



Georgia Taps into Its Private Resources & Improves Its SNS Operations

The devastating events after Hurricane Katrina exposed many gaps in our nation's capacity for responding to large scale emergencies. To address these gaps, state health agencies have been exploring innovative approaches to preparing for all public health hazards. For example, some states have tapped into a plethora of private resources and supplies by partnering with the private sector. One state in particular, Georgia, has successfully secured support from the private sector for improving its public health preparedness capacity. Through its partnership with the Georgia Business Force of the Business Executives for National Security (BENS), the Georgia Division of Public Health has improved its capacity for responding to public health emergencies and provided valuable lessons for other states planning to enhance their preparedness capacities by partnering with the private sector.

BENS is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides business leaders the opportunity to volunteer their expertise, resources, and manpower to help improve our nation's security and preparedness. By establishing partnerships with the public sector, the Business Force Program of BENS aims to improve emergency preparedness by filling in the gaps that neither the public sector, nor private sector, can fill alone. In Georgia, these gaps were filled when Georgia public health officials and members of the Georgia Business Force Program of BENS successfully partnered to develop and test plans for enhanced mass dispensing of antibiotics and other emergency pharmaceuticals from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). During a large dispensing exercise with Georgia's public health sector, BENS helped public health agencies in Georgia create an SNS dispensing model that allows large businesses to dispense directly to their employees and their employees' families, while ensuring a number of business volunteers are still available to assist public health officials with dispensing to the general public.

From the experiences of the public and private sector participants in the dispensing exercise, researchers at the Center for Public Health Preparedness and Research at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health identified five valuable lessons from the partnership's experience and its SNS dispensing activities in Georgia:

1. *Strategy is key.* The partnership was successful because it was strategic in its outreach to the government and to state health officials. By being sensitive to the differences in public health and business cultures, the partnership was able to maintain their focus on the shared goal of community preservation.
2. *Benefits must be clear.* As opposed to ad hoc collaboration, prior collaboration between the private and public sectors has obvious benefits for state-based efforts in mass prophylaxis dispensing from the SNS. Because the partnership clearly represented these benefits, it won support for the partnership from all stakeholders.
3. *Challenges must be addressed now, not later.* Participants from both the public and private sectors identified several challenges to collaboration: (1) cultural differences

between the private and public sectors; (2) barriers to volunteer engagement; (3) potential liability concerns; and (4) barriers to sharing confidential and sensitive information. However, because of their prior collaboration, the cultural differences between the two sectors have united to form a working relationship based on mutual respect and trust. In addition, the two sectors are currently working on ways to lessen the concerns over shared information and potential liability risks. As a result, the partnership has fostered its membership growth and expanded its preparedness efforts in Georgia by addressing these challenges now.

4. *Proposed Model Must Work for Everyone.* The BENS-Georgia Division of Public Health partnership model was successful in Georgia, because it focused on manageable and measurable projects that corresponded with each sector's mission and goals. In doing so, the partnership created a successful model that worked for everyone.
5. *Linking shared goals is essential.* While links between business and public health efforts have often been limited in the past, their underlying principles can be linked to a shared need for community continuity. For example, in the event of a public health emergency, business stability depends upon the health of the community, and the health of the community depends upon the ability of businesses to provide essential resources and services. Public health agencies also depend upon businesses to ensure a functioning economy to support emergency response and mitigation activities. By linking their shared needs for community continuity, the partnership in Georgia was able to successfully see beyond their differences and work toward a mutual goal of improving the state's SNS dispensing operations.¹

According to Lee Smith, Bioterrorism Preparedness Director at the Georgia Division of Public Health, public health officials in Georgia believe that they have found yet another way to ensure the safety of the citizens of Georgia through their collaborative efforts with BENS. Their model for collaborating with BENS may be useful to other states that are developing similar partnerships with the private sector to improve SNS readiness. The lessons learned in Georgia may also provide valuable insights into the complexity of private and public sector partnerships and the need for further evaluation of similar partnerships across the country.

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The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials is the national nonprofit organization representing the state and territorial health agencies of the United States, the U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. ASTHO's members, the chief health officials in these jurisdictions, are dedicated to formulating and influencing sound public health policy, and assuring excellence in state-based public health practice.

Reference

¹ Buehler, J.W., Whitney, E.A., and Berkelman, R.L. "Business and Public Health Collaboration for Emergency Preparedness in Georgia: A Case Study." *BMC Public Health*. 2006, 6:285.