



Staffing Emergency Management in Health Centers

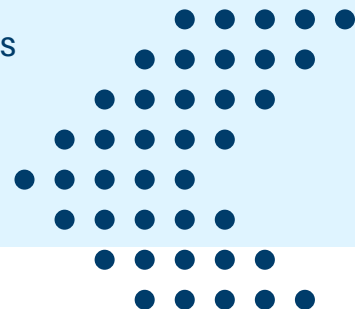
WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT ABOUT?

In health centers (HCs), effective emergency management (EM) is crucial for supporting the safety and well-being of both staff and patients during crises as well as for the long-term resilience of the health center and the community. While securing funding to staff EM can be challenging, not doing so can have significant long-term consequences should disaster strike. This document explores the benefits of staffing EM positions, the challenges faced by health centers in this area, and strategic approaches to overcome these obstacles. By understanding and addressing these factors, health centers can enhance their preparedness and response capabilities, ultimately fostering a safer environment for all.



HOW WAS THIS WORK DEVELOPED?

The content of this document was developed from a series of interviews conducted in 2025 by NACHC with health centers that have dedicated emergency management personnel. This document can be used to identify gaps in organizational staffing and to build the case for hiring and retaining emergency management staff.





BENEFITS

- Having a dedicated emergency management (EM) position allows for standardization and quality control across multiple sites, reducing silos and improving integration.
- A focused EM role enhances the overall preparedness of the health center.
- Centralized EM can lead to better resource allocation and funding opportunities, as seen with successful grant applications and donations.
- A dedicated EM position can relieve pressure from site managers, allowing them to focus on their primary responsibilities while ensuring that emergency protocols are followed.
- A direct line of communication between EM staff and leadership fosters a culture of awareness and responsiveness to emergencies.
- A well-staffed EM program can enhance the community's trust in the health center's ability to respond to emergencies, fostering stronger relationships and collaboration with local organizations and residents.
- A dedicated EM role can facilitate ongoing training and professional development for staff, ensuring they are well-prepared for various

emergency scenarios.

With a focused EM team, health centers can better collect and analyze data related to past emergencies, leading to informed decision-making and improved future responses.

CHALLENGES



- Many health centers struggle with limited budgets for EM positions, often relying on operational funds or grants that may not be consistently available.
- Lack of dedicated EM personnel can lead to overburdening staff who juggle multiple responsibilities, as seen in organizations where no one is dedicated 100% to EM.
- Gaining support from senior leadership can be challenging, especially if they do not fully understand the importance of EM or the implications of being unprepared.
- Frequent changes in personnel can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and disrupt ongoing EM efforts.
- Without a centralized approach, different sites may operate independently, leading to inconsistencies in emergency preparedness and response.
- Keeping up with changing regulations and requirements related to emergency preparedness can be a significant challenge, especially for centers with limited resources.
- There may be resistance to change within the organization, particularly if staff are accustomed to operating without a formal EM structure.
- Competing priorities within the health center can lead to conflicts over resource allocation, making it difficult to prioritize EM initiatives.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges



- Engage leadership by presenting data on the financial implications of being unprepared and the benefits of a robust EM program.
- Use tools like Hazard Vulnerability Assessments (HVA) to help illustrate risks.
- Review past after-action reports to understand impacts of disasters on health center.
- Review regulatory requirements and determine feasibility of meeting requirements based on current staffing.
- Explore funding opportunities – federal, state, and local – to help offset some of the overall EM costs such as purchasing of equipment and supplies.
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of EM staff within the organization to ensure accountability and clarity in operations.
- Encourage a culture where preparedness is valued and integrated into daily operations, making it a shared responsibility among all staff members.



CONSIDER DIFFERENT MODELS BASED ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE HEALTH CENTER

- For a network, central EM staff that support all sites
- For a network, central EM staff that work with dedicated multidisciplinary staff at each site
- Dedicated EM staff for each individual site
- Formalized responsibilities for EM staff with additional responsibilities (e.g. 50% time dedicated to EM)

This publication is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$6,625,000 with 0 percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).