

Enhancing emergency preparedness in long-term care



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The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Penn/Temple LTC-RISE team implemented an emergency preparedness program in partnership with long-term care facilities. The program enhances communities' ability to plan for an emergency while ensuring the safety and well-being of staff and residents during emergencies.

The "What"

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical aspect of emergency preparedness in long-term care settings. Due to resource constraints and the complexity of managing an infectious disease event, such as COVID-19, long-term care communities were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The Penn/Temple LTC-RISE program, an initiative at the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) that uses funding through the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) cooperative agreement, partnered with

HAPevolve, a leading expert in emergency management and infection prevention, to support a diverse group of long-term care facilities (Skilled Nursing, Assisted Living, Intermediate Care facilities, and Personal Care Homes). Across all entity types, one hundred and sixty-seven (167) communities engaged with HAPevolve's emergency preparedness program.

On initial assessment, they found that 54% of communities lacked a Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (HVA). A HVA is a systematic approach to identifying hazards or risks likely to impact a community and the surrounding community. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of communities lacked an emergency operations plan, 89% lacked training and exercise programs related to emergency management, and 39% lacked connections to external resources to leverage in the event of an emergency.

The Penn/Temple LTC-RISE team, alongside HAPevolve partners, collaborated with community leaders to begin or improve their emergency management programs. They also provided a web-based tool (Portable Response Emergency Plan Access [PREP]) to help communities create, manage, and access their plans. A team of experts offered education on emergency management basics from preparedness to response, supporting communities with the necessary tools and resources needed to succeed.



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The “So What”

Of the 167 engaged communities, 113 (68%) have completed HAPevolve’s program to date. Additional communities are expected to complete the program by the end of June. Of the 113, 95% received education on a HVA and how to complete one. Through one-on-one coaching, 79% made improvements to their HVA. The top three hazards identified were: weather-related, infectious

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diseases, and utility failures. Similarly, 95% of communities received education on an emergency preparedness plans and how to complete one. Through the program, 95% of participating communities were able to make improvements to their plans leveraging the PREP platform to streamline their emergency planning process, reduce response time, and improve overall preparedness for emergencies

In addition to learning how to develop and conduct training in their communities, they were also able to identify, make connections, and add external partners (i.e., PA Emergency Management Agency, schools, churches) to their emergency plans. Many also collaborated with their local fire and emergency services departments in emergency management exercises facilitated by HAPevolve. These emergency exercises allowed facilities to test their emergency preparedness plans, identify gaps in preparedness and response efforts, and learn ways to improve for future events.

The “Now What”

The past year of working with communities has resulted in many learnings. Collectively, HAPevolve and the Penn/ Temple LTC-RISE teams have learned that there is no singular solution or approach to remedy the challenges faced by communities, especially in the areas of emergency preparedness. Looking forward to the future, it is imperative that the program is designed considering the unique culture, resource profile, expertise available, and overall workforce in each community. Though significant improvements have been seen in some communities in the southeast region of Pennsylvania, there is an opportunity to broaden the delivery of existing resources and deepen the education, training, and capability of participants engaged with Penn/ Temple’s emergency preparedness program provided by HAPevolve.

Moving into the next iteration of the LTC-RISE initiative, HAPevolve has plans to offer more onsite, one-on-one support to communities with fewer resources, and focus on further promotion of the PREP platform. The platform has a lot of potential, as it is web-based, customizable, and allows community leaders to update plans in real-time, meet regulatory requirements, and ensure they have information and resources readily available.

Continuing to invest in sustainable programs in long-term care, like HAPevolve’s emergency preparedness program, is imperative. This program in long-term care is essential as it enhances communities’ ability to plan for an emergency while ensuring the safety and well-being of staff and residents during emergencies.

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