



JOINT POLICY WORK GROUP

Meeting Summary Washington, D.C. January 10, 2024

Chairs, Dr. Ali Harrist, the Wyoming State Health Officer representing ASTHO, and Brad Richy, the Idaho Office of Emergency Management Director representing NEMA warmly welcomed the group alongside the start of introductions around the room.

Emerging Trends: What are the big issues on the horizon for state public health, state emergency management, and state homeland security. ASTHO, GHSAC, and NEMA represented by their members shared the national priorities of each sector for this year to help paint the picture of the impacts to state agencies and the priorities they look to focus on.

Dr. Steven Stack, ASTHO President, provided a state public health insight. ASTHO conducts an environmental scan, [2023 Environmental Scan of Current and Emerging Public Health Priorities](#), that identifies state, territorial, and freely associated state health agencies top current and emerging priorities. This scan gleans a national outlook on programmatic, infrastructure, capacity, and the recent impacts that lead to emerging priorities of state public health.

- Programmatically, the number one priority for state health administrators is maternal, child, and family health to include youth and adolescent physical and mental well-being; early childhood development; and to ensure maternal and infant well-being.
- Communicable disease control to include immunization, vaccination, and building capacity for lab testing and monitoring.
- Workforce development is a priority for 51% of states. This observes the boom and bust the public health workforce endured recently, especially in shortages, to include training and education; recruitment and retention; and rebuilding the capacity in clinics and labs.
- Data modernization and informatics – especially in data sharing and coordination.
- For the islands, emergency preparedness and response are a priority to include response and recovery networks and lessening the impacts of climate change.

Public health has been mostly impacted by newly passed legislation; the COVID-19 public health emergency response sunset; new infectious disease and communicable disease outbreaks; climate-related events/trends; and workforce shortages. Thus, creating emerging priorities in environmental issues and climate change, public health data modernization, combatting misinformation, and emergency and extreme weather preparedness. Paring those emerging trends, ASTHO designed their [2024 Legislative Prospectus Series](#) to outline the top ten anticipated public health legislative trends such as supporting the workforce, supporting mental health, data sharing, and optimal health for all. Additionally, public health will continue to be mindful of the supply chain stability and disruptions, border and migrant health, cybersecurity, and the upcoming election year.

Alicia Tate-Nadeau, GHSAC Chair and Director of Illinois Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency, provided a homeland security perspective of priorities for 2024. Where the landscape shows patterns that may not go away within a year's time, the homeland security advisors stress the importance to continue to build partnerships, strengthen preparedness and response capabilities, and harness new technologies to address the evolving threats.

- *Cybersecurity.* Protecting our critical infrastructure from the threat of physical and cyber-attacks. Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure like healthcare systems, water and wastewater facilities, and the electric grid continues to grow. HHS states that the past year presented 552 data breaches due to hacking IT incidents that impacted health information of almost 119 million individuals. Hospitals are the most targeted as learned from the [Ardent Health Systems attack](#) in November that impacted hospitals in New Jersey, New Mexico, and Texas. The electric grid is another factor being disrupted by cyber attacks proving their vulnerabilities to the threat much like what happened with China's PLA accessing systems of several critical infrastructure entities including the Texas power grid. Water and wastewater facilities are identified as significant as they are typically small but run a large portion of the United States drinking water supply and sewage. 153,000 public drinking water systems supply more than 80% of the population's potable water; 16,000 publicly owned wastewater systems treat 75% of the country's sewage.
- *Violent Extremism.* The Nation is seeing more domestic impacts from global conflicts. FBI Director Wray identifies Homegrown Violent Terrorism remains to be the most immediate international terrorism threat and Domestic Violent Extremism is the greatest domestic terrorism threat. One of the top current concerns under this focus is the lone offenders who are inspired by or reacting to the on-going conflict in the Israeli-Hamas conflict.
- *Migration Shift.* The shifting global landscape from both a climate and geopolitical perspective are key areas of focus. The changing climate causing increase in severity and timing has a significant impact on how we respond to natural disasters both on communities and the workforce. This also causes a flow of migration throughout the world. The geopolitical events add another layer to the shift of migration as the United States has seen a significant increase in migration crossings. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection, in November, is averaging 8,000 people they encounter per day. Where many people are returned, those pending determination have a significant impact on border and interior states. New York City, has helped over 150,000 individuals since the spring of 2022, estimates the cost to support the asylum seekers to be about \$5 Billion per year. Chicago has supported over 30,000 individuals since August of 2022. Where there was a slight lull in December, the trend is expecting the number of asylum seekers to increase.
- *School Safety.* Improving school safety is not a siloed effort, but one of coordination and partnership. Homeland security advisors are working through comprehensive strategies to make schools more physically resilient, improve response training, proactively support youth mental health, and grow capabilities to identify and mitigate potential threats. Many states have implemented strategies and created teams as well as expanding access to reporting mechanisms and fostering a positive climate for reporting. These efforts are gaining strides in improving school safety.

- *Swatting.* Swatting, or the act of false reporting a serious emergency to deceive emergency service providers into sending police or other emergency response teams, have increased in targets within the last few months. Typically swatting was focused on schools and universities. One week in December of 2023, more than 200 Jewish institutions were targeted through swatting by an entity based outside of the United States. Just last week, 11 state capitols were targeted by swatting. This threat drains emergency response resources and is difficult to stop.
- *Elections and Electoral Process.* Homeland Security Advisors are preparing for the physical and cyber threats that may be focused on the upcoming elections. Sharing information will be critical to ensuring the safety of our communities throughout the process. Also, the Republican and Democratic National Conventions will be another area of focus.

Two critical pieces where homeland security looks to engage with these priorities are in building partnerships and leveraging technology.

Shawn Talmadge, Director of Virginia Division of Emergency Management and representing NEMA, provided the emergency management perspective on priorities and emerging trends for the year.

- The example of foreign adversary might take advantage of a natural disaster to spread disinformation leading to distrust of government that sidelined the response of the wildfires in Maui is one of many examples that shows the geopolitical instability causing widespread disruptions in communications and distrust. When the Department of Defense is occupied with war, the emergency management community will be looked to assist on the home front to see how best state emergency management can support critical operations. This concept was introduced to state emergency managers during [FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell's remarks](#) at the NEMA 2024 Emergency Management Policy and Leadership Forum last October.
- The emergency management community is looking towards investments in resilience, whether that looks like building code adoption, investing in infrastructure for long term mitigation efforts, and advocating for more flexible funding in federal programs. Building state emergency management capacity and making resilience a priority is paramount to protecting citizens and their communities and ensuring a strong economy before, during, and after disasters.
- As a community recovers, emergency management focuses on the survivor to ensure the disaster programs set in place fit the needs of the community in an equitable and effective way. There have been strides in the efforts to help with public and individual assistance, but accelerating support for those survivors remains a priority.
- Creating an emphasis on emerging technology to leverage data sharing systems gives room to explore. There is still much to learn between machine learning, that can process applications and requests in a continuum after humans get tired, to artificial intelligence, that has opened doors we are not aware of yet. This emphasis creates the priority to find how to safely utilize those technologies for the betterment of the programs.
- Through what is phrased as traditional and non-traditional events, crisis management is an added layer to the responsibility of collaborators and consensus builders. State leaders must recognize the cycle of disasters being experienced today. With that NEMA produced the [Empowering Emergency Management to Meet Current & Emerging](#)

[Threats white paper](#) that recommends direct communication to Governors, the importance of educating elected officials on disasters, and the state emergency management agency should also review compensation structures with government to ensure best practices of successful recruitment and retention of a capable, diverse workforce that represents the public they serve.

As noted in the session discussion, the overlapping priorities will be great avenues for the workgroup to discuss in future meetings. Expansions of the discussion include any information that can be shared on a formal process for inbounding those new to the workforce and best practices on workforce mental health benefits. For training aspects, is ICS a good fit for public health? In facing data-driven systems, how best can one build a collaborative system, have people familiar and trained with the system, and what happens when the funding goes away – how to sustain the system? Lastly, the awareness to gain if there is a federal coordination to guide supply chain and warehousing.

The CDC PHEP Outlook. Todd Talbert, Associate Director, Program Planning and Development, Division of State and Local Readiness, Office of Readiness and Response for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provided an outlook on the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program titled *Moving Forward*.

As our public health preparedness and response evolves so does the need for the programs that support it. Reflecting on historical milestones such as in 1999 the CDC established the Public Health Preparedness and Response for Bioterrorism Program; in 2002 marked the first issues of the PHEP cooperative agreements; and in 2006 due to the impacts of Hurricane Katrina Congress shifted PHEP to an all-hazards approach. Then you had the events that tested the program – H1N1 Response (2009); the Ebola response (2015); and the most recent pandemic response to COVID-19. These are examples of historical pressure that led to the involvement and created priorities such as protecting vulnerable populations and diving into threat specific content. And like any response, ways to prepare are learned. The fifteen [Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities](#) were formed. Taking the historical nexus into consideration, the Division of State and Local Readiness launched a next generation of PHEP to help modernize the program, with the help of feedback from their partners such as those within this working group.

This modernization created the following PHEP program priorities for 2024 – 2029.

1. Prioritize a risk-based approach to all hazards planning, that addresses evolving threats, and support medical countermeasure logistics.
2. Enhance partnerships, federal and nongovernmental organizations, to effectively support community preparedness efforts.
3. Expand local support to improve jurisdictional readiness to effectively manage public health emergencies.
4. Improve administrative and budget preparedness systems to ensure timely access to resources for supporting jurisdictional responses.
5. Build workforce capacity to meet jurisdictional surge management needs and support staff recruitment, retention, resilience, and mental health.
6. Modernize data collection and systems to improve situational awareness and information sharing with healthcare systems and other partners.

7. Strengthen risk communications activities to improve proficiency in disseminating critical public health information and warning and address mis/disinformation.
8. Incorporate health equity practices to enhance preparedness and response support for communities experiencing difference in health status due to structural barriers.
9. Advance capacity and capability of public health laboratories to characterize emerging public health threats through testing and surveillance.
10. Prioritize community recover efforts to support health department reconstitution and incorporate lessons learned from public health emergency responses.

The priorities create the framework for the overarching strategies of the agency with a health equity focus being threaded through all three: 1. Use CDC's national preparedness capabilities as applicable to augment STLT all-hazards planning and improve readiness, response, and recovery capacity for existing and emerging public health threats and modernized laboratory and electronic data systems. 2. Use CDC's national preparedness capabilities as applicable to improve whole community readiness, response, and recovery through enhanced partnerships and improved communication systems for timely situational awareness and risk communication. And 3. Use CDC's national preparedness capabilities as applicable to improve capacity to meet jurisdictional administrative, budget, and public health surge management needs and improve public health response workforce recruitment, retention, resilience, and mental health.

The NOFO looks to be published in February with the focus of streamlining the effort to make it easier for the writer and the applicant. The Cities Readiness Initiative future also looks to be broader in scale to help cover risk and capability assessments, readiness for a large-scale medical countermeasures event, and prioritizing readiness for all hazard jurisdictional specific threats. The NOFO will also address an exercise framework for 2024 – 2029 that will involve chemical, biological, radiological/nuclear, and natural disaster threats with the goal to assure readiness for top jurisdictional threats. The exercise will be layered for a mass response with medical countermeasures and looks to incorporate HSEEP as an exercise format. Integration of federal partners was asked of Director Talbert. Also discussed was the need for integration of public health within the National Exercise Division at FEMA.

Pandemic Preparation: Recommendations from Public Health and Emergency Management. Mr. Curtis Brown with the Virginia Commonwealth University, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Research Institute for Social Equity, shared the lessons learned from a hosted workshop that gathered public health and emergency management state leaders, alongside federal partners, to discuss coordinated efforts during the COVID-19 response. The workshop fueled the white paper, [*Preparing for the Next Pandemic Response Through Strengthened Collaboration*](#). Mr. Brown was one of the architects that lead the entire project.

The pandemic provided areas of scaled success as well as areas where collaboratively emergency management and public health can learn from each other and work more together, especially during times of preparedness initiatives and not limited to only a response. The success is not overshadowed – the innovation in PPE distribution; the massive creation and distribution of vaccines; and the advances in data share. The takeaways contained learning of the flexibility emergency management can do administratively, rapid speed for contracting, and created a discussion of in what ways can representatives change the bureaucracy in culture to get to the integration between the two sectors, and how best to train the workforce to those efforts. One example came in data measuring, emergency management was more focused on

infrastructure, while public health is more focused on the people. That merger helps provide layers of the data to assist in all efforts of response to provide a more people-focused recovery effort. And where the states moved quicker in collaboration with each other, the federal agencies proved to be more stove piped and created scrambles due to their lack of coordinating between their own agencies.

Social Media Best Practices in Crisis Communications Jamie Biglow, CNA Safety & Security Division Project Manager, shared learnings from an extensive study in crisis communications using social media platforms. The report, [Best Practices in Social Media Crisis Communications for State and Local Emergency Management Agencies](#), highlights the observed unexpected challenges with social media for crisis communications and how to best overcome such challenges. Ms. Biglow focused in areas to heighten social media messaging by becoming a trusted agent through 'know your source' campaigns; put information out quickly with the statement that more information to follow and then follow up; for those practitioners utilizing the social platform, it was advised to use the same skill sets 911 operators use in taking in information and providing it through the message. The best practices shared in the report are quickly applicable. Areas of growth were proven in expanding to utilizing more platforms to hit an array of audiences; build out data mining capabilities but understand there is a greater need for guidance in that area; and to increase followers, it is advised to work with trusted others to enhance your own messaging. And if you use humor, use it with the mindset some may not think it is funny.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center for Prevention Program Partnerships (CP3) Brief Director Bill Braniff provided an update on the CP3 program pertaining to the program's incredible growth over the nine months. Five states are implementing strategies: Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, and New York. More have drafted strategies but overall, more than half the Nation has expressed interest in working with the program to target prevention violence. With this increase, there are more regional coordinators – for 20 states - designing behavioral assessment teams and training initiatives. These teams are not set only for law enforcement but are multiple discipline teams that look to upstream prevention tactics to show how preventable such violence can be. The grant program, Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program, contributes to the success of the program and those states and locals that are applying for it. CP3 has also implemented Invent to Prevent, where institutions of higher education and high school students take a semester to construct a program for their campus. The idea is to allow youth to create the culture in their world to help prevent violence and create a safe space, without threats, for multi-racial conversations. CP3 looks to host a virtual symposium February 1- 2 to showcase best practices. Publications and resources can also be found on www.dhs.gov/CP3.

The Elevated Roles for Non-Traditional Event Response Directors Trina Sheets, NEMA; Alysia Tate-Nadeau, Illinois Emergency Management and Homeland Security; and Dr. Sameer Vohra, Illinois Department of Public Health shared the expectations when state agency roles become elevated to help events that are not what an agency would normally prepare for and respond to. Those such events are creatively labeled as 'non-traditional' events. State emergency management has keyed in on these events over the last year as they have pulled in coordinated efforts between state partners for successful response. For this discussion, the example set was the asylum seekers and the migration efforts our states support. Director Sheets set the stage in illustrating the impact of 39 states have been pulled in for coordination in

migrant support, utilizing the top funding sources of EMPG, homeland security grants, using their own emergency management budgets, or legislatures in some states have appropriated funds to help support. Director Tate-Nadeau and Dr. Vohra shared Illinois support and their coordinated effort with the Illinois Department of Human Services as the lead agency and the local communities that receive and house migrants. They have over 30,000 people where about half are still in shelters as they seek asylum – and that number continues to grow as they accept about 16 buses per day with about 50 people on each bus. Emergency management helped with the coordination behind the movement and shelter of people while public health was focused on the healthcare of the people. The wrap around services included providing attorneys that help navigate through the U.S. legality process; working with NGOs for help with clothing (some came off buses not ready for winter weather in Illinois); medical needs; schools that helped with English as a second language; and public transportation along with the guidance of how to navigate those services. The drum beat of the buses are steady and at times overwhelming leading to drop offs outside the city and county causing more locals that needed support and a lean on the NGOs and charitable groups that stepped up to assist. As the buses came, a landing spot was created to accept everyone and then assess their next step. Funneling the buses to that landing spot was helpful to provide the support the seekers needed. The challenge came when a bus would go rogue and simply drop people off in a random location. Chicago presented a working model by contracting with the hospitals so that as people were assessed in the landing spot, if they needed any medical attention or healthcare needs, it was provided quickly.

Decisions deemed helpful were the weekly regional calls that had representatives from the White House, federal agencies, state, and local participation. This, at times, also helped gauge the number of buses to expect. The State continuously checked in with the local representatives impacted to ensure they had the resources they needed and to provide and gain situational awareness. Having the two warehouses already in place became helpful in storing human needs – diapers, clothes, baby food, and bedding. A lesson provided was about being wary of expensive contracts – contracting with hotels, although easy, proved to be very expensive. It was more helpful to utilize large facilities and convert those into living quarters. Optics proved very important as well when choosing terminology. For example, ‘tents’ was a very negative meaning – even when those tents were hard sided and used for our military assignments being temperature controlled and comfortable – the word itself was an automatic refusal. The support is not ending anytime soon. The transition now is how to build infrastructure around sustainment.

Maryland’s State of Preparedness Executive Order Secretary Russ Strickland of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management explained what the [Governor Executive Order](#) means to Marylanders as they remain in a state of preparedness. The goal of the order is to motivate a system of systems to coordinate a response by authorizing the department of emergency management to direct activities during an event. The intent is also to support at a less cost the 26 local emergency management areas. One way that may be done is by allowing the locals more flexibility with hazard duty pay against their unions. The idea came from West Virginia who did a state of preparedness order years ago to allow agencies to assist with a Boy Scout national camp with ease. The order has not been battle tested until the day prior to this meeting to see what works and what needs improvement.

Wrap Up

Actions oriented during discussion and throughout the meeting will be considered as goals for the work group to work toward:

- The emerging trends session helped gain a sense of future meeting topics. The Chairs and association staff will work to ensure we continue or extend the excellent engagement that happened during this meeting through more information sharing that pertains to topics of interest for all.
- Exercise/Training coordination with public health and emergency management. The role of ICS and the sharing of best practices. And see best fits for training integration efforts.
- Letter to the federal partners to provide more transparency and/or guidance in warehousing/stockpiles as far as what are the expectations of states look to be in that role.
- PHEP classes cornerstone in academia. Share of success stories and strategies of continued collaboration.