

Sustaining Texas Hospital and Health System Utility Infrastructure During Times of Disaster

Texas Hospital Association Leadership Fellows Workgroup:

Rendell Gazzingan

Robert “Murray” Hall

Todd A. Senters, Sr.

Rhonda Unruh

Introduction:

Over the past three years, there has been a series of disasters and severe weather events which have compromised the ability of Texas hospitals and health systems to provide essential care for vulnerable patient populations. While supply chain interruptions have created delays in patient care, the most notable impact has been from the interruption of critical utilities infrastructure, chiefly electrical power and potable water. Wide-spread utilities disruptions during Hurricane Harvey, and again during Winter Storm Uri forced hospital evacuations, the transfer of critical patients, interruption of essential services, the loss of patients who might otherwise have been able to be saved, Emergency Department inundation with patients with inoperable DME / loss of critical medications / inability to access outpatient care.

Project Summary:

Our Texas Hospital Association Fellowship workgroup seeks to 1) Investigate the extent of the impact to hospitals and health systems due to wide-spread loss of utilities during recent disaster events, 2) Develop a mitigation strategy to lessen the impact in the event of future wide-spread utility outages, 3) Evaluate the role of pending state legislation in facilitating mitigation efforts, 4) Recommend legislative strategies to facilitate mitigation efforts, 5) Evaluate need for state-wide changes to hospital building codes, to better facilitate response to wide-spread utility outages by state and federal agencies, 6) Develop implementable strategy to manage patients with inoperable at-home DME / loss of critical medications, 7) Develop strategy to mitigate impact of outpatient center closure, i.e. hemodialysis, oncology.

Project Scope:

The intent of this project is to share with lawmakers, state agencies, as well as elected and appointed officials the real-world experiences of hospitals and health systems in dealing with the immediate and lasting impact of wide-spread utilities disruptions upon the care of critical, vulnerable and otherwise compromised patient populations, including but not limited to:

- Hemodialysis
- Trauma
- Critical / Urgent Care (including Surgery)
- Stroke / MI / Cardiac Arrest
- Patients Dependent Upon At-Home DME (rendered inoperable due to utility outage)

It is our intention to utilize these discussions to form and shape an actionable approach to address and mitigate disruptions in critical utility infrastructure, resulting from significant weather events and other related disasters. It is also our hope that this work product will help inform future legislative action aimed at developing a long-term solution to help fortify the utility infrastructure of Texas hospitals and health systems.