



The Community Partnership  
For The Prevention  
of Homelessness

# A Strengths-based Approach to Disaster Preparedness

Thursday, February 14, 2008

Washington, DC

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# Focus:

Communication between Outreach Workers and  
Consumers within the  
DC Continuum of Care (CoC)

# The Plan for Today

- 1) Who is the target population?
- 2) Target population needs and strengths.
- 3) Connecting w/ Consumers in times of disaster.

# The Target Population

- Approximately 340 individuals in DC live outside, on the street, or in abandoned buildings.

# The Target Population Cont.

- Majority unsheltered also chronically homeless: 321 of 340 in DC.
  - Unaccompanied adult, disabling condition, 1 year continuously homeless or 4<sup>th</sup> homeless episode in three years.

Homeless Enumeration for the Washington Metropolitan Region, 2007, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

# The Target Population Cont.

- Disabling conditions affecting homeless in DC:
  - Chronic SA:.....1,542 or 27%
  - SMI:.....1,362 or 24%
  - Dually Diagnosed:.....762 or 13%
  - HIV/AIDS:.....410 or 7%
  - Physical Disability:.....806 or 14%
  - Chronic Health Prob.:.....1,305 or 23%

Homeless Enumeration for the Washington Metropolitan Region, 2007, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

# Needs During a Disaster

- If a potential or actual disaster strikes, what are some needs people living on the streets may have?

# Needs Cont.

- Safety
- Food, water, possibly shelter
- Continued access to RX medication:
  - Drug dependence therapies
  - Psychiatric medication
  - Antiretrovirals
  - Insulin, blood pressure...
  - Directly observed therapy (TB)
- Coping skills
- Information
- Support
- Help making informed decisions
- Alt. routes out of bldg./evacuation/transportation

# Strengths

- Looking at the every day, what are some strengths that people living on the streets can apply to a disaster situation?

# Strengths Cont.

- Adaptability
- Resourcefulness
- Knowledge of the area
- Mobile

# Provider Strengths

- What are some crisis scenarios that Outreach Workers have successfully responded to in the past that can be applied toward the future in disaster situations?

# Provider Strengths Cont.

- Knowledge of where people are
- Mutual familiarity
- Knowledge of human behavior, SA, SMI
- Active listening and crisis intervention techniques

# SOP

- Be aware of program and/or agency Disaster Preparedness protocols
  - Ensure outreach part of formal plan and know component
  - Review plan
  - At time of disaster, do quick review of plan as necessary

# Risk Acceptability

- Voluntary vs. imposed
- Under an individuals control vs. controlled by others
- Have clear benefits vs. little or no perceived benefits
- Be distributed fairly vs. unfairly distributed
- Natural vs. manmade
- Generated by a trusted source vs. untrusted source
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Affect adults vs. children

Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials, 2002, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

# Outreach & Consumer Preparedness

- Talk w/ Consumers about different possible events, possible associated activities, and being prepared:
  - Case-by-case basis and stay general/broad
  - Noise, sirens, planes, metro, debris...
  - Being prepared physically and mentally/emotionally

# Outreach & Consumer Preparedness Cont.

- Where or how do you think Consumers will find out about a disaster?

# Outreach & Consumer Preparedness Cont.

- Emergency kit/pack:
  - ID, social security card, shelter card, medical card, list of medications and allergies, medications (7 day supply), DD214 or other VA paperwork, phone card, important phone numbers (keep in sealed plastic bags)...
  - Water
  - Metro and bus tokens
  - Flashlight, radio, and battery

# Outreach & Consumer Preparedness Cont.

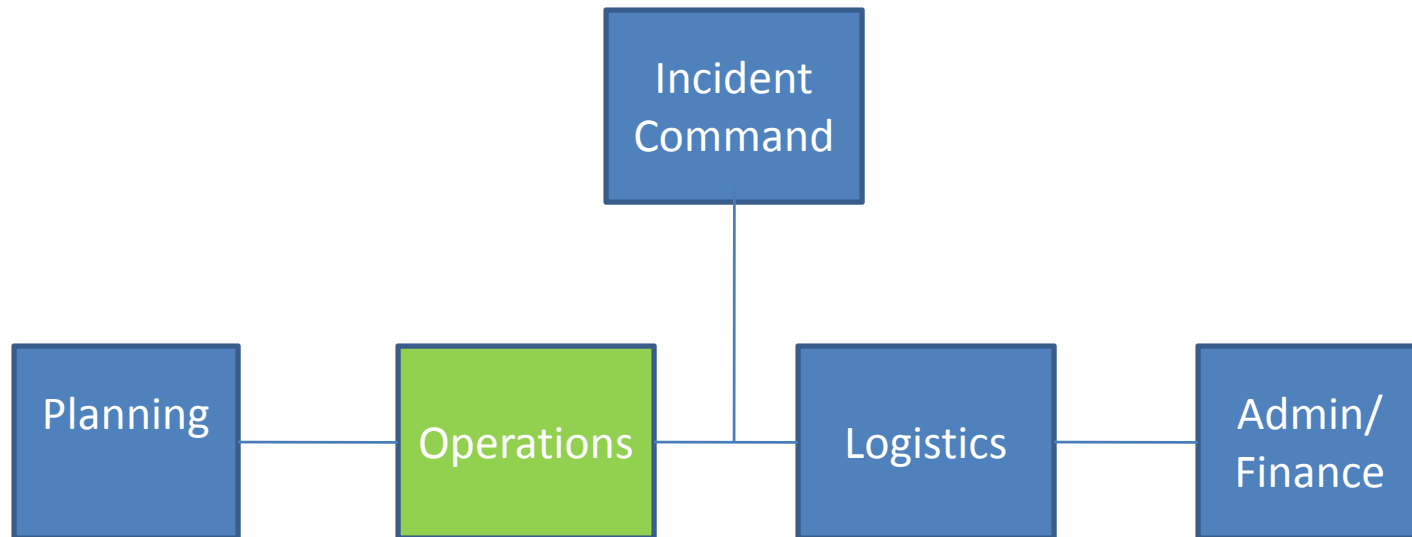
- Evacuation Plans
  - Abandoned building
  - Metro
  - Bus
  - Local service or disaster center

# Outreach & Consumer Preparedness Cont.

- Preparing Consumers emotionally/mentally for a disaster:
  - Different emotions one may experience (during a disaster) and reactions they think they may have
  - Tips on concise and effective communication during a disaster

# Communication During a Disaster

Where Are Outreach Efforts Likely to Fit



# Outreach Communication During a Disaster

- Before going into the field:
  - Size-up the situation and be informed
  - Gather data on event(s)
  - Synthesize data into concise and easy to understand information
  - Anticipate questions
  - Be confident in main message

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster

- Be aware of risk communication myths:
  - Myth: Risk communication is more likely to harm than calm.
  - Myth: Many issues that arise in times of crisis are too difficult for the public to understand.

Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials, 2002, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster

- Before going into the field, despite urgency, follow safety protocols
  - Sign-out at program or agency/let at least two other staff know destinations and expected return time
  - Take mobile phone; if no phone service, take CB radio to communicate w/ others in field
  - Depending on situation, take personal protective equipment

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster

- Practice core outreach techniques and precautions:
  - Teams of two
  - Calm approach
  - Build rapport
  - Listen
  - Provide information

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster Cont.

- Active listening
  - Allow silence
  - Non-verbal listening of eye contact, head nodding, caring facial expressions, occasional “uh-huhs”
  - Paraphrase (i.e. so you are saying that)
  - Reflect feelings (i.e. you sound angry, does that fit for you?)
  - Allow emotional expression: Intense emotions expressed through tears or angry venting can help one work through feelings to pave way toward constructive problem solving.

Disaster Counseling, SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center,

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/KEN-01-0096/default.asp>

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster Cont.

- Help Consumers understand the following:
  - No one who sees a disaster is untouched by it
  - It's normal to feel anxious about you and your family (friend) safety
  - Sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event
  - Acknowledging our feelings helps us recover
  - Focusing on strengths and abilities can help heal
  - Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy
  - We all have different needs and coping mechanisms
  - It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain, but nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or acts.

Care Tips for Survivors of a Traumatic Event: What to Expect in Your Personal, Family, Work, and Financial Life, SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center,

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/KEN-01-0097/default.asp>

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster Cont.

- Provide tips to Consumers to help them cope w/ Disaster induced stress:
  - Talk w/ someone about feelings
  - Do not hold self responsible for event
  - Do not be frustrated if you cannot help directly in the rescue effort
  - Take steps to promote physical and emotional healing by maintaining routines
  - Use existing support groups
  - If help strategies aren't working and/or using AOD to cope, may wish to seek outside or professional assistance.

Care Tips for Survivors of a Traumatic Event: What to Expect in Your Personal, Family, Work, and Financial Life, SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center,

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/KEN-01-0097/default.asp>

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster Cont.

- Addressing fears w/ information:
  - Metro:
    - All Metro Transit Police, rail supervisors, station managers, and operators should be trained in First Aid and CPR.
    - Each rail car has three sets of emergency doors and fire protection systems.
    - If in a tunnel or elevated track during an evacuation of the metro, use the Emergency Trip Station Call Box (marked w/ a blue light & available every 800 feet) and dial zero for the Metro.
    - The metro is designed to reduce smoke and provide emergency lighting if needed.

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster Cont.

- Have the most up-to-date information on available resources:
  - Food, shelters, Rx assistance, hotlines or 2-1-1, detox, counseling, decontamination sites, and evacuations and transportation.

# Outreach Communication During a Disaster Cont.

- BONUS: If possible, provide emergency back pack/kit:
  - Water, high energy food, zip lock baggies, metro or bus tokens, emergency numbers (including hot-lines), flash light and radio w/ battery.

# Post Outreach

- Sign-back in w/ program or agency
- Notify program or agency Disaster Liaison of questions unable to answer.
- Document client interactions in HMIS
- Identify next steps
- Identify steps to build into next development of program, agency, and CoC Disaster Response Plan

# Worker Health During a Disaster (preventing burn-out)

- Dealing w/ the dual role: Worker's may also be experiencing impact(s) of disaster
- Acknowledging high stress a first step in managing it:
  - Routine defusing and debriefing sessions during all phases of recovery operations
  - ID a stress management counselor
  - Be aware of signs and symptoms of burnout in Consumers and Staff

# SAMSHA

- On-line publications available on disaster and trauma:
    - After a Disaster: Self Care Tips for Dealing w/ Stress
    - Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials
    - Disaster Counseling
    - Psychosocial Issues for Older Adults in Disasters
- [http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/Publications\\_browse.asp?ID=181&Topic=Disaster%2FTrauma](http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/Publications_browse.asp?ID=181&Topic=Disaster%2FTrauma)

# Washington DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency

- DC Local Emergency Planning Council
  - Alert DC Notification System
    - Emergency Plans
    - Preparedness Guides
  - Terror Threat Advisory
    - Major Hazards

<http://dcema.dc.gov/dcema/site/default.asp?dcemaNav=|31806|>

# DC Alert

- When an incident or emergency occurs, DC Homeland Security & Emergency Management personnel can provide a personal connection to real-time updates, instructions on where to go, what to do, or what not to do, who to contact and other important information.
- Alert DC is available to citizens of the DC and those traveling to or working in the District.
- Subscribers may be charged, as set forth in wireless provider contracts, for messages delivered to wireless devices.

<https://textalert.ema.dc.gov/index.php?CCheck=1>

# National Response Framework

<http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nrf/>