
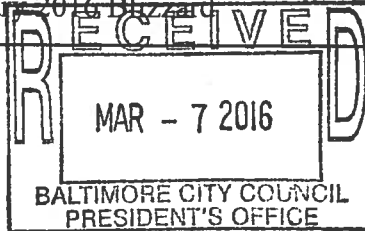


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	Subject	CB 16-0285R – Investigative Hearing – Response to the January 2016 Blizzard		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall



March 8, 2016

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill 16-0280R – Investigative Hearing – Response to the January 2016 Blizzard. The purpose of this bill is to review the lessons learned from this crisis and to explore what best practices should guide the City’s response to future storms of this magnitude.

Overview:

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is a primary agency in the City Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). BCHD is the lead agency for Emergency Support Function-8 Health and Medical (ESF-8). Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) EMS is also a lead agency for ESF-8, and BCHD works closely with BCFD EMS on planning and response efforts related to public health during emergencies. On an ongoing basis, BCHD engages in planning and coordination with City hospitals and other healthcare facilities, including dialysis centers, as part of its emergency preparedness planning through its Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response and Field Health Services program.

BCHD is also the lead agency for Emergency Support Function-16 Animal Protection planning in Baltimore City. The Bureau of Environmental Health and Office of Public Health Preparedness in BCHD work closely with BARCS on their plans for the City animal shelter. BCHD is also a support agency to Emergency Support Function-6 Mass Care and Feeding and provides health and medical care services to residents who seek temporary housing at City emergency shelters.

BCHD Blizzard Preparedness:

BCHD began preparing for Winter Storm Jonas on Tuesday, January 19th when the agency began reaching out to dialysis centers to discuss storm preparations, the need to adjust clients’ treatment schedules if possible, and the need to request transportation as soon as adjustments were made.

On Wednesday, January 20th BCHD began preparing for EOC activation and the possibility that the storm might lead to large scale power outages. BCHD updated contact lists for Aging and CARE clients, backed up important emergency response files, prepared supplies and staff for the possibility that emergency shelters might be stood up, ensured that backup generators were tested

Comments

and that fuel was on site, shared City preparedness information with hospitals, prepared and distributed public messaging related to the storm, worked with Meals on Wheels and Eating Together program sites to ensure seniors received boxed meals prior to the storm, and reached out to BARCS regarding their preparedness efforts and needs related to the shelter.

BCHD held a conference call with City hospitals and participated in a conference call with DHMH on Thursday, January 23rd. BCHD reached out to program managers with BCHD to begin planning for the possibility of COOP activation within the department and staged laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots at its FHS office to ensure that the program would be able to maintain its essential service of providing medical transport for Medicaid clients.

On Friday the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (OPHPR) conducted a Just-in-Time training for BCHD staff who were assigned to assist with tracking power outages at healthcare facilities should the City experience widespread power outages. Senior staff and OPHPR were given 800MHz radios as well in case of widespread power outages.

BCHD Blizzard Response and Recovery:

OPHPR staff served as EOC representatives for BCHD beginning on Friday, January 22nd and remained in the EOC 24/7 through Thursday, January 28th.

OPHPR held daily conference calls with City hospitals through Tuesday to provide updates on the storm and the City's response and recovery efforts. OPHPR worked closely with hospitals and the Mayor's Office of Human Services and the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (MOEM) in the EOC to help coordinate the pickup and transport of homeless individuals from hospital EDs to the Winter Shelter. OPHPR also worked with MOEM to help coordinate the transport of critical hospital staff who were unable to report to work before Phase 3 of the Snow Plan went into effect.

The Division of Aging and CARE Services worked with its contracted vendors, Meals on Wheels and Overlea Caterers, to ensure that meals continued to be delivered to clients. Meals on Wheels delivered 2,928 frozen meals its clients the week following the blizzard. 2,931 meals were delivered to congregate meal sites between Monday and Friday following the blizzard.

The ESF-8 response priority once the storm passed and the City began its recovery process was to work with partners in the EOC to ensure access to life-sustaining healthcare and to ensure that the 911 system and EMS was not overwhelmed with calls.

BCHD established a protocol for responding to 311 calls from the public regarding medical and dialysis concerns. The majority of these calls were plowing requests for DOT, but BCHD followed up with individuals to collect additional information regarding their medical need and to let them know that dialysis centers were prioritizing patient appointments. BCHD was able to leverage its MOU with Northern Pharmacy to develop a protocol to assist individuals with getting prescriptions refilled and delivered to residents' homes if needed. Following up on 311 calls began on Saturday and continued through the Thursday following the storm. In total, BCHD spoke with over 203 individuals who contacted 311 with medical or dialysis concerns.

BCHD worked with Department of Transportation to ensure that healthcare infrastructure including hospitals, dialysis centers, methadone clinics and other behavioral health clinics were prioritized for plowing. The agency also worked closely with Department of Transportation and Department of General Services to ensure that BCHD building sites and intersections where the Needle Exchange program operates were cleared so that agency operations could continue to function.

BCHD worked with the Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) and National Guard to ensure the transport of residents to life-sustaining treatments, including dialysis, chemo, and radiation, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. BCHD's Field Health Services (FHS) program provides transport for Medicaid recipients through its vendor TransDev. For this event, FHS worked with dialysis centers to arrange transportation for individuals deemed critical by the centers. On Monday, this included FHS's normal population and also MTA Mobility patients and individuals who normally drive themselves. FHS continued to assist individuals who normally are self-transporters to dialysis through Thursday as some streets remained impassable. BCFD and National Guard personnel and 4x4 vehicles and Humvees were used to assist individuals whose streets had not yet been plowed with getting to life sustaining appointments.

Throughout the blizzard event, BCHD engaged in public messaging around Code Blue, snow shoveling tips, pet safety, and BCHD response actions.

Planning for Future Snow Events:

Many of BCHD's actions during this event were based on our experience during the back-to-back snowstorms in February 2010. As the City plans and prepares for future snow events, BCHD recommends that the City engage in public messaging several days ahead of storms when possible to encourage personal preparedness actions such as stocking up on food and water, making sure that prescription medications are filled, and bringing pets indoors. Clear communication regarding the responsibility of property owners to clear snow from in front of their homes and around their vehicles is also needed as many of the 311 calls for medical needs came from individuals who needed their street, sidewalk, or alley cleared to get to medical appointments. Initiatives like the Youth Snow Shoveling program instituted by DOT this winter should be further developed to help address the shoveling needs of our elderly, disabled, and medically fragile residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill. The Health Department will be present at the hearing to offer additional testimony and answer any questions.

cc: Angela Gibson, Office of the Mayor