

Proposed CAEP position paper on disaster preparedness

Executive Summary

Despite evidence to the contrary, most authorities in Canada perceive our healthcare disaster readiness to be far more advanced than it is while in fact we remain dangerously unprepared. What limited scientific review of readiness exists is outdated and Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) authorities have not engaged in any formal assessment of healthcare disaster preparedness. Unless all levels of government measure and acknowledge the existing readiness gaps and begin to actively engage front line clinical care groups in remedying this, it will be difficult to defend the unnecessary suffering and loss of life that will occur.

List of recommendations

- 1) All healthcare facilities (including hospitals, long-term care homes,) and agencies, (including public health, pre-hospital, patient transport, community healthcare,) must have some degree of competency in disaster preparedness.
- 2) This competency must include (but need not be limited to):
 - a) incident command,
 - b) triage,
 - c) mass casualty events/mass gatherings,
 - d) hazardous materials as well as a
 - e) common terminology (including basic knowledge and procedures related to biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear events).
- 3) The planning needs to be high concept and must include an all-hazards approach
- 4) The planning must be integrated at all levels of the health system.
- 5) At the institutional level the ideal model for Emergency Management is a dyad model comprising of an upper level administrator with formal training and experience in Emergency Management and a dedicated Physician in the Medical Director role.
- 6) In addition to the above institutions and agencies must prepare plans that:
 - a) are uniform in format and structure allowing for mutual aid between local facilities and agencies as well as across and between regions and provinces/ territories
 - b) are coordinated with Provincial/Territorial & Federal initiatives and support
 - c) have a defined command and control structure based on IMS principles and supported by an emergency operations centre.
 - d) are simple and easy to review rapidly
 - e) include role description checklists A.K.A “job action sheets” that allow for a quick understanding of staffs immediate tasks while activating the next level in response
 - f) are based on best practices,
 - g) are tested and exercised
 - h) follow a standardized format and include key components so as to allow uniform and interoperable plans that cross Provincial borders. Facilitating this process will require support and guidance from the Federal government within the parameters of the Canada Health Act.
- 7) Education and training in disaster preparedness should have dedicated annual funding so as to both achieve and maintain said competency.

- 8) Said competency should be validated through structured cyclical auditing that where applicable should be integrated as a critical factor into the existing evaluation processes of the organization.
- 9) Disaster response must be a Required Organizational Practice (ROP) without which health care facilities cannot be accredited. Specifically, accredited health care facilities and agencies must make disaster preparedness an accreditation requirement which is assessed using specific, measurable, and scientifically driven standards.
- 10) Facility training must include periodic exercises that involve all components of the disaster response and that are objectively assessed for purposes of quality improvement.
- 11) Any educational program must promote coordination of services and alignment of disaster plans between the various health care providers and health system components within a community such as first responders, fire, police and relevant government and local agencies involved in health emergencies in order to ensure ongoing health care to all citizens.
- 12) All planning must take into consideration vulnerable segments of the population such as children, the elderly and patients with special needs.
- 13) In each jurisdiction the relevant professional colleges must support the development and delivery of professional education in disaster preparedness to trainees and to practicing professionals.
- 14) All training and education across Canada – whether delivered by Federal, Provincial or Territorial authorities, should share:
 - a) common resources for risk assessment, readiness assessment, planning and reporting
 - b) common guidelines upon which they can base their planning, with the resultant uniformity in disaster preparedness.
 - c) common structure/ education models for maintenance of disaster preparedness competence for all responders/ care providers
 - d) clarification of the division of authority between health care facilities, regional authorities, the Ministries of Health, the Public Health Agency of Canada and other Federal and Provincial/Territorial agencies
 - e) common reporting, command and communications methodology between health care facilities, regional authorities, the Ministries of Health, the Public Health Agency of Canada and other Federal and Provincial/Territorial agencies
- 15) In order to ensure interoperability between regions and all levels of healthcare, the Federal government in cooperation with the Provinces & Territories must provide the uniform planning tools and resources to achieve the previous point. Ideally, a federal health emergency response plan should include:
 - a) a core set of concepts, principles, terminology, and technologies covering the incident command system;
 - b) a multi-agency coordination systems;
 - c) a unified command protocol;
 - d) a training strategy;
 - e) identification and management of resources;
 - f) a process for defining qualifications and certification;
 - g) and tactics that support the collection, tracking, and reporting of incident information and incident resources¹⁹

- 16) While the training at the federal and provincial/territorial level should assist organizations in breaking down their inter-organizational silos, all training should also emphasize the breaking down planning and communication silos within healthcare facilities.
- 17) A national database of unidentified patients, ideally with trackable location identifiers, should be created and be available to all health care centres in order to ensure effective identification and reunification of patients and families.

Summary

1. What outdated literature exists reveals gaps in Canadian institutional preparedness for health care related disasters.
2. There has been no formal FPT assessment of readiness at institutional and first receiver level.
3. Disaster causes morbidity and mortality as does any disease, but, unlike other diseases, there is no expected standard of care in disasters despite the fact that the methodology of disaster response has been well defined and is publicly available.
4. In the health care system Emergency Physicians and Nurses in collaboration with Emergency Managers and community resources are best positioned to lead their institutions to better disaster preparedness.
5. The steps required to remedy this gap in health care are clear and outlined in the recommendations.
6. Not addressing the issue of health care disaster preparedness, particularly at the institutional level, will lead to increased illness and death in the Canadian population.

Next Steps

1. The recommendations should be publicly presented to the Federal Ministers of Health and Public Safety, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Accreditation Canada, and the relevant Provincial Health, Public Health and Emergency Management authorities.
2. In keeping with these recommendations CAEP should develop and deploy a preparedness curriculum including both education and training so as to assist all FPT agencies, first receivers and disaster responders achieve a common baseline of proficiency.
3. In presenting these recommendations CAEP should offer support to FPT authorities, helping them organize and support a public review - with scientific methodology and quantifiable results - of current disaster readiness at the first receivers level and repeat said review in three years.
