



The Pandemic Planner

A Monthly Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

Emergency Management Unit, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

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History has taught us – and science confirms – influenza pandemics have no boundaries. We know that regardless of where one lives, or one's health, age, social status, profession, culture, religion or ethnicity, during an influenza pandemic, everyone is at risk. History has also taught us the importance of the "volunteer" and how this extraordinary community has risen to the challenge during all types of emergencies time and time again. Volunteers know and care about their community and will be an invaluable support, resource and asset to our response efforts during an influenza pandemic.

Many emergency and pandemic planners have asked how to engage the voluntary sector to ensure plans are effective and that our response is well coordinated. The answer lies in bringing volunteer organizations to the planning table. This month's issue of the *Pandemic Planner* features what is new in the voluntary sector and how this diverse community can support local pandemic planning activities across Ontario. We hope you enjoy this issue and that it informs your planning priorities for 2008!

~ Allison J. Stuart, Director, Emergency Management Unit &
A/Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health Division

What's New?

Community Support Organizations – Pandemic Planning and Potential Partners

The community support sector is a vast and diverse industry comprising of hundreds of organizations – small and large, volunteer or non-profit, faith-based or community-based – that provide direct support and care to individuals in their homes. These organizations provide an important role and during an influenza pandemic the services provided will be critical to supporting the overall health system's response.

At the recent Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) Annual Conference, the Canadian Red Cross led a pandemic planning session to assist these organizations in developing influenza pandemic and business continuity plans. Key to the success of the planning session and its usefulness was the recognition that many of these organizations have limited staff with a significant number of direct services being delivered in the community through volunteers.

For community support organizations, the process of developing influenza pandemic and business continuity plans can be challenging. During the planning session, the Canadian Red Cross shared its planning experience and best practices in a volunteer environment in order to help these organizations get started on their own planning processes.

Emphasis was placed on developing pre-response action plans and mitigation strategies based on the World Health Organization's (WHO) Pandemic Periods and Phases (see Chapter 2 of the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) at: www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic). For example, during the current pandemic alert period phase 3, community support organizations can – in part – focus planning efforts on prevention and mitigation activities such as education, awareness and outreach to staff,

volunteers and clients on infection prevention and control techniques (e.g., the importance of proper and frequent hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette). In addition, during the planning process for alert period phase 4, plans should consider a priority of services and human resource strategies in case of high absenteeism.

It is important for us to recognize the important services as well as the critical role these organizations can and will play during an influenza pandemic or other emergency. Many members and staff of these organizations have experience and professional training in the health sector – a valuable resource for our community planning tables. Working in the community and with these organizations now will go a long way to ensure all our plans are effective and that our response is well coordinated.

To contact community support organizations in your area, visit the OCSA's website at: <http://www.ocsa.on.ca/>.

The Emergency Volunteer Registry

Some of our subscribers may recall that the November 2006 issue of the *Pandemic Planner* profiled the broad outreach and awareness activities of the Peterborough County-City Public Health Unit and the Interagency Pandemic Influenza Planning Team. Since that time, not only have key sections of the interagency influenza pandemic plan been updated (most recent updates in July 2007), but the interagency team has engaged the voluntary sector at the planning table.

Recognizing the impact an influenza pandemic will have on health human resources, both in terms of those who will get ill and the increased demand

for services, the interagency team identified that there will be a need and role for trained and qualified volunteers in supporting response efforts.

Looking to the experts, the Interagency Pandemic Influenza Planning Team met with volunteer coordinators in the community including the United Way of Peterborough & District (United Way), local branches of the Canadian Red Cross and Salvation Army and other agencies, to discuss options and ideas for the development of a volunteer resource management system.

As the volunteer information centre for the City of Peterborough and surrounding districts, the United Way took the lead on developing the volunteer management system – now known as the Emergency Volunteer Registry or EVR.

The first step in developing the EVR was to research whether existing software programs would meet the community's pandemic response needs, as well as volunteer management requirements.

It was quickly discovered that existing software would not support the objectives of such a registry, and the United Way set out to create a flexible hybrid version that captures not only a volunteer's personal information (such as availability and location/residence, personal and professional skill sets such as health care professional training and experience) but also creates a position profile to match the volunteer and their skills with the appropriate agency and/or response position. The system is also designed to meet volunteer management requirements, such as privacy (limiting the collection, access, consent and use of personal information) and security including police and personal and professional reference checks.

The EVR cross-references personal and profession profile information with the appropriate security checks (security is critical in managing human resources and response efforts), and generates an easy to understand, universal "badge" system (identification):

Green Badge = skilled volunteer with documented police, personal and professional checks;

Yellow Badge = skilled volunteer with some documented security checks (personal or professional reference checks, or police); and

Red Badge = skilled volunteer without security documented checks.

Another unique feature of the EVR is that it is also designed for "real time" data management and is able to identify how many volunteers are deployed to specific sites/location at any given time.

The EVR has been well received and approved by the Interagency Pandemic Influenza Planning Team. It was also presented to the residents of Peterborough at the Pandemic Interagency Public Information Session held on October 17, 2007.

Due to its design and flexibility, the EVR will also be used to register volunteers for all types of emergencies such as fires, power-outages, floods or intentional acts in the community. The United Way anticipates that the EVR will be launched in January and expects that the registry will be well underway by spring 2008.

Congratulations to the Peterborough County-City Interagency Pandemic Influenza Planning Team and the United Way of Peterborough & District on this novel planning tool. Stay tuned to the *Pandemic Planner* for future updates on this important and exciting resource!

Strategic Partnerships: What to Offer & What to Expect

In September, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial (F/P/T) Pandemic Health Operations Committee held a two-day meeting to discuss a number of initiatives and directions including the role of volunteers in supporting influenza pandemic planning and response activities.

At the meeting, a joint presentation on the voluntary sector and disaster management was made by representatives from the Canadian Red Cross and St. John Ambulance national offices. The focus was to share the current volunteer landscape in Canada and the potential resource capabilities for disaster and emergency management – including an influenza pandemic.

The presenters highlighted the role volunteers can play during the phases of emergency management. For example, for preparedness activities, volunteers trained in disaster management can be an excellent resource for communicating and educating staff and/or the public on personal preparedness. During the planning process, volunteers can assist with identifying alternative sites locations (including flu centres) and identifying volunteer roles and responsibilities in accordance to an organization's response needs (administrative support, coordinating reception centres and transportation and stocking supplies on-site).

The presentation also highlighted the importance of emergency planners communicating their resource needs to the voluntary sector, as well as the importance of engaging the volunteer organization in the planning process.

The Canadian Red Cross, St. John Ambulance and other voluntary sector organizations are interested in creating working partnerships and supporting pandemic planning efforts across the province and the country. If your organization or planning committee would like to make contact with local offices of the disaster management voluntary sector, visit the web sites listed below (under "Useful Online Resources").

You Asked....?

- The OHPIP Steering Committee has established five key planning priorities for 2008: Primary Care; Communications; Stockpile Distribution Strategies; Surveillance; and Disease Specific Care Guidelines (for prioritizing services).

Important Dates:

- **October 15 and November 6, 15 & 30** – the Provincial/Local emergency mass immunization exercise "Operation Mass Immune" is taking place. Stay tuned for debrief outcomes of this important exercise!
- **November 2 & 3** – IDEAS Network Pandemic Exercise will be held in Toronto. Visit: <http://www.ideasnetwork.ca/>.
- **November 5, 6 & 7** – the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) is hosting OHA HealthAchieve 2007. Visit : <http://www.oha.com/>.
- **December 6 & 7** – the OHA is presenting Managing Risk and Disclosure in Today's Changing Environment conference. Visit: <http://www.oha.com/>.

Useful Online Resources

Canadian Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.ca/>

Mennonite Disaster Services:

<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/Browse/984>

Ontario Community Support Association: <http://www.ocsa.on.ca/>

Salvation Army: <http://www.salvationarmy.ca/>

St. John Ambulance: <http://www.sja.ca/>

United Way of Canada: <http://www.unitedway.ca>