ESF8 Network Communications Annex

Introduction

The Louisiana Emergency Support Function – 8 (ESF-8) Network Communications Annex supplements the ESF-8 Preparedness & Response Network Coalition Plan. The purpose of the annex is to identify systems, communication resources, processes and methodologies to collect real-time data reported from Louisianas healthcare systems during disasters.

Timely communication is crucial when the nature of the emergency may overwhelm the capacity of the communication systems in place. The ESF-8 Network is a coalition of members who follow plans and have common understandings of the systems used in sharing information with institutions and response partners during emergency events.

Purpose & Scope

This annex outlines the people, processes, systems, and platforms necessary for maintaining communication and continuity of information sharing during response to any emergency event.

Continuity of communications capabilities and interoperability must be established and maintained when responding to missions between regional partners, healthcare coalition leads, and state ESF-8 response partners. These missions may include resource requests for any of the following:

- Supplies and equipment for medical surge
- Evacuation support and transportation assets to support a healthcare facility
- Critical infrastructure support

Situation

Louisiana ESF-8 identifies the following scenarios to prompt activation of the communications annex:

- Natural Hazards: Hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and other severe weather incidents (including freezing/icing events) in which physical and critical infrastructure impacts to communities is widespread.
- No-notice events in which communications infrastructure may be compromised for a vast area – i.e., Cybersecurity incident or technology breach/failure.
- Other no-notice or planned events which have the potential to overwhelm health and medical resources resulting in the activation of plans and coordination of activities between local, regional, and state agencies.

Assumptions

1. Any part of the communications annex may be activated in anticipation of or response to an event.
2. Healthcare entities maintain and activate internal communications plans to assist with information sharing within and among employees, patients, and visitors.
3. Healthcare entities maintain plans and equipment to assist in communicating with external partners including other patient care organizations as well as response partners who may provide support during disasters.
4. Individual agencies, response entities, and organizations at local, regional, and state levels may simultaneously implement other response and communications plans.
5. All ESF-8 coalition network partners maintain and understand their response role, purpose, and triggers for using redundant communications platforms.
6. When communication resources fail, requests may be made to local, state, or federal partners. Provider or local level requests should be routed through Parish OEPs via WebEOC, when possible, for onward processing to ESF-2.

Applicability

This communications annex applies to all Regional and State ESF-8 network partners and their ability to maintain robust situational awareness through communications pathways. The following sections outline the methods, networks, platforms, and systems primarily used to enable coordination during events. These methods and systems are routinely used for meeting the federal requirement of Healthcare Coalitions (HCC) through the Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) to conduct and report outcomes of redundant communications drills, at least twice a year. Additionally, hospitals and other healthcare

entities must demonstrate the ability to communicate with stakeholders during emergencies as outlined within their emergency operations plans and procedures per regulatory requirements.

Methods and Networks

The most common methods and networks utilized daily and planned for use during disasters are outlined in the section below. In Louisiana, a critical funding source for emergency communications equipment enabling redundancies is through the Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) grant.

Radios

Radios are an essential backup, redundant means of communication within and among healthcare partners. Multiple forms of radio communications may be used in an event. Common radio communication types are outlined below:

2-way Radios: These are used within a facility or across a specified area of operations, usually smaller in proximity. These radios do not need radio towers to function and may be preferred for internal response operations or those isolated to a general area of impact or operations – i.e., at a medical shelter or a site during medical institution evacuation.

700 MHz Radios: These radios operate using the Louisiana Wireless Information Network (LWIN) system, defined in the next section, Systems and Platforms. The 700 MHz radios are used by most within the ESF-8 network and by healthcare partners across the state. They are pre-programmed to channels and allow for communication between and among entities including state and regional ESF-8 partners, EMS agencies, and Parish offices of homeland security. The *LDH Bureau of Community Preparedness Communications Annex* outlines the channels within the fleet map used by ESF-8 programmed radios. The primary channels used by Hospitals and ESF-8 Network Partners are:

- HRSA Channels
- OPH Channels
- Parish level channels (Regional OHSEP channels)

The ESF-8 network has issued and maintains a cache of pre-programmed radios for use in disasters. Both the Louisiana HPP program and the Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) program have caches of additional radios used for response in the field by providers. Full lists of equipment issued and available for use are outlined in the *Tactical Communications Annex*.

HAM (Amateur) Radios: These radios are specialized and have the capability to communicate across much of the continental United States. They are less commonly used among the ESF-8 network of partners as they require an abundance of equipment, specialized operators, and are deemed to be less secure. This is considered a last line of communication according to the ESF-8 PACE communications plan.

Phones

Telephone communication is the primary method of communicating during an emergency event as it can allow for expedited, uninterrupted information sharing in real-time. Two types of phone communication may be used by any ESF-8 network and external responses partners.

Landline phones: This may also be referred to as plain old telephone system (POTS). While today, cellular phones may be the primary method of phone communication daily, the landline phone is a redundant method of phone communication and is commonly outlined in plans.

Cellular Phones: Cellular phones allow for communication by way of cellular towers, associated with mobile service providers which enable phone communication despite physical location. More details about the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS), the Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP), and the Wireless Priority Services (WPS) programs can be found the on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) website at fcc.gov.

Internet

VOIP: Voice over internet protocol (VoIP) is a type of phone system using an internet connection to make and receive calls, rather than traditional landlines. VOIP does not need to have a phone system to be successful - desktop, laptop, or tablets may be used – only internet is required.

Satellite

BGAN: A Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN) device is maintained by the Louisiana Hosptial Preparedness Program (HPP). This device allows for satellite connectivity to the internet through ethernet cable or wifi.

Satellite Phones: The LDH EOC as well as the HPP maintains a cache of satellite phones available at the time of an event in which cellular service has been compromised. These devices may also be requested in anticipation for large scale events where the loss of communications services – phones and internet in particular – is very probable.

Starlink: A satellite internet constellation service that can be launched following an event to provide internet access to users in an area with widespread communication and internet outages. Currently, some parishes, state agencies, and the state ESF-2 maintain access to Starlink which can be deployed immediately following an event.

Systems and Platforms

The systems and platforms outlined below are utilized primarily by state, regional and local response partners to maintain situational awareness and request resources during an event. Some of the platforms are used directly by healthcare providers whereas some platforms are solely used by response partners. During widespread internet outages, the request to re-establish secure internet will be a priority for ongoing response functionality. In the absence of internet capability, alternative methods of collecting and reporting information will be established and utilized at the time of the event. These alternative methods will include collection of information by alternative methods – see ESF-8 Primary, Alternate, Contingency, and Emergency (PACE) communications plan.

ESF8 Managed Platforms

At Risk Registry (ARR): an internet dependent, patient tracking system used by hospitals as well as home health and hospice agencies. The use of the ARR is voluntary for hospitals however may be mandated for use during impending hurricanes in which sheltering-in-place and/or evacuations are probable. This system collects clinical details of patients which assists with matching patients to a bed and transportation type should an evacuation be warranted. The ARR also may be used during no-notice events, such as Mass Casualty Incidents (MCI) in which patients will be brought to hospitals and will need to be tracked for family notification and reunification. User guides and tools for using the ARR can be requested through LDH ESF-8 or the HPP Program.

ESF8 Portal: an internet dependent, resource management and operational status reporting platform used by healthcare entities. In anticipation of a large-scale event or in response to a no-notice event, the use of various ESF-8 portal applications may be mandated by the LDH Health Standards Section. The applications listed below have report features which allow the state to monitor timeliness of updates, trend data and collate information for situation reporting to state agencies and Unified Command Croup (UCG) with the Governor.

The messaging application is designed using the Everbridge emergency communications software popular among public safety entities across the nation. Both Everbridge and the ESF-8 portal have redundancies in place including back-up servers that ensure functionality throughout an event. The messaging application also allows administrative users capability to track receipt and acknowledgement of communications distributed.

The essential applications of the ESF-8 portal used for response are:

> Messaging – used pre-event to notify hospitals or healthcare provider types of mandatory reporting, required information to submit and other details of an event which may influence readiness postures and decision-making.

> MSTAT – used pre and post event to provide facility details of census, operational status, power and other critical infrastructure status.

> Resource Management – this application sources patient routing during MCI events, or other time sensitive illnesses.

Help guides, manuals and other tools to assist with the use of the ESF-8 Portal applications are posted to the LHAF website by the HPP staff and may be available upon request to assist provider level users.

Google Drive/SharePoint/Other Shared Drives: internet-based systems used by some State ESF-8 response partners to share and track information in a single location. This type of platform is essential for collating information received which must be used to monitor a situation or issue.

Email: internet-based, secured messaging system used commonly and consistently for daily operations as well as during emergency response to share information, extend calendar invites for situation awareness and information sharing calls.

State Managed Platforms

LWIN: Louisiana Wireless Information Network (LWIN) is one of the largest radio systems in the country. Currently Louisiana has 141 active towers. LWIN is a trunked system (P25) and operates in the 700MHz and 800MHz bands. The P25 system operates at 95% or better coverage when using a radio inside a building within a major metropolitan area and 95% or better coverage at outside street level.

WebEOC: internet-based, secured software system used by the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the sixty-four parishes, individual response agencies and emergency management partners to monitor and manage activities before, during and after an emergency or disaster. The WebEOC platform allows for information sharing among all response partners and is the method to formally request and track the resources needed in response to events. The following levels of WebEOC support ESF8 preparedness, response and recovery are outlined below.

- Parish WebEOC
- GOHSEP WebEOC
- LDH WebEOC

Preparedness Activities

A. Training & Education
   a. WebEOC – online, on-demand and per request by GOHSEP
   b. ESF-8 Portal – online, on-demand and per request by LDH ESF-8 team, HPP staff and ADRCs
   c. Other – other sources of communications education and training can be requested and coordinated through GOHSEP, parish EOCs, and LDH EOC.
B. Radio Roll call
   a. Statewide – conducted weekly between ESF-8 leads and regional HCC leads/hospital DRCs.
   b. Regional – frequency varies by region; some conduct weekly, others conduct monthly. At minimum regions conduct redundant communications drills, inclusive of radio operations at least twice a year.
C. Pre-event Notifications – sent by way of the ESF-8 Portal messaging application, the LDH EOC notification system, emails distributed by state and regional network partners. Notifications may include the following types of requests for action by facilities/providers:
   a. Update facility information
      i. MSTAT – configuration of bed types, generator and fuel information, critical infrastructure providers, etc.
      ii. Resource Management – bed availability, clinical services, and emergency resources
      iii. People and Users – contact information and user access information
   b. Alternate communication methods – Primary, Alternate, Contingency and Emergency (PACE) plans, inclusive of multiple people and methods to contact during events
   c. Reporting deadlines and call schedules for situation reporting
D. Incident management communications planning documentation developed and shared among appropriate network response partners' pre-event.
   a. Incident Action Plans (IAPs)
   b. Incident Command System (ICS) form 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan
   c. Hospital Incident Command System (HICS) form 205-A, Communications list
   d. State and Region PACE plans

Resources & Attachments

Resources & References	Location
ESF8 HPP Communications Equipment	On file – HPP; Accessed upon request
BCP Communications Package	On file – BCP/LDH EOC; Accessed upon request
Incident Action Plan (IAP) – HICS 205A, Communications List	Cal Hospital HICS Website
ICS 205 – Incident Radio Communications Plan	FEMA ICS Website
ESF-8 Network Map – of State and Regional Contacts	On file – updated regularly
ESF-8 EOC & TOC PACE Communications Plan	On file – updated regularly
LDH-BCP Tactical Communications Annex	On file – BCP,
ESF8 Coalition Network Response Plan	LHAF – EP Website
ESF2 Communications Briefing for Healthcare Partners (August 2021)	LHAF – EP Website
ESF8 Portal & At-Risk Registry User Guides and Tutorials	LHAF – EP Website
Louisiana Emergency Operations Plan & Statewide Communications Plan	GOHSEP Website
Documents listed as on file can be requested by email to LHAEP@lhaonline.org or by contacting the HPP Grant office at 225-927-1228.	

Acronyms

ADRCs – Administrative Designated Regional Coordinator

BCP – Bureau of Community Preparedness, an Office of Public Health (OPH) program

DRC – Designated Regional Coordinator

EMS DRC – Emergency Medical Services DRC

EOC – Emergency Operations Center

ESF – Emergency Support Function

ESF-2 – Communications function

ESF-8 – Health and Medical Response function

GOHSEP – Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

HPP – Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) grant

HRSA – Health Resources and Service Administration; the former federal agency with oversight of the HPP grant. Some ESF-8 designated radio channels are labeled "HRSA" channels.

LDH – Louisiana Department of Health

LERN – Louisiana Emergency Response Network

LHA(F) – Louisiana Hospital Association (Foundation)

LWIN – Louisiana Wireless Information Network

PHERC – Public Health Emergency Response Coordinator

RMD – Regional Medical Director

TOC – Tactical Operations Center