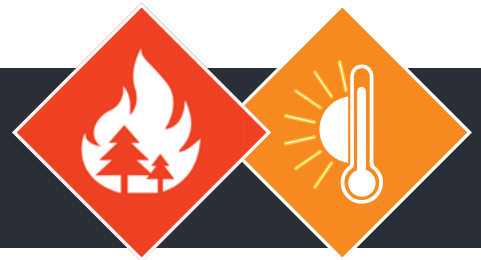


Beyond the Facility Walls

Strengthening Your Community Network



Focus: *Securing the clinic's or health center's place within the broader regional safety system.*

For any clinic or health center, it will be a challenge to adequately support vulnerable patients during extreme weather events alone. Strong partnerships with local organizations allow facilities to maximize available community resources and extend their reach to the communities, especially during extreme heat or wildfire smoke events. Building strong relationships and maintaining them over time will create a space for collaboration during emergencies, resulting in a smoother, faster and more impactful response.

This section focuses on building relationships to promote awareness, joint planning, resource mobilization and long-term actions to benefit all members of your community.



At a glance:

- **Be a good neighbor:** Show up to other organizations' events and promote their services to your patients before and after extreme heat and wildfire smoke seasons. This builds the trust needed to coordinate resources quickly during a crisis.
- **Secure your role in local decision-making:** Join regional health care coalitions or city/county emergency groups to ensure your patients' needs are part of the official government response and to gain access to shared emergency resources.
- **Build redundancy in support networks:** Identify personal contacts at different agencies so you have a "Plan B" to get supplies (e.g., air filters, financial aid or other items for patients) if your primary partner gets overwhelmed.

1 Be a good neighbor to build lasting two-way partnerships.

Supporting partner organizations involves not only transactional relationships, but also supporting and showing up to their events, maintaining consistent communication and amplifying their initiatives through the clinic's or health center's communication channels. Expressions of visible support for partner leaders and their work can strengthen partnership support received during extreme weather events.

Being intentional about supporting these relationships builds trust over time. One clinic manager makes sure their facility sends a representative to town hall meetings “so that the relationship is not transactional—so that they communicate better with us.”

Disseminating key information about partner organizations' events.

One health center coordinates an email group of over 500 community members, sharing information and updates that include where cooling centers are located. By disseminating information not only to patients but to the broader community, the clinic demonstrates cooperation with partner organizations and a shared commitment to keeping all residents safe and healthy.



Key takeaways:

- **Cultivate relationships year-round:** Relationships before an emergency can help ensure critical connections are in place when you need them.
- **Assign staff to support engagement:** Designate representatives to attend community meetings and partner events to maintain visibility and trust.
- **Coordinate dissemination channels:** Establish mechanisms (email groups, text groups, postings, social media) to disseminate information during emergencies.

2 Secure your role in local decision-making.

Most communities have councils, coalitions or working groups of partner organizations that meet regularly to discuss issues related to health and safety and disaster preparedness and emergency response. Being part of these community-focused working groups can make a difference in responding to your patients' needs during an extreme weather event. Joining other like-minded groups can benefit your organization by increasing access to new information and resources.

Engaging in community groups.

Consider joining groups or professional networks centered in health care or emergency response. There may also be groups that address broader issues, such as Chamber of Commerce, that could provide valuable partnerships for your clinic or health center. Try reaching out to your local health care coalition, city or county emergency management office, and any community organizations active in disaster (COAD).

If you haven't already, use the time when extreme heat and wildfire smoke threats are not imminent to identify, reach out and join these groups, and consider using your action plan as a tool to communicate the role your clinics or health center can play.



Key takeaways:

- **Be active in your community:** Participation strengthens trust, coordination and enhances access to shared information and resources.
- **Explore broader groups:** Expanding your network beyond traditional partners will increase the opportunities to meet your patients' needs during extreme weather events.

3 Build redundancy in the relationships you depend on.

Support networks are weaker when there are fewer redundant connections. If one partner is unable to operate or communicate, you don't want this to inadvertently break the network.

This was a critical learning for a health center that responded to a wildfire smoke event in a neighboring county but was excluded from the official response by a major local organization. Despite having capacity, the health center was unable to engage through formal channels. Luckily, a pre-existing personal relationship between a staff member and a different partner organization in the affected area made it possible for the health center to act independently. Through that connection, the health center was able to distribute gift cards to residents impacted by the wildfire smoke event ensuring support still reached the community despite institutional barriers.

Key takeaways:

- **Develop both formal and informal partnerships:** Formal partnerships are essential, but informal partnerships and redundant connections often determine whether resources move quickly during emergencies. When official systems are delayed or overwhelmed, personal relationships can enable faster response.
- **Develop multiple entry points:** Don't rely on one partner for supplies or funding.
- **Maintain personal connections:** Develop and maintain up-to-date contact lists among partners prior to emergency events to ensure timely coordination and collaboration.
- **Clarify roles early:** While roles can change during an emergency, pre-planning and sharing these plans can be critical (e.g., knowing who is likely to open a cooling center, or who may have financial resources).

Summary checklist for clinics and health centers

- Community partnerships:** Have you met with at least one local partner to coordinate how to reach patients with supplies or education during periods of elevated heat or wildfire smoke risk?
- Strengthen relationships:** Does your clinic or health center meet regularly with partner organizations, coalitions or planning groups to plan or coordinate? Does your clinic or health center have more than one contact for the organization or group?
- Review collaborations:** Do you periodically assess partnerships to ensure they align with your clinic or health center (current or anticipated) operational and community needs?