

Florida Department of Health

Bureau of Preparedness and Response

YEAR IN REVIEW

2012-2013

“All things are ready,  
if our mind be so.”

—William Shakespeare, *Henry V*



## Contents

### Our Mission

**The Florida Department of Health** works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

**The Bureau of Preparedness and Response** supports this mission by ensuring state and federal preparedness and response investments are wisely leveraged to build a resilient Florida population and resilient public health and health care system prepared for any disaster or emergency.

The Bureau supports the state's health and medical response with grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR).

### accomplishments

Collaboration, 4

Information and Resources, 6

A Resilient Florida Population, 8

Budget, 10



**“Chance favors the prepared mind.” —Louis Pasteur**

### Message from Leadership

**We have faced many challenging events this year, so it is gratifying to share some important accomplishments in this annual report.**

Our collaboration with public health and health care partners and relationships with national, state and local colleagues have strengthened Florida’s ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from, man-made and natural disasters. Our practical and useful public health preparedness and response information, resources, programs and initiatives have made communities more resilient and ready for any possibility.

With these and many other efforts outlined in this report, Florida is leading the way in public health preparedness and response. The Bureau provides resources, funding and expertise to support health care coalitions, strong epidemiological surveillance systems, laboratory testing, medical logistics and many other programs. The result of this support is an effective public health and health care response to incidents and events.

Our determination, efforts and efficiency, allow us to overcome budget challenges and the ever expanding list of health risks and dangers facing our communities. We will be prepared. We will respond. And we will recover—no matter what the incident or event. This is the Bureau, Division and Department’s commitment to all Floridians.

**Kay Croy, RN, BSN, MEd.**

### Message from the Co-Chairs

**During our time as co-chairs of the Public Health and Health care Preparedness (PHHP) Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT), we have seen Florida’s capacity in public health preparedness and response grow.**

Using the expertise of its leaders and subject matter experts, the Bureau and Department have forged an effective and unique structure to guide public health and health care preparedness efforts within the state. Our statewide Program Advisory Teams develop programs and deliverables each year to meet state, local and public health preparedness goals. Members of SPOT then review, prioritize and provide guidance on programs and deliverables.

The SPOT consists of state, local and regional health and medical partners including hospitals, County Health Departments, Poison Control Centers, the Red Cross, Centers for Independent Living and many others. The strategic planning process for Florida’s PHHP programs has been very successful over the years in building the resiliency of Florida communities and its public health and medical support systems.

It has been an honor to serve in a leadership capacity with SPOT. We look forward to many more years of extraordinary work by the Bureau and Department as we continue to advance Florida’s public health and medical preparedness.

**Dr. Judith Hartner**

**John Scott**

# Collaboration

Developing partnerships with health and medical professionals across the state is crucial to the success of Florida's public health and health care preparedness capability. The Bureau supports a wide variety of collaborative efforts to ensure Florida is prepared for and can respond to any man-made or natural disaster.

Our **Program Advisory Teams** represent a diverse range of multidisciplinary preparedness and response partners across the state. Every year, the statewide teams develop projects to ensure Florida's health and medical system can support the needs of residents when disasters overwhelm the normal day-to-day operations of the health care system. Teams analyze public health and health care preparedness capabilities of the regions and recommend initiatives to close gaps and strengthen relationships with private and public partners.

Promoting the development and sustainment of local, community-based **health care coalitions** are top priorities in public health and health care preparedness in Florida. Strong **public and private sector health care and response partner relationships** enhance the effectiveness of response and recovery of the health care system. Through the Florida Health Care Coalition Task Force, the Bureau provides information, resources and guidance to support development and sustainment of these vital partnerships. In 2012–13, coalitions grew to cover all regions of Florida.

Disasters can impact **children** both physically and emotionally. Through

the **Florida Children's Preparedness Coalition**, the Bureau works with health care and community partners, like the Department's **Children's Medical Services**, the **Department of Children and Families** and the **Florida Hospital Association**, to ensure the health, safety and security of all children before, during and after emergencies and disasters. This includes supporting the integration of children's disaster needs in state and local disaster planning and policies to identify gaps and leverage resources for this unique population. In 2012–13, the Bureau worked with partners to strengthen regional and local partnerships, and shape planning priorities for Florida's children.

Meeting the needs of **vulnerable populations**, like those who are physically or mentally disabled, blind, deaf, hard-of-hearing, cognitively impaired or mobility challenged, is a key component of public health and health care preparedness planning. The Bureau funds a statewide disability coordinator position and maintains partnerships with the disability community including the **Agency for Persons with Disabilities and Florida's Centers for Independent Living**. **More than 3,500 individuals** with access and functional needs completed personal

emergency preparedness plans during the grant year.

During a statewide disaster, **Regional Emergency Response Advisors (RERAs)** provide critical situational awareness information to the state Emergency Support Function 8 (ESF8) emergency coordination officer, who resides within the State Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee. When not in the field responding to incidents, the RERAs are responsible for assisting public health and health care partners, including county health departments, with a wide variety of preparedness and response activities including planning and integrating response systems and resources.

**Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Program (NEPP)** engages and mobilizes communities throughout Florida to foster self-sufficiency at the residential level. Twelve counties are currently involved in neighborhood preparedness, representing **34 Florida communities with 462,632 residents**. All communities sign a Memorandum of Agreement to develop neighborhood preparedness through planning, training and exercises.

Program Advisory Teams

health care coalitions

public and private sector health care

response partner relationships

children

Florida Children's Preparedness Coalition

Florida Hospital Association

vulnerable populations

Agency for Persons with Disabilities

Florida's Centers for Independent Living

Regional Emergency Response Advisors

Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Program

34 Florida communities with 462,632 residents

Regional Behavioral Health Teams

University of South Florida

Florida Crisis Consortium

Special Needs Shelters

Interagency Committee on Sheltering Facilitation Services

Division of Emergency Management

Medical Reserve Corp volunteers

**“Private-sector preparedness is not a luxury; it is a cost of doing business in the post-9/11 world. It is ignored at a tremendous potential cost in lives, money and national security.”**

—The 9/11 Commission Report

**Regional Behavioral Health Teams** engage with community organizations to foster strong social networks to help meet the mental and behavioral health needs of survivors and responders. The teams are trained through a partnership with the **University of South Florida** and the **Florida Crisis Consortium** to identify gaps and planning considerations and develop exercises that test systems and processes.

**Special Needs Shelters** are an important component of Florida's

ability to prepare for and respond to emergencies. Florida collaborates with the **Interagency Committee on Sheltering Facilitation Services**, the **Division of Emergency Management** and other mass care partners to provide technical assistance and subject matter expertise to help counties provide mass care sheltering to those with special medical needs.

**Medical Reserve Corp volunteers** are more than 18,600 strong in Florida. Volunteers are pre-screened

health and medical professionals available to deploy during an incident or emergency. During 2009 to 2012, volunteers provided more than 65,000 hours of assistance representing over \$2.3 million in health and medical services. The department collaborates closely with county health departments to manage the volunteer network and provide annual planning, training and exercise resources and activities.

# Information and Resources

The Bureau supports the development of useful and practical information and resources to increase the innovation and responsiveness of Florida's public health and health care preparedness partners across the state. Support is often provided in the form of toolkits, trainings, information technology and medical supplies.

A **health care system** prepared for both traditional disasters (like hurricanes) and terrorist attacks, including the use of chemical, biological and radiological weapons is crucial for the overall health and safety of a community. The Bureau provides extensive tools and resources to hospitals and other health care partners through online toolkits and **webinars** where experts disseminate information, and share experiences and best practices among health care partners.

The ability of the health care community to respond to **mass casualty incidents**, like the Boston Marathon bombings, comes from coordinated planning, training and exercising. Health care facilities need comprehensive emergency management plans that include the possibility of a sudden surge of patients. The Bureau provides support for community **planning, training and exercising for medical surge incidents**, as well as subject matter experts (during incidents) to help increase the capabilities of hospitals and other health care partners for mass casualty incidents.

Maintaining a competent, trained **epidemiology** workforce capable of conducting investigations and

providing surge capacity for large outbreaks and other emergencies is a primary function in preparedness and response. Bureau funding supports activities within the Bureau of Epidemiology, as well as at the county level. Funding supports **trainings** for staff at all levels of the agency (county and state), and supports operating several state surveillance systems: the alert network, EpiCom; Merlin, where high priority diseases are reported; and the syndromic surveillance system, ESSENCE-FL. The Bureau also funds biweekly calls with Florida's 67 county health departments reaching 1,780 participants, and **Epidemiology Grand Rounds** presentations reaching 919 participants across the state.

Whether the disaster is a hurricane, anthrax attack or bombing, **environmental health** practitioners play an important role in emergency response. The Bureau provides funding to support training, equipment and consultation for environmental health staff at county health departments throughout Florida. This support was crucial during two out-of-state wastewater spills that impacted several Florida communities. With the Division of

Emergency Management, the Bureau also developed the **Preparedness Fotonovela and Activity Guide for Migrant Families**.

Children and the elderly are some of the most vulnerable residents during a disaster. The Bureau created a **Vulnerable Population Toolkit** for counties to assess the vulnerable populations within their area and identify gaps in emergency planning and sheltering. The Bureau also developed a Discharge Planning Guide for special needs shelter managers and provided webinars about the process of discharging shelter clients with special needs.

Ensuring communities have **emergency medical supplies** and ways to distribute these resources are cornerstones of public health and health care preparedness. Through the **Bureau's logistics, Bureau of Public Health Pharmacy, Strategic National Stockpile, Cities Readiness Initiative and Chempack** programs, the Department works with county health departments and other partners to provide an inventory of emergency medical supplies and a system to manage these resources before, during and after an event. The Bureau also provides **training** in medical materiel management and



“By failing to prepare,  
you are preparing to fail.”

—Benjamin Franklin

distribution for logistics coordinators and staffing unit leaders at the state, regional and local level.

Communicating information to the public during an emergency is a crucial preparedness and response capability. The Bureau coordinates with the Office of Communications to fund and provide regular **crisis and emergency risk communication trainings for public information**

**professionals and spokespersons** across the state, particularly those at county health departments, health care organizations and emergency response partners. Twelve onsite training opportunities were held for 428 Department personnel and preparedness partners. The Bureau also supports the development and dissemination of public health-related **messaging tools** in multiple languages and formats, including

audio and video public service announcements, fact sheets, frequently asked questions, talking points, stock news releases and other product templates on various disasters, diseases, incidents and events.

The Bureau supports the development and effective use of many **Information Technology (IT)** systems and tools to help responders make informed and timely decisions during a disaster. Some of these resources include: the **Inventory Resource Management System (IRMS)**, which provides real-time asset inventory of ESF8 resources during an incident; the Geographic Information Services (GIS) team, who provide vital data analysis and mapping services accessible to all county health departments during an event; and **Everbridge/SERVFL**, the online system for managing public health and medical responder volunteers and staff teams. It also serves as Florida’s **Health Alert Network**, which provides a wide range of methods to send and receive information among health partners. These resources allow the Bureau to collaborate with health partners and share important health information for risk assessments and analysis.

Protecting health and medical responders during a disaster is a primary concern for the Bureau. The Bureau provides **Level C personal protective equipment** to licensed Emergency Medical Services (EMS) providers throughout the state.

# A Resilient Florida Population

Healthy Floridians are resilient Floridians who can bounce back and learn from disasters. The Bureau supports crucial statewide systems like Emergency Support Function 8 or ESF8, epidemiological surveillance and state laboratories to increase the responsiveness of communities during a disaster. These and other similar programs improve the strength and flexibility of communities.

When the state emergency response system responds to an event, the Department is activated as the lead state agency for Emergency Support Function 8 or ESF8. Emergency Support Function 8 is comprised of highly trained departmental employees, private sector stakeholders and other state agencies such as the Agency for Health Care Administration, Agency for Persons with Disabilities and Department of Elder Affairs. The Bureau is charged with maintaining a **trained and qualified public health and health care response staff** who are ready to respond when called upon during a disaster. In addition to providing **on-going monthly training** for preparedness staff, the Bureau updates statewide **plans** and **operating procedures**, develops **special event planning guides** and toolkits, maintains a state medical response system consisting of teams and medical caches, and participates in statewide trainings, exercises and significant events such as the 2012 Republican National Conference.

**Epidemiological surveillance systems** provide Florida's preparedness and response decision makers with timely and useful information to effectively identify and prevent the spread of infectious

diseases. Surveillance systems around the world alerted public health officials to threats like Avian Influenza, SARS and Ebola. Most recently, Florida's surveillance systems, **Merlin** and **ESSENCE-FL**, played a critical role in Florida's response to the national fungal meningitis outbreak. The Bureau provides funding to support epidemiologic investigation staff and systems throughout the state in coordination with the state public health laboratories. Florida also provides timely data to public health partners via a secure, moderated alerting system for all-hazards called **EpiCom**. Recent accomplishments of Florida's surveillance systems include increasing the number of emergency departments participating in ESSENCE-FL to 168, making it the largest syndromic surveillance system in the nation and shortening the transmission/receipt of emergency department data from once every 24 hours to every two hours for 63 Florida hospitals. Bureau grant funding also continues to support electronic laboratory reporting (ELR), which reduces case identification time from nine to five days.

The ability of Florida's **public health laboratories** to identify and analyze clinical and environmental samples

for threat agents and chemicals plays a crucial role in public health preparedness and response. State labs are critical in rapidly identifying the presence of biological toxins, emerging infectious disease agents and chemical threats. The Bureau supports four state public health laboratories through staff training and exercising, integration of epidemiological data and training for other laboratory staff across the state. Florida's laboratories have some of the most sophisticated capabilities in the country, and Florida is one of only ten states in the nation with the ability to perform chemical threat surge testing for the CDC.

Re-establishing routine **health care delivery systems** after a disaster helps restore a sense of normalcy for communities and strengthens resilience. The Bureau worked with the **Florida Association of Community Health Centers** to provide training to senior leaders of federally qualified health centers on how to develop continuity of operations plans for their facilities.

Emergency and disaster planning for **long-term care facilities**, like nursing homes, is a primary concern given the health and medical needs of their





## “Prepare for the unknown

by studying how others in the past have coped with the unforeseeable and the unpredictable.”

—Gen. George S. Patton

trained and qualified public health and health care response staff

on-going monthly training

plans

operating procedures

special event planning guides

Epidemiological surveillance systems

Merlin

ESSENCE-FL

EpiCom

public health laboratories

health care delivery systems

Florida Association of Community Health Centers

long-term care facilities

health care coalitions

University of Florida’s Maples Center for Forensic Medicine

The Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System

patients. The Bureau worked closely with **health care coalitions** to develop planning considerations for these centers, which serve more than 70,000 patients in Florida.

Florida is prepared even for those events that may result in mass fatalities. Through a partnership with the **University of Florida’s Maples Center for Forensic Medicine**, the Bureau ensures the capability to take over mortuary services when local resources are overwhelmed. **The Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System (FEMORS)**, has the ability to store, identify and process victims of a mass fatality. Victim information centers are set up to aid members of the public searching for loved ones who may have become victims of an event.

# Budget

Grant Period	Total Funding Received (CDC & ASPR)
2011–2012.....	\$50,496,151
2012–2013 .....	\$48,860,404
2013–2014 .....	\$45,761,945

During 2012–2013, the Bureau received six Prudential Davis Productivity Awards for innovative programs and initiatives, representing a savings to taxpayers of over one million dollars and 13,000 staff hours.



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