collaborative action among formal authorities, citizens at-large, and local opinion leaders around a pressing public matter—can augment officials’ abilities to govern in a crisis, improve application of communally held resources in a disaster or epidemic, and mitigate against communitywide losses.