



Prepare for the Worst, Hope for the Best: Vulnerability and Preparedness in the Event of a Hazard

Emergency Links

www.publicsafety.gc.ca
www.emo.gov.ns.ca
www.gov.ns.ca/health/ehs
www.ec.gc.ca/ouragans-hurricanes
www.emo.gov.ns.ca/content/links
www.halifax.ca/EMO
www.redcross.ca
www.nspower.ca

Basic Emergency Kit:

- * Water (at least two litres per person per day). Use small bottles that can be carried in case of an evacuation order.
- * Food that won't spoil
Canned or dried foods and energy bars.
- * Manual can opener
- * Wind-up or battery-powered radio and flashlight (and extra batteries)
- * Cash (small bills) and change (for pay phones)
- * First-aid kit
- * Extra keys for your car and house
- * Emergency plan and contact information
- * Medications, important documents, infant formula
- * Pet food
- * Special items for family members with disabilities or special needs



In the field of Emergency Management, preparedness and mitigation measures are seen as the most effective way to combat the effects of hazards. These plan for disasters before they occur in an attempt to lessen their impacts. It is the identification of the vulnerabilities present in a given region that allows for the determination of what can be done to prepare for them, though there are some vulnerabilities that cannot be managed, such as the physical location and geography of a region. These attributes have a strong impact on what hazards a region or community might be at risk of, and so must be taken into account for all other planning, even though they themselves cannot be changed (for example, Nova Scotia cannot be moved to Canada's Pacific coast to avoid hurricanes).

Attributes that can be managed do become an important means of reducing vulnerability to hazards by mitigation strategies. Of these, physical vulnerabilities, such as community planning and building codes, have often taken a front seat in efforts made. Social vulnerabilities, such as vulnerable populations and demographic attributes, are much more complex issues to manage and present unique ethical challenges. As such they have not been considered with the same respect when it comes to hazard mitigation strategies.

The list of vulnerable populations is seemingly endless and can include anyone, depending on the hazard and which groups are most affected by it. Everyone belongs to vulnerable population groups of some kind, based on characteristics such as socioeconomic status, profession, family, and personal history. That being said, not all individuals within the description of a vulnerable population are at greater risk just by virtue of their belonging to it; the susceptibility of every individual depends on a wide variety of factors and not just the one. One of the ethical challenges, therefore, is responding to vulnerabilities in a way that remains sensitive to individuals and does not increase susceptibility to hazards in other ways.

What knowledge of vulnerable populations does tell us is that our planning processes need to take certain factors into account about the characteristics of populations that could be most affected by the hazards that may be experienced in a community. For instance, it is known that pet owners represent a vulnerable population in the event of some hazards by being less likely to comply with an evacuation measure. Knowing that this is the case, plans for pets to be accepted into temporary shelters, whether with families or separately, can be put in place to reduce this vulnerability. At the same time, it cannot be assumed that everyone with a pet will be unwilling to evacuate their home, or that none have plans in place for someone to look after the pet.

Did you know?

Consent does not always have to be written – implied consent can be given if you nod your head, open your mouth for medication, or offer your arm for a blood draw

Did you know?

You can appoint someone to make decisions for you if you can't do it on your own

It is essential to manage vulnerabilities appropriately, responding to them in a way that does not increase risk or harm for vulnerable populations. It is with this idea that the Public Health Agency of Canada and the four Atlantic Provinces, through the Council for Atlantic Health and Social Services Emergency Managers, have embarked on the creation of a new risk assessment methodology. This risk assessment does not only evaluate the likelihood and potential severity of hazard occurrence in Atlantic Canada. It also accounts for vulnerabilities to hazards that can be found within the region, including vulnerable populations, and assesses the current mitigation strategies in place and the capacity of the region to respond to disasters in light of varying susceptibility to vulnerability. This methodology is one way to ensure that the ethical issues present in emergency preparedness are addressed appropriately.

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Ethics Q & A

Question: What is informed consent?

Permission given to the health care team to do specific procedures after they have given you information about what will happen

Question: What are “best interests”?

A decision about what another person would think is best for themselves

Question: What is confidentiality?

The duty to keep personal information private unless it needs to be shared to provide care

Question: What is a personal directive?

A document that says how to make decisions for you when you can not make them yourself, much the same as a living will, a health care proxy, an advance directive, or a power of attorney for health care

Question: When is someone allowed to make medical choices for themselves?

Whenever they can understand information relevant to the decision and can understand the consequences of their choice

NSHEN currently has a small library of books that may be of interest to you. Please contact the Administrator for the title listing.

Questions?
Comments? Want to join the mail list?

Contact NSHEN!

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NSHEN: Coming Events...

September 28, 2011

Telehealth Education Session
Healthcare Sustainability
12pm-1pm

Please check with your Telehealth Coordinator for the room location in your area

October, 2011

NSHEN Fall Newsletter

November 30, 2011

Telehealth Education Session
Topic to be announced, Halifax, NS.

January 25, 2012

Telehealth Education Session
Topic to be announced, Halifax, NS.

February, 2012

NSHEN Winter Newsletter

If there are any topics you would like to see discussed in our Newsletter or Telehealth Education sessions, please let us know!

What Makes NSHEN Unique?

While there are other ethics networks and centres across the country, there are a few features that make NSHEN unique within Canada.

- * Our collaborative structure facilitates dialogue between partners
- * Our strategic goals are collectively established by the collaborating partners
- * NSHEN involves academia, government, and health care organizations in a single network

This results in a network that is innovative, efficient, and responsive to ethics needs in Nova Scotia.