



# REGION VII DISASTER HEALTH RESPONSE ECOSYSTEM

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**ANNUAL REPORT**  
OCTOBER 2023 - SEPTEMBER 2024



*"The true strength of the Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem lies in its collaborative spirit, where the project team unites local, state, and federal partners to enhance regional readiness and resilience. From facilitating community-focused training sessions and webinars to hosting the first-ever Region 7 Healthcare Coalition Coordinator Conference, this team ensures that every challenge is met with innovation, expertise, and unwavering commitment to community health and safety."*

**Dossy Felts, MBA, MHA, FACHE**

Associate Director of Administration and Operations,  
Global Center for Health Security,  
University of Nebraska Medical Center





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# INTRODUCTION

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During our sixth year (Federal FY2024), the Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem (R7DHRE) continued to pursue its cross-jurisdictional efforts to advance regional readiness, capacity, and capability for health care and public health crises. In an era of ever-present health care threats and challenges, the focus continues to be on providing health care delivery system tools to save lives and preserve continuity of operations. The R7DHRE team facilitated training sessions, webinars, and exercises in a wide array of fields, including infectious diseases, biological threats, radiation exposure, burns, chemical threats, trauma, and pediatric care.



These actions reached thousands of health care professionals and civilians across Region 7 and beyond. The R7DHRE also hosted the region's first-ever Healthcare Coalition Coordinator Conference, sharing best practices and developing stronger networks for health emergency response.

Additionally, the R7DHRE team addressed numerous topics in preparedness and response. Our Burn Specialty Team was vital in developing the inaugural Midwest Burn Plan for nine states. In active crisis response, we convened hospital associations, health care systems, and clinical laboratory experts to refine regional resources to address a shortage of blood culture bottles and its impact in the summer of 2024.

Finally, the R7DHRE team continued to strengthen the relationship with the Regional Disaster Health Response Systems from Regions 1, 4, and 8, building a true national network for health system response. Together, last year's efforts garnered new partners, increased optimization of current relationships, and strengthened the regional response to rapidly evolving health threats.





# ANSWERING THE CALL



Scan the code for more information on the R7DHRE Burn Specialty Team.

## Creating and Exercising a Plan

During the past year, the R7DHRE coordinated with the American Burn Association (ABA) and subject matter experts to create a Midwest Burn Region Disaster Plan. This created a framework for how the region would respond to a burn surge event and was the first of its kind.

To test the newly developed plan, the R7DHRE hosted a tabletop exercise to evaluate the plan's communication pathways, support nonburn facilities, and collaboration between ABA, R7DHRE, and Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR).

This exercise was attended by 120 participants from 53 organizations and resulted in significant improvement in the understanding of key areas of the Midwest Burn Region Disaster Plan. The event also highlighted a strong interest in future exercises, an expansion of collaboration with additional partners, and a motivation to enhance preparedness efforts at the local facility level.

## MIDWEST BURN REGION DISASTER RESPONSE



## Convening and Coordinating

In July of 2024, R7DHRE partners raised the alarm about a shortage of blood culture bottles and how it would impact patient care throughout the region. At the request of state hospital associations, the R7DHRE convened a group of subject matter experts to address the situation. This group included hospital leadership, laboratory specialists, and health care coalition leaders throughout Region 7. Through their coordination efforts, the R7DHRE was able to create a better picture of shared situational awareness, assist impacted facilities to formulate response plans, and maintain patient care throughout the region.



*"MHA's relationship with the R7DHRE has helped connect Missouri hospitals, health care, and community organizations to a broader network of partners,*

*subject matter experts, and resources to inform both preparedness and response efforts. Disasters do not stop at state lines and there is much to learn from our surrounding states, which makes multi-state, regional coordination not only a "nice to have" but a "need to have." The R7DHRE provides the mechanism for this."*

- Kara Amann-Kale

Director of Hospital Preparedness Programs  
Missouri Hospital Association



Scan the code to learn more about how the R7DHRE convenes, coordinates, and communicates during an event.

# TIMELINE OF KEY R7DHRE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## CRISIS STANDARDS OF CARE

Created Nebraska Crisis Standards of Care planning guidance document, codified into Nebraska law in 2021.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

Developed COVID-19 playbooks for risk mitigation and provided virtual technical assistance to community partners and various industries including meat processing, correctional facilities, and shelters.

2019

## LEGAL REFERENCE GUIDE

Authored a legal reference guide covering emergency declarations, 1135 waivers, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, and the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

## KNOWLEDGE CENTER

Integrated an incident management technology platform in 93 Nebraska counties for a shared operational perspective.

2020

2021

## SPECIALTY TEAMS

Assembled specialty teams employing an all-hazards approach, incorporating subject matter experts in planning, response, and recovery strategies that address a wide range of potential hazards or threats.

## MONOCLONAL ANTIBODIES

Led the monoclonal antibody distribution project, which resulted in 513 doses administered to long-term care residents to treat acute COVID-19 infection. Nebraska had one of the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates for long-term care residents among US states in 2020-2021.



*"I deeply appreciated that the process that R7DHRE took was to start with genuine collaborations and a spirit of working with large groups to complete both an exercise and draft plan. This was highly successful, and a fantastic example of growing regional level practical partnerships."*

- Chris Newton, MD, FACS, FAAP  
UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, Oakland

#### **COMMUNITIES MOST IMPACTED BY DISASTER**

Created a new line of effort to further efforts in addressing access to care and examining the ramifications of health disparities on pandemic morbidity, mortality, and disruptions to the health care system.

#### **INFORMATION SHARING**

Provided training and technical assistance in Nebraska's transition from incident management technology platform Knowledge Center to Juvare Systems.

**2022**

**2023**

**2024**

#### **SUPPLY CHAIN SHORTAGE RESPONSE**

Convened health care leaders from across the region to address the blood culture bottle shortage by sharing best practices and validating alternatives.

#### **BURN PLAN CREATION**

Partnered with the American Burn Association and 24 burn centers to create the first ever Midwest Region Burn Mass Casualty Operation Plan.

#### **PEDIATRIC "TRIPLEDEMIC"**

Convened 22 pediatric-capable hospitals in Region 7 to collaborate on expanding capacity and identified 8 cross-state transport teams for rapid pediatric care access.

#### **LEVEL 1 TRAUMA CENTERS**

Convened 30+ ACS trauma program managers throughout Region 7 to exchange best practices and trauma initiatives, aiming to enhance regional trauma care and collaboration.

#### **DISASTER EDUCATION**

Provided disaster trauma education sessions for EMS responders and health care providers, emphasizing all-hazard care treatment to enhance their readiness in responding to a wide range of traumatic incidents during emergencies.



# ABOUT THE NUMBERS



# 25,684

R7DHRE website visitors

- + Users from 56 countries and all 50 states, plus DC, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands
- + 139% increase in website traffic from previous year



# 1,802

webinar attendees

- + 97% of participants would recommend R7DHRE webinars
- + 94% increase in attendees' topic knowledge
- + 90% indicate attending activity will improve their team's performance
- + 12 webinars/520 hours of continuing education credit
- + 38 states/2 provinces reached



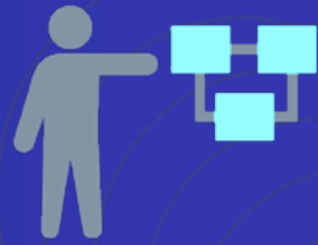


# 4,060

cumulative training hours

- + 593 professionals trained
- + 15 in-person courses provided
- + 9 states represented

# 13



exercises attended,  
consulted on, and facilitated

*Participation included:*

- + Development & Facilitation of new virtual Disaster Management and Emergency Preparedness course
- + Healthcare Coalition tabletop exercises
- + Full-scale exercises
- + Functional drills

# 21



local, regional, and national  
conference presentations

*Presentations included  
appearances at:*

- + NACCHO Preparedness Summit
- + NHCP Conference
- + Federal Agency meetings
- + Regional Health Care Symposia
- + State Trauma conferences
- + National Emerging Special Pathogens Training & Education Center webinars



*"Advanced Hazmat Life Support (AHLS) provided valid, organized, usable information for our area hazmat responders to use while caring for patients during specialized incidents. With R7DHRE's experienced, world-class instructors that are practicing toxicology professionals, they strengthened a weakness in our response model."* - Nik Kimbel, CHMM, NR-P

Creve Coeur Fire District, MO

# REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

- Air Methods
- Akron Children's Hospital
- American Burn Association
- American College of Surgeons
- American Society of Anesthesiologists
- Ascension Columbia St Mary's Hospital
- Ascension Milwaukee
- Ascension Via Christi St. Francis
- Avera Children's Hospital
- Avera McKennan Health Center & University Health Center
- Blank Children's Hospital
- Boys Town National Research Hospital
- Bryan Health Center
- CHI Health - St Elizabeth
- Children's Nebraska
- Children's Wisconsin
- Community Emergency Response Teams
- CoxHealth - Springfield
- CS Mott/ Michigan Medicine
- Detroit Receiving Hospital
- Gulf 7 Pediatric Disaster Network
- Hennepin Healthcare
- Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Kansas City Kansas Fire Dept/ IAFF District 2
- Loyola University Medical Center
- Mercy Hospital - Springfield
- Mercy Hospital - St Louis
- MercyOne Children's Hospital
- MetroHealth Medical Center
- Miami Valley Hospital
- Mid-America Regional Council
- Midwest-1 Disaster Medical Assistance Team
- Missouri Non-Urban Healthcare Coalitions
- Missouri State Emergency Management Agency
- Mountain Plains Regional Disaster Health Response System
- National Alliance on Radiation Readiness
- National Emerging Special Pathogens Training and Education Center
- Nationwide Children's Hospital
- Nebraska Plains Healthcare Coalition (NPHCC)







- Omaha Metropolitan Healthcare Coalition (OMHCC)
- OSF Healthcare - St. Anthony Medical Center
- Panhandle Region Medical Response System
- Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site
- Region 1 Regional Disaster Health Response System
- Region 7 Regional Emerging Special Pathogen Treatment Center
- Regions Hospital
- Research Medical Center - Grossman Burn Center
- Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers
- Rural Region One Medical Response Systems (RRORMS)
- Saint Louis Fusion Center
- Society of Disaster Medicine and Public Health
- Southeast Nebraska Healthcare Coalition (SENHCC)
- Southern Regional Disaster Response System
- SSM Health - Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital
- St. Louis Area Regional Response System – STARRS
- St. Louis Children's Hospital
- Team Rubicon
- Tri-Cities Medical Response System (TRIMRS)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Unity Point - St. Luke's
- University of Arizona – AHLS
- University of Chicago Medicine
- University of Cincinnati Burn Center
- University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
- University of Kansas Health System
- University of Wisconsin – Madison
- UNMC Global Center for Health Security
- Wesley Children's Hospital
- Western Regional Alliance for Pediatric Emergency Management

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS



## Chemical Specialty Team

Developed hazardous materials guidelines based on 20 of the most commonly encountered substances to supplement health care professionals' response to chemical emergencies.

Provided Advanced Hazmat Life Support courses garnering 125 trainees from four states, in conjunction created 61 new instructors for a total of 186 Region 7 providers.



## Biological Specialty Team

Enabled cross-organizational coordination by hosting three webinars focused on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, H5N1, and Mpox to foster situational awareness and information sharing during high-consequence infectious disease responses.

Increased high-consequence infectious disease resources available on the R7DHRE webpage and through technical assistance/consultation.



## Radiation Specialty Team

Created 10 radiation Just-in-Time Training videos which were viewed 98 times in less than 3 months since uploading to the R7DHRE YouTube channel: [regionviidhre.com/radiologicalresourcesjit](https://regionviidhre.com/radiologicalresourcesjit).

Collaborated with the Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site to provide medical and clinical support for radiation incidents.

Finalized the Medical Radiation Specialty Support Team 509 Qualification draft and routed to the National Qualification System to become a National Incident Management System typed resource.

Submitted mission-ready packages to Nebraska Emergency Management Agency to become a Medical Radiation Specialty Support Team.



## Burn Specialty Team

Created and hosted an American Burn Association designated Midwest Burn Region tabletop exercise that included the 9 state Midwest Burn Region, Department of Health and Human Services Regions 5 & 7, and other federal partners.

Participated as an active member of the American Burn Association Disaster Committee and facilitated in a cross-state exercise with the Region 8 RDHRS.

Provided updates to the ASPR TRACIE "Burn Considerations" section of their Medical Operations Coordinating Center Toolkit.



## Pediatric Specialty Team

Shared information on pediatric disaster care in the region, identified how health care coalitions can integrate pediatrics into their plans, and provided resources from the Pediatric Pandemic Network.

Delivered monthly updates to the Region 7 Pediatric Working Group on disaster best practices, clinical care, and real-time situations in the region.



## Trauma Specialty Team

Convened to provide educational resources and to share best practices. 50 Region 7 trauma program managers from American College of Surgeons Level 1 & Level 2 trauma centers.

Identified new disaster requirements for ACS Level 1 – 4 trauma centers in the American College of Surgeons grey book to include the Disaster Management and Emergency Preparedness course, disaster surgical protocols, and disaster committee requirements.





## Tiered Casualty Management

Joined with Region 7 Regional Emerging Special Pathogen Treatment Center and affiliates to collaborate on emergency medical services cross-work.

In coordination with Children's Mercy – Kansas City, MO, drafted a Pediatric Medical Operations Coordinating Center framework to rapidly identify pediatric bed capacity within Region 7 to assist with load balancing and transport coordination during a large-scale event surge.



## Health System Expansion

Connected with the Region 7 Medical Reserve Corps and Community Emergency Response Team units to determine ways to optimize their engagement during disasters and to facilitate ongoing collaboration.

Convened Region 7 hospital association and health care leaders to coordinate strategies to address the nationwide shortage of blood culture bottles in the summer of 2024.



## Metrics and Assessments

Administered a survey to the R7DHRE pediatric "triple-demic" response working group members to determine impact of convening the group. All respondents (100%) indicated that convening the working group "positively contributed" to overall situational awareness and success during the respiratory surge, and 89% of respondents indicated that the working group was either "very effective" or "effective" at identifying/coordinating information, resources, and technical expertise.

Evaluated the impact of the Midwest Region Burn tabletop exercise to assess participant understanding and confidence in implementing the communication processes, patient transports, supply acquisitions, and telehealth support. Respondents reported significantly higher levels of understanding across all focus areas of the Midwest Region Burn Plan after participation in the exercise. The most gains were observed in understanding how the region and the American Burn Association work together, how to acquire additional supplies, and how to access telehealth support.



## Information Sharing Platforms

Created a R7DHRE Specialty Teams map highlighting pediatric hospitals, burn centers, Radiation Injury Treatment Network facilities, Level 1 and 2 trauma centers, and health care coalitions.

Developed an approved workflow and platform for non-Personal Health Information telehealth services, ensuring compliance with organizational regulatory standards.

Established a partnership with the Saint Louis Fusion Center Terrorism Early Warning Group to provide a multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary approach to the collection, analysis and dissemination of information used to detect, defend against, or respond to acts of terrorism in the region.



## Local/Regional Adaptive Planning

Presented at the Region 7 Healthcare Coalition Coordinators Summit, *Climate in Region 7*, addressing preparedness related issues for 27 coordinators, hospital association representatives, and ASPR federal partners.

Identified Good Samaritan laws in Region 7 and educated 60 health care coalition coordinators, hospital association leaders, public health leaders, and federal partners.

Drafted a regional legal reference guide that includes telehealth information, cross-state licensing, crisis standards of care, license reciprocity, deployable medical teams, and Good Samaritan laws to provide a rapid reference to address legal barriers and disaster preparedness with an estimated completion of spring 2025.

Bolstered relationships with the Region 7 Center for Disease Control to focus on improving public health preparedness and provided insight on regional coordination.

Scan the code for more information on R7DHRE specialty team resources.



# »»» FUTURE OF THE R7DHRE »»»



## REGION VII DISASTER HEALTH RESPONSE ECOSYSTEM



Maintain an advisory and convener role for the region's state health departments, hospital associations, health care coalitions, and health care providers.



Provide ongoing assistance and expert consultation with planning, response, and recovery efforts; particularly specialized clinical scenarios.



Continue to convene regional health care facilities to support transfer strategies and share transport team information across the region.



Advance the development of the Region 7 Medical Operations Coordination Center (RMOCC) and a Pediatric Medical Operations Coordination Center (PMOCC) to support management of patient care and movement across jurisdictional boundaries, including movement across state lines.



Support Region 7 health care coalitions in their development of specialty surge annexes, facilitating a process to support secondary transfer prioritization in specialty surge (e.g., chemical, radiological, burn, pediatric) related to mass casualty situations.



Refine the R7DHRE legal guides to synchronize with current state guidance.

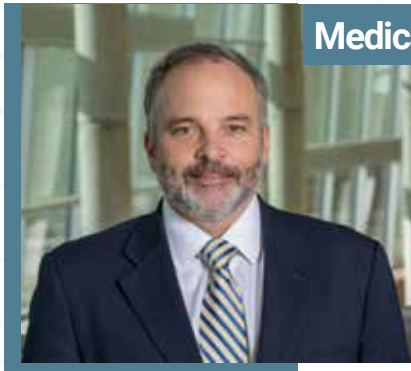


*"I've been involved in disaster planning since 9/11, and thanks to the Region 7 Disaster Health Response Ecosystem, we've seen improved communication, better exercises, more resources, and stronger teamwork. Having this regional setup really boosts our efforts in dealing with disasters."*

- Annemarie O'Connor MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, CBRN  
UChicago Medicine



# EXECUTIVE BIOS



## Medical Director, Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem

James Lawler, MD, MPH, FIDSA serves as the Principal Investigator and Medical Director for the Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem.

Before joining UNMC in Nov. 2017, he served 21 years in the United States Navy Medical Corps. Dr. Lawler's work includes research, policy, and field activities related to emerging and high-consequence infectious diseases, medical and public health preparedness, pandemic and outbreak response, and global health.

Dr. Lawler held national policy positions in both the White House Homeland Council Biodefense Office and National Security Council Resilience Directorate spanning two administrations. In 2012, he founded the Austere Environment Consortium for Enhanced Sepsis Outcomes (ACESO), an international research collaboration focused on improving sepsis survival in resource-limited settings and conducting high-impact research in six countries across four continents.

Dr. Lawler is the Associate Director for International Programs and Innovation, Global Center for Health Security. He is also the Woody and Paula Varner Professor and Professor of Medicine in Infectious Disease at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and is the Deputy Medical Director of the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit.



## Executive Director, Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem

Shelly Schwedhelm, MSN, RN, NEA-BC serves as the Co-Principal Investigator and Executive Director for the Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem, as well as the Associate Director for Clinical Operations and Emergency Management at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Global Center for Health Security (GCHS).

Shelly is the executive leader for the National Special Pathogen System and is a subject matter expert for the NETEC. Shelly is principal investigator of the Region VII Disaster Health Response grant, serves as a principal investigator and subject matter expert for the Omaha NDMS pilot program, is a member of the NDMS FCC Omaha Steering Committee, and is a consultant to the emergency management program at Nebraska Medicine.

Shelly has extensive healthcare leadership experience to include emergency and perioperative services, trauma, emergency preparedness and accountability for biocontainment unit operations and logistics during the care of repatriated Americans in 2014 and 2019. Shelly is a member of the Omaha Metropolitan Healthcare Coalition (OMHCC) and is Chairperson of the Board of Directors.

The Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem welcomes your feedback on additional ways to engage and strengthen our regional partnerships.

Scan the QR code to visit us online, or email us at [R7DHRE@unmc.edu](mailto:R7DHRE@unmc.edu) to explore ways in which we can work together to meet the readiness and preparedness needs of Region 7.



Questions regarding the information in this report should be directed to:

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