



Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Tribal Nursing Home Best Practices

Emergency Preparedness

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Introduction

Across Indian Country, tribal nursing homes provide culturally sensitive long-term care environments where American Indian and Alaska Native elders can age with dignity and remain connected to their communities. Emergency planning is a crucial aspect of ensuring elders' comfort and safety. Many tribal nursing homes developed emergency preparedness plans to protect their residents in case of a natural disaster or other emergency.

In November 2016, CMS implemented a regulation requiring health care facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid to create emergency preparedness plans. This regulation promotes appropriate planning to protect the safety and wellbeing of patients and staff in health care facilities, including nursing homes. More information about [the emergency preparedness rule](#) is available on [CMS.gov](#).

A comprehensive, well-rehearsed emergency plan helps ensure that nursing home staff conduct evacuations and other emergency protocols efficiently to protect the safety of everyone involved. Having a plan in place reassures nursing home residents and their loved ones that they will remain safe in the event of an emergency.

Many tribal nursing home emergency plans provide examples of culturally sensitive planning measures that other tribal facilities can emulate. This report describes the emergency preparedness approaches of five tribal nursing homes. It compiles emergency preparedness recommendations from nursing homes that have successfully created emergency plans and shares what has worked for these facilities, including leveraging partnerships, securing funding, and implementing staff training.

Program Profiles

The following sections provide overviews of the emergency planning approaches used by five tribal nursing homes:

- Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility
- Chinle Nursing Home
- Colville Tribal Convalescent Center
- Laguna Rainbow Elderly Care Center
- Morning Star Care Center

Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility

OPERATED BY: TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION

LOCATION: SELLS, AZ

“The staff is going to have to take the most action with any kind of disaster or emergency that we would have, and that is why it is so important to make sure the staff is trained to the point where they can basically take over.”

Sam Gibson, Administrator

Potential Emergencies

Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility's emergency plan deals with several potential scenarios:

- Fire
- Flooding
- Power outage

Emergency Preparedness Plan

The nursing home designed its emergency preparedness plan to follow CMS and state emergency preparedness requirements. To develop the plan, the facility conducted a hazard vulnerability assessment to identify potential disasters for which the facility is at risk and developed an emergency communications plan. To update the plan, a team that represents each nursing home department reviews and discusses the content.

Nursing home staff engage in ongoing preparation for emergencies by keeping current on CPR and first aid training, maintaining the food supply, keeping the facility's vehicles ready for emergency transportation, and ensuring there is sufficient fuel for the facility's generators. Staff can communicate during an emergency using portable radios.

Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility structured its plan according to the Nursing Home Incident Command System. Under this emergency response approach, the staff member who first identifies an emergency acts as the incident commander, responsible for taking immediate actions to protect residents' safety, such as activating alarms and beginning evacuation, until emergency responders arrive. To ensure staff readiness to respond decisively to an emergency, staff are oriented to the facility's layout and receive regular reminders about key emergency response information, such as the location of the water shut-off valve or the emergency shut-off for the generator and propane tanks.

Partnerships

Through partnership with the Tohono O’odham Nation’s Office of Emergency Management, the nursing home works to integrate its emergency response plan with the tribe’s comprehensive emergency plan. The tribe also offers emergency preparedness training resources to nursing home staff.

To design an effective plan, the nursing home also consulted with the state of Arizona. Additional partnerships include memoranda of understanding with a nearby hospital and nursing facility.

Training and Preparation

To equip staff with the knowledge to respond effectively to an emergency, all new hires review the facility layout and the contents of the emergency plan during orientation. The nursing home conducts emergency drills and an annual disaster training that involves reviewing the facility with the fire department to identify potential emergencies and appropriate responses. The drills include evacuation drills and biannual facility lockdown drills in partnership with the police department. The nursing home plans to conduct a joint drill with other tribal entities to ensure their emergency plans intersect successfully.

Funding

The nursing home draws emergency preparedness funding from its annual operating budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership of the Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility offered the following emergency planning recommendations for other tribal nursing homes:

- Begin emergency planning immediately.
- Prioritize training as one of the first steps of emergency planning.
- As part of training, present example scenarios to employees and ask them to think through how they would respond.
- Plan for residents to shelter in place if possible, such as by remaining in the facility during a power outage and using generator power rather than evacuating.

Chinle Nursing Home

OPERATED BY: NAVAJO NATION

LOCATION: CHINLE, AZ

“Our job here is to make them comfortable and happy, as well—make them so they’re around for a long time.”

Wayne Claw, CEO

Potential Emergencies

The Chinle Nursing Home developed an emergency preparedness plan to respond to several potential emergencies in the surrounding area, including:

- Flooding
- Heavy snow
- Power outage
- Tornado

Emergency Preparedness Plan

The Chinle Nursing Home serves elders and people with disabilities in the surrounding area. The facility is situated above a valley that is prone to flooding during heavy rain times, which makes it an ideal evacuation site for community members displaced by flooding. To protect its residents and nearby community members, Chinle Nursing Home developed an emergency preparedness plan. The nursing home notifies local chapters of the Navajo Nation government that community members can evacuate to the nursing home in case of flooding.

The nursing home stores a 6-month supply of food and water and extra blankets for residents and evacuees who seek shelter at the facility. A generator powers the facility in the event of a power outage.

Frequent meetings of the 10-person emergency preparedness response team helps those involved stay up to date on emergency protocols. The group meets about four times yearly, convening as the weather changes each season.

Tribal Nursing Home Best Practices

Emergency Preparedness

Partnerships

Chinle Nursing Home partnered with the Chinle Chapter of Navajo Nation, Indian Health Service (IHS), and the Chinle Unified School District to create an emergency preparedness plan for community members served by the Chinle Nursing Home. The plan incorporates emergency response resources from Apache County, the state of Arizona, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Through partnership with the local school district, the nursing home can access equipment to assist with emergency response. Further, the nursing home often asks students for information that allows the nursing home to map the location of elders in their families who many need assistance in the event of an emergency.

Training and Preparation

Nursing home staff receive in-service training on possible emergency scenarios every 2 weeks.

Funding

Chinle Nursing Home is primarily funded through Medicare and Medicaid and receives additional funding from Navajo Nation. The program maximizes the resources from these funding streams to help cover emergency preparedness expenses. For example, the facility has three vehicles that could be used to transport evacuees in an emergency. The nursing home also receives revenue from the state from property taxes paid by tribal citizens who reside off-reservation. The nursing home uses this funding for activities that are not covered under Medicare and Medicaid, including emergency planning. In addition, Chinle Nursing Home offsets the costs of emergency planning through fundraisers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership from Chinle Nursing Home offered the following recommendations to guide other tribal nursing homes in creating or enhancing emergency preparedness plans.

- Carefully evaluate the needs of elders and people with disabilities.
- Develop housing solutions for staff at rural facilities to help retain staff who are well-versed in emergency protocols.

Colville Tribal Convalescent Center

OPERATED BY: CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

LOCATION: NESPELEM, WA

“The more training, the better prepared the staff are, the smoother it will go. It definitely would prevent loss of life by having people trained in the event of a real emergency.”

Sally Hutton, Administrator

Potential Emergencies

Colville Tribal Convalescent Center developed an emergency preparedness plan to address the following potential emergencies:

- Fire
- Power outage
- Shooter
- Water outage
- Windstorm

Emergency Preparedness Plan

To safeguard residents in case of emergency, Colville Tribal Convalescent Center developed a written emergency plan, which employees review regularly. The nursing home structured the plan to meet state long-term care and fire safety regulations. The nursing home also incorporated resources from health care associations and the tribal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office into the plan.

The plan includes a list of all residents, contact information for their primary and secondary emergency contacts, and information on their primary physicians. Medical records staff update this list monthly. In the event of an evacuation, nursing home staff gather the printed plan, patient charts, medication, important personal belongings, and clothing. A specific staff member is responsible for notifying all residents' emergency contacts of the evacuation.

Colville Tribal Convalescent Center has evacuated its residents twice. In one instance, a wildfire caused an evacuation to a local community center overnight. Later, another wildfire resulted in a 2-week evacuation. The nursing home transported residents to a nearby high school, moved beds and other necessities to the school, and used the home economics classroom to prepare meals.

Partnerships

Colville Tribal Convalescent Center has memoranda of understanding in place with a nearby hospital, school, and community center that permit the nursing home to transport residents to these locations in the event of an evacuation. To ensure effective emergency planning, the nursing home convenes with its partners to engage in a tabletop discussion, as a brainstorming approach to emergency planning. Partners in the tabletop include the tribal OSHA office, local emergency medical services, the local IHS clinic, and the tribal health department. To further support emergency preparedness, the nursing home's maintenance supervisor attends the tribe's monthly safety committee meeting.

Training and Preparation

Each month, one of the three shifts participates in a fire drill, rotating so that each shift engages in one drill per quarter. The nursing home notifies residents about the drills in advance.

Funding

Colville Tribal Convalescent Center is primarily funded through Medicaid, with some residents who pay privately. Additionally, the facility receives tribal funding. No funding is earmarked specifically for emergency preparedness planning, so the facility works to maximize existing resources to engage in emergency planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The administrator of Colville Tribal Convalescent Center presented the following recommendations for other tribal nursing facilities working to develop emergency preparedness plans

- Seek guidance from other tribal facilities that have emergency plans in place.
- Prioritize emergency response training for staff and review the plan with all employees regularly.
- Conduct drills during each shift so all employees can participate.

Laguna Rainbow Elderly Care Center

OPERATED BY: PUEBLO OF LAGUNA

LOCATION: CASA BLANCA, NM

“We are here to protect them. That is why you have a disaster plan is to have everything in place to protect their safety.”

Sheila Wiggins, Executive Director

Potential Emergencies

The Laguna Rainbow Elderly Care Center’s emergency plan deals with several potential scenarios:

- Chemical leak or spill
- Extreme winds Fire
- Flooding
- Heavy snow

Emergency Preparedness Plan

In designing an emergency preparedness plan, Laguna Rainbow Elderly Care Center followed federal and state guidelines for emergency planning and partnered with Pueblo of Laguna to identify evacuation locations and ensure sufficient food, water, and supplies in the event of an evacuation. The plan includes agreements with other entities to provide evacuation sites for residents. To maintain an effective emergency preparedness approach, the nursing home reviews the plan annually, at a minimum, and updates it as needed.

In the event of evacuation, nursing home staff notify residents about the destination and anticipated duration of the stay. Staff members have assigned roles to quickly gather food and supplies and safely evacuate the residents. For example, the laundry team gathers blankets, dietary staff load food and cooking supplies, nurses conduct a head count, and social services staff reassure the residents. The staff and residents evacuate to a predetermined location using the nursing home’s seven transportation vans. The nursing home notifies residents’ families about the evacuation.

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Emergency Preparedness

Partnerships

The nursing home works with Pueblo of Laguna to coordinate emergency housing, food, and water. The Pueblo's emergency management, police, and emergency medical services departments are familiar with the nursing home's emergency plan and can assist in the event of an emergency.

Training and Preparation

Nursing home staff stay up to date on emergency protocols through disaster drills and annual emergency preparedness training. The nursing home conveys the contents of the plan and notification about upcoming drills to the resident council, who passes this information on to the residents.

Funding

Laguna Rainbow Elderly Care Center is funded through Medicaid. It does not receive additional funding for emergency planning, so the nursing home leverages existing resources, such as using its transportation vehicles to evacuate residents in case of emergency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The administrator of Laguna Rainbow Elderly Care Center offered the following recommendations to other tribal nursing homes looking to create or enhance emergency preparedness plans.

- Prioritize training and education about emergency preparedness.
- Ensure that all staff members clearly understand their responsibilities in the event of an emergency.
- Understand the facility, its resident population, and its vulnerabilities.
- Maintain and regularly update agreements with partners.
- Conduct one-on-one training on actions that should be taken immediately, such as showing staff the location of the water shut-off valve.
- Develop a simple reference list for staff that notes who to contact and steps to take in the specific situations, such as a burst water pipe.

Morning Star Care Center

OPERATED BY: SHOSHONE TRIBE OF THE WIND RIVER RESERVATION

LOCATION: FORT WASHAKIE, WY

"I think everybody is in tune with what's going on and what needs to be done. So, that is really important in a rural community because we don't just have instant access to things somebody might have in a city."

Tami Reed, Administrator

Potential Emergencies

Morning Star Care Center developed an emergency preparedness plan to address several potential emergency situations:

- Bomb threat
- Fire
- Flooding
- Shooter
- Tornado

Emergency Preparedness Plan

The facility modeled its emergency plan according to CMS regulations and standards. The nursing home installed a 2-hour smoke compartment, which is a space enclosed on all sides, including the top and bottom, by barriers that protect those inside by restricting the movement of smoke. In case of a power outage, the nursing home also has a backup generator, which is tested weekly.

In the event of an emergency, the plan directs staff to contact the charge nurses, director of nursing, and administrator, who assess whether evacuation is warranted. Staff members fulfill designated roles to ensure residents' safety, such as checking rooms during an evacuation. If residents need to evacuate, the nursing home's detached garage is used as a staging area. Especially during cold weather, this provides a warm area a safe distance from the main building where residents can await transportation.

Partnerships

Morning Star Care Center has memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with nearby school districts, the tribal casino, a state life resource center, and three other nursing homes in the surrounding county. Through MOUs, the nursing home can transport residents to these locations during an evacuation. Under an MOU with one of the school districts, the nursing home has permission to use the district's bus, which has a lift, to quickly evacuate residents. The nursing home also works with the local IHS clinic, a dialysis center, and other tribal health programs to share resources in case of an emergency. Quarterly, the nursing home participates in a county-wide emergency planning meeting with tribal, local, and county partners.

Training and Preparation

Morning Star Care Center provides emergency preparedness training for staff and residents. Residents participate in a monthly fire training, which familiarizes them with which smoke compartments they should access in case of a fire and the location of the nearest exit. Nursing home employees attend training every few months, during which they review evacuation protocols, conduct fire drills, and discuss emergency preparedness approaches. Fire drills involve the local fire and police departments and provide an opportunity for participants to collaborate and identify flaws and strengths of the plan. During orientation, new staff members learn the building's layout, locations of fire extinguishers and exits, and evacuation protocols.

Funding

Since no funding is designated specifically for emergency preparedness planning, the facility leverages existing resources to engage in emergency planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The administrator of Morning Star Care Center offered several recommendations to help guide other tribal nursing homes in developing emergency preparedness plans.

- Scan for potential emergency planning resources, such as state or county assistance or a Red Cross program.
- Request MOUs with other entities that may be able to provide evacuation locations, emergency preparedness equipment, or other forms of assistance. Send a cover letter, clarify the goals of the request, and be willing to reciprocate the request.
- Conduct a mock emergency evacuation twice yearly, at a minimum. Notify residents, their family members, and community members in advance of these drills.

Conclusion

Tribal nursing homes across Indian Country are prepared to protect residents and staff during an emergency. Their emergency preparedness plans cover a range of potential disasters, from fires to floods to power outages. The plans guide nursing home staff in the event of an emergency, and many articulate steps for evacuating residents. These facilities have enlisted the support of partners, such as tribes, states, and nearby hospitals, schools, community centers, and health centers. Through these partnerships, evacuation locations, transportation vehicles, emergency equipment, and more are available in case of emergency. Regular, ongoing training empowers nursing home staff to act quickly and decisively in the event of an emergency. To fund emergency preparedness expenses, tribal nursing homes work to maximize their own resources and the resources available through funding streams, such as Medicaid, Medicare, and tribal support. Lessons learned through the development of these emergency preparedness plans can help guide other tribal nursing homes in creating or expanding their emergency plans.