

Creating a Mobile Health Clinic System

Initiative Summary Statement:

Provide accessible care by expanding telehealth, mobile clinic, and other services in areas of need.

Initiative Description:

Objective: Enhance work between Lee County and local municipalities to expand healthcare services through efforts including but not limited to establishing a fleet of mobile health clinics and developing telehealth services available to residents to increase accessibility. Mobile health clinics are storm-protected units providing pharmacy, mental health, nursing, and other immediate health-related services critical in post-disaster situations and during non-disaster times. In coordination with Emergency Management, these units could also provide emergency transport and other needed services in a crisis. Lee Health operated one mobile health unit post Hurricane Ian to serve patients in the Dunbar community.

Initiative efforts provide alternative means for accessing healthcare during blue sky days and increase redundancy when existing facilities and providers experience service disruptions. Mobile health units could range in size for specific types of deployment and could include fully contained medical units, trailer units, and small pop-up units. The fleet could include but is not limited to:

- Small pop-up units that can move place to place multiple times per day to get immediate basic medical attention (i.e., tetanus shots, bandages, hydration);
- Fully contained medical units that can move place to place daily;
- Trailer units that are temporarily stationed in highly impacted areas to serve longer term needs; and
- Telehealth capabilities that enable remote support for mental and physical wellbeing to triage patients as a force multiplier. Telehealth capabilities may be stationed at set locations.

Need: Due to the predicted future impact of tropical systems and other hazards on healthcare facility operations, there is a strong need to increase sector resilience, and self-contained, mobile clinics are one viable strategy. The demand for healthcare services often increases during and after disasters. This happens at times when both infrastructure and healthcare workforce members can be impacted by the same event. Hurricane Ian damaged multiple healthcare facilities leaving community members who relied on their services with

limited access to health assessments, mental health care, pharmaceuticals, and other healthcare services. Additionally, surge waters limited accessible modes of transportation, which further compromised residents' ability to access healthcare. Mobile health clinics and telehealth services would likely increase healthcare for homebound populations during blue and grey sky days. Community members would likely be less dependent on restoration of facilities to receive prescriptions or any other medical resources and would also be able to receive care in immediate recovery operations.

Regional Approach: The mobile health clinic network could be a combination of coordinated efforts of existing mobile health clinics and additional mobile health clinics that are managed by local providers. It should also be a system that provides all healthcare plans to participate in the network. During emergencies, mobile health clinics could operate in coordination with Lee County and municipalities, emergency medical services agencies, and other first responders to provide critical healthcare services. During non-disaster times, the mobile health clinics could provide regular services in coordination with social service providers, Resilience Hubs, municipalities, and the County. This could result in strengthening the baseline community health level, therefore increasing the population's capacity to weather daily shocks and stressors while also providing equitable access to care for patients with limited mobility.

Healthcare facilities throughout the County experienced damage and utility disruptions during Hurricane Ian. HealthPark Medical Center and Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida experienced threats from storm surge and impacts to their fire suppression and potable water infrastructure. Dunbar community members experienced disruptions to healthcare services after Hurricane Ian. While some of the healthcare demand from County residents was able to be met by other institutions within the region, LeeHealth was able to establish a successful mobile clinic in just under three months to support the Dunbar community. Lee County maintains two mobile health clinic units for the Florida Department of Health in Lee County, which were funded using CARES allocations. Similarly, the Ronald McDonald House operates a mobile dental clinic servicing schools and communities in need.

Impact: Mobile health clinics with telehealth capabilities would enhance continuity of services available to residents, increase healthcare sector resilience, and reduce challenges in the event of shocks and stressors. Additionally, vulnerable populations could have increased access to healthcare and may experience reductions in the burden of transportation (e.g., additional stress or spent resources due to not owning a car, living further from work, not having access to transportation network). Predetermined staging areas that align with other recovery support services (e.g., Resilience Hubs, points of

distribution for emergency supplies) can be socialized to communities ahead of disasters to increase preparedness and streamline recovery.

Key Considerations:

- Consider aligning implementation with FEMA Public Assistance (PA) Category B: Emergency Protective Measures.
- Consider sustainability planning of ownership and operation of system with funding. Grant management may also be a requirement. Determine the responsibility for units and maintaining them for use in action and gray skies.
- Consider a maintenance and storage plan for when the mobile units are not in use. Fire departments and other municipal organizations with space and/or mechanical expertise may be able to support.
- Consider aligning operations with the mobile Ronald McDonald Dental Clinic, serving schools and underserved communities.
- Consider aligning clinic staging areas with Resilience Hubs and points of distribution during response and/or short-term recovery operations to streamline access to resources for community members and maximize the contributions of available resources.
- Gray sky operations are coordinated through the Lee County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Emergency Support Function 8 (Health and Medical). Consider designating a mobile health clinic liaison to operate within the EOC during emergency incidents or forming a network of providers to coordinate with government leads during emergency incidents.
- Provider networks should consider entering into agreements to create provider-agnostic care options during disasters, to include staffing arrangements.
- Staffing needs to be included as part of the planning and a consideration for any new sites established after a pilot phase. Necessary qualifications, ability to report to work in a post-disaster environment should be part of preparedness planning for this workforce.
- Consider making Electronic Medical Records integrations to improve coordination of patient care year-round.
- Consider a marketing campaign to inform community members of services before disasters occur to prepare patients in case of disruptions to communications.

Co-Sponsoring Branches:

Health & Social Services, Cultural Resources, and Planning & Capacity

Stakeholders:

- LeeHealth
- Premier Mobile Health
- United Way
- Florida Department of Health
- Florida Division of Emergency Management – Emergency Support Function 8
- Lee County Emergency Medical Services
- Lee County Public Safety - Emergency Management
- Lee County Parks and Recreation
- Fire Departments
- Municipal Emergency Management
- Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida
- Millenium Physicians
- Ronald McDonald House
- Regional Health & Wellness Coalition
- SalusCare
- Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs)

Potential Funding Sources:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- United States Department of Health and Human Services
- United States Department of Transportation
- Florida Division of Emergency Management
- Florida Department of Health
- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Florida Department of Transportation