

Tulane to lead new CDC center for public health emergency preparedness across South Central US

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ayawn@tulane.edu

(504) 247-1443



Tulane University will establish a new regional center aimed at addressing gaps in emergency preparedness in public health systems across Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and 68 federally recognized tribal nations. (Photo by Shutterstock)

The Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine at Tulane University joins Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Columbia and six other leading universities as the site of one of a series of new regional centers the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is establishing around the country to help regions better prepare for

future pandemics and other public health emergencies.

The Region 6 Center for Health Security and Response Readiness will address critical gaps in crisis preparedness in public health systems across Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and 68 federally recognized tribal nations. Funded by a \$4 million, five-year CDC grant, it is [one of 10 regional centers](#) to be established nationwide with the goal of advancing and implementing new evidence-based strategies and interventions.

“The vision for the center is to create a robust, collaborative network that enhances the ability of public health systems to prevent, detect, and respond to emergencies on state, local and tribal levels,” said Principal Investigator [Stephen Murphy](#), director of the Tulane Disaster Management Master of Public Health Program. “This is an opportunity to better support our public health systems and workforce, build collaborative new partnerships, increase integration of evidence-based strategies into our emergency protocols, and use the decades of practice-based experience at Tulane and beyond to improve this region’s readiness for the emergencies of tomorrow.”

The center will offer leadership development opportunities to boost flagging public health worker retention rates. It will also prioritize trainings for specific real-world scenarios workers may face.

The center will work to improve coordination between multi-sector partners by examining previous disasters and identifying which institutional relationships should be bolstered prior to the next crisis. The center will also serve as an information and research hub that will collect and analyze local level data on past emergency responses to offer tailored crisis readiness guidance rooted in evidence and region-wide expertise.

“What triggers would signal a hospital to source potable water from elsewhere? Which partnerships can improve regional storm shelter capacity? What are the medical needs we may see at a given shelter, and how do we marry disparate data sources to improve awareness between partners? By working to answer these and

similar questions, we hope to improve readiness and response time across the region,” Murphy said.

While the types of emergencies each state faces can differ greatly and include wildfires, tropical weather systems and tornadoes, Murphy said many health officials identified the same areas of preparedness that need improvement. Particularly on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, multi-sector collaborations have never been more important, he said.

“Certain disasters are going to look different and are going to require engagement for different partners, but this is a chance to somewhat standardize how they can respond,” Murphy said. “We want to ensure those partners are well-trained on how to help and how they can plug into a system that can actually save and protect lives.”

Dr. Jeffrey Elder, the interim chief medical officer and emergency medicine physician at University Medical Center in New Orleans and adjunct faculty in the Disaster Management MPH Program, will serve as co-investigator for the center. Summyr Burton, a current doctoral student at the Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, will continue to serve as the senior program manager.

Tulane will work with colleagues at Texas A&M's USA Center for Rural Public Health Preparedness and Oklahoma University's Hudson College of Public Health's Center for Public Health Practice through subaward contracts to fulfill the center's mission and extend the reach into the states this center will support.

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