

Reducing Disparities in Preparedness: Collaborating With Diverse Communities

Rachel Coles, MA

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)

Rachel Coles
Colorado Dept. Public Health
4300 Cherry Creek Dr. South
Denver CO 80246
(303) 692-2764
fax(303) 691-7811

BACKGROUND

- Many populations within Colorado have difficulty accessing mainstream channels of support, such as persons with limited English proficiency (LEP), or those who fall below a certain income level, or who face cultural trust barriers. For example, recommendations such as keeping two weeks of food can be inappropriate for low-income families.
- Building relationships within diverse populations, and capacity in the organizations trusted by those populations moves towards reducing barriers in trust, language, culture, or other factors.

OBJECTIVE

- Partner and contract with community organizations who might be adversely affected in an emergency or incident, to build capacity for emergency preparedness and response.

ORGANIZATIONS

- CDPHE has been contracting with the following organizations for the past three years:
 - Center for African American Health (CAAH)
 - Colorado Asian Health Education and Promotion (CAHEP)
 - St. Cajetan's Catholic Parish under the Denver Archdiocese
 - Annunciation Catholic Parish under the Denver Archdiocese
 - Inner City Parish
 - Denver Indian Center
 - Denver Indian Family Resource Center
 - Colorado Cross Disability Coalition
- CDPHE has been also collaborated with the following organizations to work with communities: Denver Office of Emergency Management, Colorado Division of Mental Health, Red Cross, Colorado Division of Emergency Management.

PROJECTS



- The first Spanish speaking CERT team in Colorado, from St. Cajetan's Catholic Church. In addition to being a CERT team, these trainees have completed the first train-the-trainer, and are scheduled to give further trainings to the community in Spanish.



- The first collaborative CERT moulage exercise between St. Cajetan's CERT team, Denver OEM, and CAHEP CERT team, with leaders participating from the Hispanic community, the Philipino, Korean,

Chinese, Asian Indian, Thai, and Hmong communities, in multiple languages.



- The first mass vaccination exercise planned and run by St. Cajetan's. Four-hundred doses of vaccine were given on a Sunday to accommodate the volume of people attending Spanish-language masses at the church. The incident command staff, screeners, and vaccination assistants were all Spanish-speaking, and from the community.

- CAAH created workshops and a step (dance and rap) competition to train community members in emergency preparedness. They are training two churches to become POD sites.
- Colorado Cross Disability Coalition is creating an annex to the state plan for people with disabilities, and participating in exercising.
- CAHEP is training Asian community leaders in Incident Command, CERT, and emergency preparedness. The Wat Buddharam (Thai Buddhist Temple), is working on an emergency plan for the Temple as a primary community organization.
- Denver Indian Center has created an Elder Preparedness Circle, in which tribal elders discuss and work through barriers to preparedness in the community. They are

receiving Are You Ready training from FEMA and Denver OEM.

- Annunciation parish has built an emergency notification and special needs database of parishioners and volunteers, and are working with DOEM to train POD volunteers.
- Inner City Parish is training their senior in preparedness, a curriculum for their parish school, and creating disaster mental health teams.

BARRIERS

- Among these populations, there is a hesitance to collaborate with any organization perceived as having ties with Homeland Security.
- Funding is dwindling, and these organizations operate on a shoestring budget.
- Communication between different government agencies, and perception of different government entities is often confusing to communities.
- Understanding the differences in language, culture, and infrastructure of these different organizations is challenging to government, which operates from a top-down command structure.

CONCLUSIONS

- Government agencies must make working with diverse communities a priority and long-term goal, both in funding, and in practice and work commitment, for true sustainable relationships to be built. These relationships can bridge differences, and provide resilience within communities to respond to an event.

