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### Trust for America's Health evaluates public health preparedness

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In December 2012, Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released its report, **Ready or not? 2012**. This report on public health preparedness in the United States shows that thirty-five states and Washington D.C. met six or less of the ten indicators selected for measurement. A mere five states claimed achievement of eight indicators (the most achieved this year) and Georgia was credited with meeting only four goals.

Because the indicators can change each year, it's difficult to compare the results from year to year. Still, the report points out

that considerable progress has been made in many areas of public health to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies from bioterrorism to foodborne outbreaks and major disasters. According to the report, the negative is that all the accomplishments are being undermined due to severe budget cuts and lack of prioritization. Some of the major areas of improvement include preparedness planning and coordination; the Strategic National Stockpile; pharmaceutical and medical equipment distribution and administration; increasing and upgrading staff; and surge capacity.

On the other hand, areas of vulnerability have persisted. These include biosurveillance, providing mass care during

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#### How Georgia fared on the 10 indicators

- 1. Public health funding commitment** - State public health budgets - **1 point**. Georgia increased funding for public health by 1.2%. 20 states met this goal.
- 2. Response readiness** - Emergency operations coordination capability - **1 point**. Forty-seven states notified and assembled public health staff within the goal of 60 minutes. Georgia's time was 23 minutes.
- 3. Infectious disease control and vaccinations** - Pertussis vaccination - 0 points. Two states met the HHS goal of vaccinating 90% of 19 to 35 month olds against whooping cough. Georgia barely missed at 87.5%.
- 4. Infections control** - Medicaid coverage of flu shots with no co-pay - 0 points. Georgia, and 13 other states do not require Medicaid coverage for flu shots with no co-pay for beneficiaries under 65.
- 5. Extreme weather events preparedness** - 0 points. 15 states have climate change adaptation plans that are complete. Georgia and 34 other states do not.
- 6. Community resiliency** - children and preparedness - 0 points. Thirty states mandate all licensed child-care facilities to have a multi-hazard written evacuation and relocation plan. Georgia and 19 other states do not.
- 7. Emergency Management** - Emergency management accreditation - **1 point**. Twenty-nine states have been accredited by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP). Georgia is accredited by EMAP.
- 8. Health System Preparedness** - Nurse Licensure Compact - 0 points. Georgia and 25 other states do not participate in a nurse licensure compact.
- 9. Public Health Laboratories** - Surge workforce - 0 points. 37 states have enough staffing capacity to work five, 12-hour days for six to eight weeks in response to an infectious disease outbreak, such as novel influenza H1N1. Georgia and 12 states reported a lack of enough staff capacity for such an event.
- 10. Public Health Labs** - Chemical terrorism preparedness - **1 point**. Georgia and 48 states increased or maintained their LRN-C chemical capacity.





## Trust for America's Health evaluates public health preparedness

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emergencies, maintaining a stable medical countermeasure strategy, and helping communities learn how to be more resilient and to cope with and recover from emergencies. The report also concludes that instead of tackling the continuing concerns, the progress of the past 10 years is now at risk due to factors including:

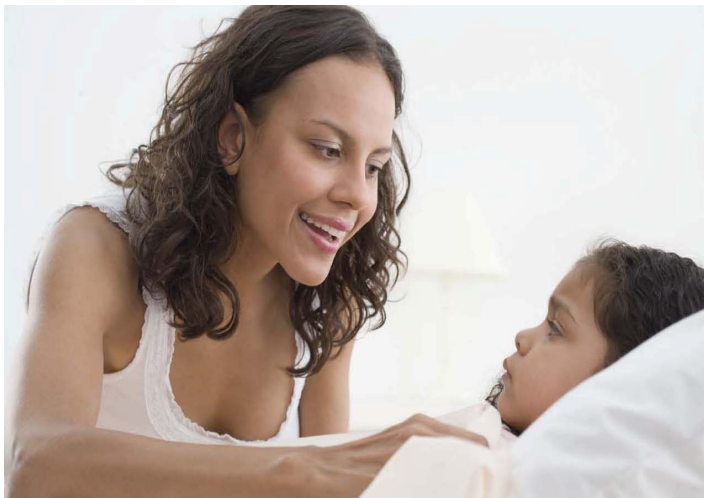
- **Outdated Congressional Authority:** Reauthorization of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act of 2006 (PAPHA) [previously known as the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Act of 2002] has languished in Congress for over a year;
- **Federal Budget Cuts:** After September 11th, it was widely recognized that there was no systematic support for state and local communities to prepare for public health emergencies, and Congress acted quickly to fill that gap. These are the only funds dedicated to help state and local health departments with the ability to prepare and respond to a range of health emergencies, including bioterror attacks, natural disasters, foodborne illnesses and emerging infectious diseases. From fiscal years (FY) 2005 to 2012, however, there has been more than a 38 percent cut to these

federal funds from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention used to support state and local preparedness (adjusted for inflation), and additional cuts are expected.

- **State Budget Cuts:** 29 states have cut their public health budgets from FY 2010-11 to FY 2011-12. Budgets in 23 states decreased for two or more years in a row, and budgets in 14 states decreased for three or more years in a row. According to a survey by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), 48 state health agencies (SHAs) reported experiencing budget cuts since 2008. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), states have experienced overall budgetary shortfalls of \$540 billion combined from FY 2009 to FY 2012 and 31 states have projected or closed budget gaps totaling \$55 billion in FY 2013.

- **Job and Program Cuts:** Due to budget cuts, state and local health departments have cut more than 45,700 jobs across the country since 2008.4 During 2011, 57 percent of all local health departments reduced or eliminated at least one program. Emergency preparedness was the hardest hit - with 23 percent of local health departments reporting a reduction.

## Early seasonal influenza infections may signal a "bad" flu season



An increase in influenza activity in December (2012) is the earliest that has been seen since the 2003-04 season. Because of this early uptick, experts are warning that this flu season may be the most severe in a decade. According to surveillance reports, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say the flu strain, H3N2 is matched well with the flu vaccine for this season. A CDC telebriefing from December estimated that about 123 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed this season and ap-

proximately 112 million of the distributed doses have been given, or about 37% of the U.S. population is vaccinated.

Thomas Frieden, MD, CDC Director also stressed that during a bad flu year, when there are lots of cases, there are more people who may have severe illness from influenza. He said, "It's not necessarily that the strain is more dangerous, but as more people are exposed and infected, the chance for more severe symptoms increases."

Sometimes certain strains of influenza do tend to hit the elderly or young kids or vulnerable people harder than other strains. However, for any one individual, any strain of flu can be life threatening. Therefore, it is recommended that everyone over the age of six months get vaccinated for influenza.

In addition to vaccination, certain steps to avoid infection are recommended. This includes washing your hands with soap and water often, covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve and staying home when you are sick. The symptoms of influenza include fever/chills, muscle/body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, headaches, cough, and fatigue. Most people who get the flu recover in a few days to less than two weeks. Others may develop complications such as pneumonia, ear infections, bronchitis or sinus infections.





## Building resilient communities for disasters, health, and wellness

Research shows that individuals and organizations that are prepared for disasters fare better than those who are not. By learning about threats that could potentially affect our communities, and then making preparations about how to respond to the threats, we can mitigate the effects of the threat should it occur. The first step is often the hardest to take; however, it is necessary to start the process. First, communities must assemble the appropriate people to conduct a hazard vulnerability assessment. This is a fairly straight-forward evaluation of any and all threats that could potentially affect their community.



For instance, most people in Georgia would agree that a weather incident is the number one threat with statewide impact. Severe thunderstorms can produce lightning which could knock out power, start wildfires, damage structures or even kill people. Heavy rain from these storms could cause flash floods, vehicle accidents, damage to structures, or sink holes (erosion). Tornadoes are frequently spawned from thundertorms and destroy everything in their paths. Impacted communities could face years of economic recovery from a destructive storm.

Other weather events like winter ice storms can knock out power, down trees, and cause damage to buildings or close roads, shutting off emergency services to some locations. Loss of power would require a different response depending on whether it occurs during the summer when temperatures are dangerously high or in the winter when we often experience freezing temperatures.

Realistically, communities must develop plans for many different scenarios and must include every discipline that could play a role in the response. Also important is Identifying resources that are available to the community.

As planners identify resources, they should identify ancillary resources such as gas for generators or trucks to move equipment or trailers. In short, planners must attempt to define every possible resource, record it and share it with other responders. This holds true for equipment, supplies, facilities, food, finances and even people. If agreements are needed to use resources, these need to be identified and put in place before an event.

After making a plan and identifying resources, communities need to hold exercises and drills to test their plan. Exercising the plan is an opportunity to build relationships and strengthen the plan by testing capabilities, identifying gaps and mobilizing resources. Evaluation of the plan, policies and procedures after every exercise is an important part of preparation. This gives every organization and individual involved in the planning process an opportunity to see how well the plan works and to share ideas for improvement.

In addition to preparing our communities for disaster, we must prepare ourselves for the challenges of responding to incidents. By staying healthy, we are less likely to become a victim, and are more ready to assist others in a disaster. A healthy lifestyle includes eating healthy, getting proper rest and exercise and keeping up-to-date on immunizations. For a schedule of adult immunizations, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/index.html>.

Additionally, we should make sure that we have a family emergency plan, an emergency kit and that we are informed about our family's preparedness. For more information on how to prepare your family and home for an emergency visit <http://www.ready.gov/> and <http://www.fema.gov>.





## Celebrate Healthy North Georgia event recognizes 21 organizations

For every one dollar spent on the prevention of chronic health conditions, approximately \$21 in future medical costs are saved. This was the message from organizers of the Celebrate Healthy North Georgia on January 17th at Lanier Technical College in Forsyth County. District 2 Public Health along with community partners from the 13-county district came together to celebrate and recognize 21 organizations that have implemented programs to improve health in their communities.

“Twenty-one organizations were chosen from nominations from our 13 counties to represent the savings that can be realized by prevention,” stated Anderson Flen, Health Promotions Coordinator for District 2 Public Health. “This also shows that there are a lot of people, businesses and organizations working to improve health, as well as access to health and wellness resources in our area.”

Keynote speakers for the event were Carolyn Crump, PhD and James Emery, MPH from the Gillings School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina. Their work to improve public health, promote individual well-being, and eliminate health disparities has been recognized, nationally and globally. Currently, the duo is spreading the message about health problems caused by obesity, to community leaders across the United States. Their informative presentation described ways that communities can address obesity, as they shared successful initiatives that other communities and organizations have implemented. In addition, the event featured breakout sessions on: Grants and Funding Sources for Healthier Communities; Building Resilient Communities; Healthy Community Policy Tools; Built Environmental Decisions that Improve and Create Healthier Business Assets; and Making Policy Decisions with Health and Wellness in Mind.

The event concluded with the presentation of certificates to these 21 organizations:

- 1. Lavonia Organic Community Garden (Franklin County)** - Addresses obesity issues among children and adults by offering fresh fruits and vegetables and demonstrating how to prepare fruits and vegetables for meals.
- 2. Boys and Girls Clubs (Hall County)** - Provides 150 minutes of physical activity to children they serve, and provides education on proper nutrition and healthy eating through Club Fit.
- 3. Toccoa-Stephens County YMCA** - Works with local pediatricians to confront childhood obesity by exploring insurance options and grants to pay for personal trainer, nutritionist, and fitness facility membership for entire family. Hosts free health and wellness clinics throughout

the year and offers family programs, youth sports, adult fitness, wellness, swimming, summer camps, gymnastics, and karate.

- 4. Average Joe Boot Camp (Hall County)** - Provides seminars to motivate and educate about health and wellness, along with grocery store tours to show how to eat healthy.
- 5. Osborne Wood Products (Stephens County)** - This manufacturing facility has installed a gym for employees and offers incentives for employees who use the gym and adopt a healthy lifestyle.
- 6. 1st Franklin Financial Corporation (Stephens County)** - Sponsors a phased 12-week wellness plan for employees that incorporates contests and initiatives to keep individuals on track. This initiative also incorporates a green challenge to reduce waste of paper and other resources.
- 7. Dawson County Schools** - Have been recognized nationally for making their campus a healthy place for students and staff. Dawson County Schools have also been participating with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation since 2007 to reduce childhood obesity and provide children with healthier lifestyle choices.
- 8. Step of Faith Outreach, Inc. (Franklin County)** - Focuses on nutrition to alleviate hunger and malnutrition in children ages 1 - 18 years. They address the negative effects that malnutrition has on an individual's health, educational development and growth.
- 9. Cedar Hill Enrichment Center (Hall and Forst Counties)** - This sustainable living center is dedicated to community education and outreach through holistic and resilient ways of living with the Earth and each other.
- 10. City of Gainesville** - Adopted a Smoke-free Air Ordinance which bans smoking in enclosed public spaces and in enclosed areas of employment. The city also established an employee clinic and comprehensive wellness program which includes a network of multi-use trails and other recreational facilities.
- 11. Georgia Mountain Food Bank** - A service for people in Northeast Georgia that provides a vital link between sources of food supplies and community-based partners that help get food into the hands of those who need it.
- 12. Forsyth County Schools** - Implemented initiatives around concussion management and heat related injury prevention program. Nurses at all Forsyth County schools are locally funded and the schools have in place a healthy eating program.
- 13. Greenway Forsyth County Parks and Recreation and Healthcare Association (HCA) of Forsyth County** - Green

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## Celebrate Healthy North Georgia event recognizes 21 organizations

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way is about conservation, recreation, environmental education, and alternative transportation. This initiative is an investment in the future of Forsyth County and promotes open spaces for people as well as natural areas for plants and animals. The HCA is a collective voice for current healthcare issues affecting the community and provides a conduit for information and resources (like Greenway) to ensure the highest quality of healthcare to meet the needs of those living and working in Forsyth County.

**14. Healthy Hall County** - This government fitness program is for the employees of Hall County, their dependents and retirees. Their desire is to create a healthier and happy workforce by providing tools to successfully reach their overall fitness goals.

**15. Royston Wellness Park (Franklin County)** - This wellness park is a 43 acre development used for fitness and outdoor activities. It features 1.2 miles of paved walking trails with fitness stations to assist therapy patients (heart disease) in their journey to good health and rehabilitation.

**16. Healthy Beginnings (Hall County)** - This collaborative between United Way, Good News Clinics, Family Connections Network, Gainesville Parks and Recreation, Vision 2030 and Northeast Georgia Medical Center focuses on children under five years of age. Not wanting to duplicate efforts to reduce obesity by other community organizations within the school setting, this collaborative targets younger children by providing education to parents, grandparents, and other caregivers of young children about developing good nutritional habits early in life.

**17. Direct Medical Imaging** - Located on the campus of Lanier Technical College Manufacturing Development Center in Gainesville, Direct Medical Imaging provides an alternative MRI service to the community. This self-pay service is designed to benefit patients with health spending accounts, high deductible insurance plans, and those without insurance by providing cost effective, high-end imaging.

**18. Legacy Link, Inc.** - Offers several initiatives for seniors

in our area. The Chronic Disease Self-Management Program focuses on tools and problem solving techniques to help people with chronic conditions to better manage their health and life. The Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program is a USDA sponsored program that provides vouchers for fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables to seniors based on age and income. The Silver Sneakers program includes fitness classes, fitness equipment, and senior centers to keep seniors active.

**19. Union County Middle School** - The Trail program allows students to connect with nature, history and culture in their backyard. The program incorporates math and science, music and art, and everything in between to strengthen the middle school's curriculum. This collaborative includes partners like the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, U.S. Forestry Service, Union Park and Recreation and even Michelle Obama's Let's Move Campaign.

**20. The Rainbow Community Seniors of Habersham County** - This is a grassroots organization of senior citizens who have "cast down their buckets where they are" to do a variety of activities to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They work with local agencies on nutrition, healthy cooking and exercise, as well as taking regular field trips to stay active, involved and motivated.

**21. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (Forsyth County)** - A national leader in pediatric healthcare, CHOA is leading the way to address adult issues that are impacting children, such as hypertension, liver and kidney disease and type 2 diabetes. Strong4Life is an initiative to lessen the impact of obesity in children by sounding the alarm on the direct attack of fast food, television, video games, junk food and splashy advertising for unhealthy behaviors. Additionally, they seek to influence policies for environmental changes like sidewalks and safe places for children to play.

For more information about the Celebrate Healthy North Georgia initiative, go to [www.celebratehealthynorthgeorgia.org](http://www.celebratehealthynorthgeorgia.org)

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David N. Westfall, M.D., MPH, CPE  
District Health Director

Mark Palen  
Emergency Preparedness Director

Donna Sue Campbell  
Healthcare Liaison

Brandin DiBlasi  
Training Coordinator

Dave Palmer  
Public Information Officer  
Editor of *The Sentinel*  
[dbpalmer@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:dbpalmer@dhr.state.ga.us)