



# Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem

2023 | ANNUAL REPORT

“

Through R7DHRE, we're not just enhancing regional collaboration and coordination; we're building a community of support that transcends boundaries, which is especially important for cross-jurisdictional incidents. By harnessing the power of telehealth technology and specialty teams, we're ensuring that every community, rural or urban, is better prepared and resilient in the face of large-scale disasters.

”

*Angela Leek, PhD, CHP - Co-Lead, Radiation Specialty Team*

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# INTRODUCTION

The fifth year of the Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem (R7DHRE) saw promising progress as the ecosystem's concepts began to take a more solid form. In the first quarter of FY23, our regional health system struggled with the ongoing strain from the COVID-19 pandemic combined with unusually severe influenza and RSV seasons in the pediatric “triple-demic.” Fortunately, R7DHRE’s ability to convene a multi-organizational response drew on lessons learned from the pandemic, enabling real-time situational awareness, critical data sharing, and coordination of resources. Our ongoing outreach, partnership, and training efforts galvanized a community network of preparedness. Our specialty teams continued to address information and capability gaps, which are particularly valuable in rural areas. Finally, we continue to work with other RDHRS sites nationally to develop governance, economic, and assessment tools for robust and sustainable regional health system preparedness.

# ANSWERING THE CALL



**We are certainly experiencing a surge in the pediatric population across the country this winter. Thanks to the collaboration across the pediatric specialty team, we were able to prepare our entire region. When surge hit, we were in a much better place this year to collaborate quickly and share best practices and work together, ensuring top quality care is provided to all children throughout our region.**

Jennifer Watts, MD, MPH  
Professor, Pediatrics, University of  
Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine  
Clinical Associate Professor, Pediatrics,  
University of Kansas School of Medicine  
Co-Lead, Region 7 Pediatric Specialty Team

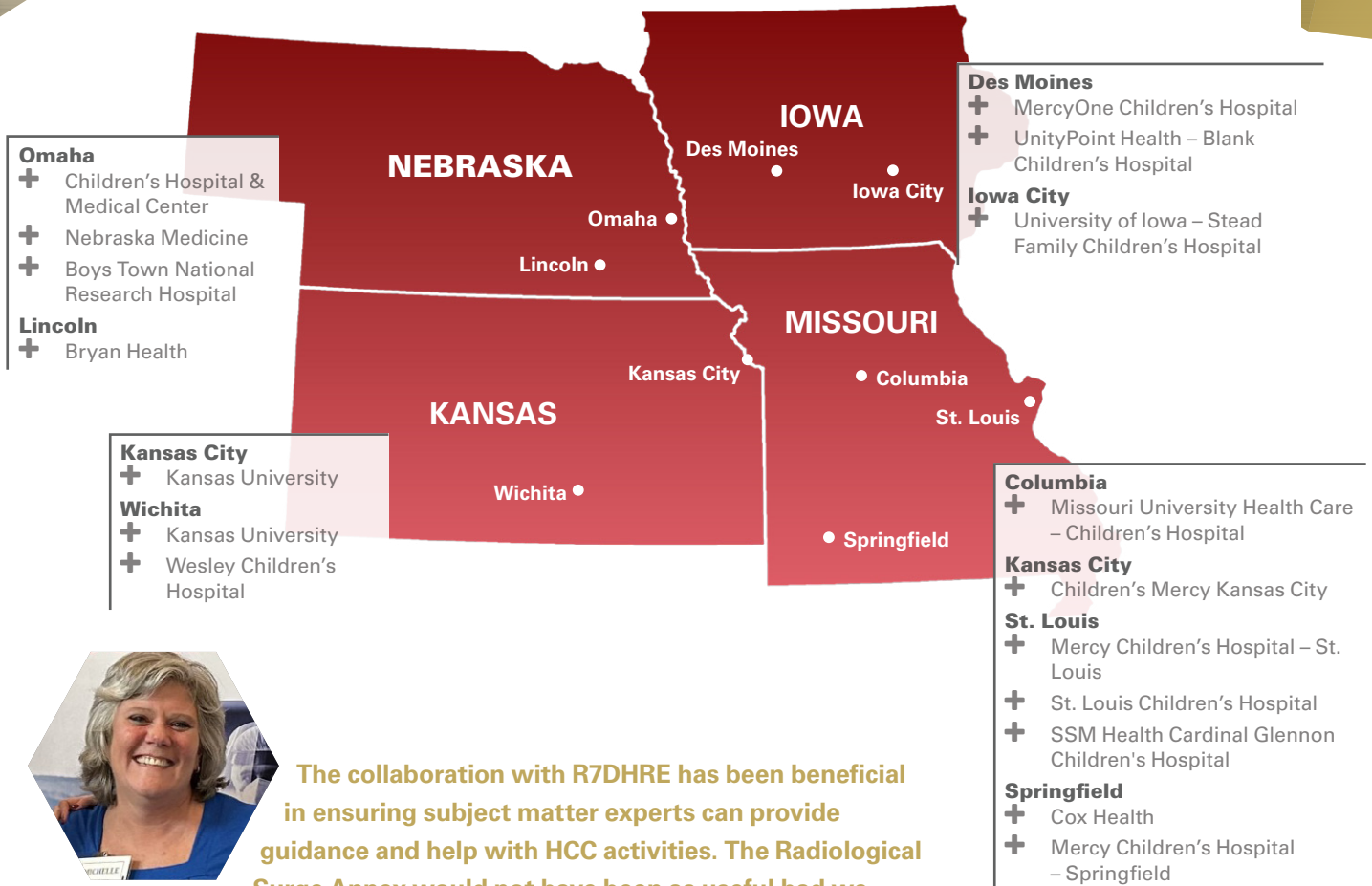
## **Facilitated pediatric hospital surge efforts.**

During the fall/winter 2022 pediatric respiratory disease surge of RSV, influenza, and COVID-19 (referred to as the "triple-demic"), the R7DHRE played a pivotal role in facilitating critical regional pediatric care coordination. The R7DHRE Pediatric Team convened 22 hospitals from Region 7 specializing in pediatric care to offer educational resources, exchange clinical best practices, identify solutions for medication and supply shortages, and provide shared situational awareness that included capacity data. The R7DHRE supplied daily bed capacity updates through a straight-forward bed dashboard, which assisted with referrals, load balancing, and transportation of pediatric patients within and across state lines amidst the triple-demic surge.

## **Provided regional assistance for radiological emergency planning.**

As Health Care Coalitions (HCC) refined their plans to include a radiation annex, the Radiological Specialty Team (RST) developed guidance and checklists to assist HCCs, incorporating Region 7 specific details. In turn, the RST provided direct subject matter expert support on radiation-related matters, including the development of a tabletop exercise, regional annex template support, and development of radiation basics training for 10 HCCs that was provided prior to and in conjunction with tabletop exercises across the region.

# REGION 7 PEDIATRIC HOSPITALS



The collaboration with R7DHRE has been beneficial in ensuring subject matter experts can provide guidance and help with HCC activities. The Radiological Surge Annex would not have been as useful had we not been able to rely on R7DHRE to create the draft and identify R7 resources.

Michelle Hill, BS, EMT-B – HPP Coordinator, State of Nebraska



# FY23 APPROACH

## REGION VII DISASTER HEALTH RESPONSE ECOSYSTEM

Those who work in emergency preparedness know the importance of networking. The RDHRE has opened countless avenues to increase engagement and information-sharing and networking opportunities across Region 7. The value of this engagement is seen not only at the regional level but at the national level through other federal grants and programs."

Jackson Gruber, BS,  
Region 7 Special Pathogens  
Program Coordinator

- + **Collaborate with strategic-level national specialty organizations.** Continued strengthening preparedness partnerships with the American Burn Association, Radiation Injury Treatment Network, National Emerging Special Pathogen Training and Education Centers (NETEC), and Poison Centers. The RDHRS sites advanced mutual integration with the organizational missions, cooperation with subject matter experts, and development of regional disaster response plans.
- + **Assist regional efforts to respond to emerging special pathogen events.** Collaborated with the Regional Emerging Special Pathogens Treatment Center (RESPTC) team on sharing information related to special pathogen outbreaks, including disease overviews, epidemiologic risk factors, care considerations, and best practices for identifying and managing suspect cases. This information was shared through quarterly scheduled meetings and regular distribution lists across the RESPTC and R7DHRE. Ongoing concerns regarding COVID-19 throughout the region were also continuously addressed.
- + **Increase regional responder training to prepare health systems and communities for disasters.** The Chemical Specialty Team (CST) organized regional Advanced HAZMAT Life Support (AHLS) Provider and Instructor courses in each Region 7 state; efforts trained 137 multi-disciplinary professionals including as nurses, paramedics, EMTs, physicians, physician assistants, and respiratory therapists. The Radiological Specialty Response Team (RST) sponsored three trainees for the FEMA Radiological Operations Support Specialist (ROSS) initial course and coordinated with regional ROSSs to augment RST membership.
- + **Convene regional SMEs for preparedness and response efforts.** The Behavioral Health Specialty Team (BHST) connected with behavioral health hospital-based departments across the region to garner behavioral health providers for Psychological First Aid and Disaster Behavior Health training; efforts recruited 40 providers for the repository. The Burn/Trauma Specialty Team connected 30 regional trauma program managers for strategic planning and to triage lines of effort, develop new ideas, and build relationships prior to a disaster.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- + Assisted the Region 7 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health in facilitating a “Community Conversation” session addressing the impact of extreme climate events and health. Participants represented various sectors including public health, health care, education, agriculture, and food supply. The insights gathered from the discussions were utilized to inform national-level HHS assessments of community perspectives regarding climate and health.
- + Supported the Region 7 Tribal Climate, Emergency, and Health Symposium which convened representatives from nine tribal nations, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, and HHS. The collaboration focused on joint efforts related to emergency response and preparedness planning across the region.
- + Represented R7DHRE at the 2023 Kansas HCC Summit in Wichita, Kansas, interacting with 83 attendees including HCC leaders and emergency management organizations. This led to identification of education and training shortfalls, information shaping gaps, and sparked requests for increased collaboration.
- + Participated in the South Omaha Community Care Council Cinco de Mayo Health Fair in Omaha, Nebraska to showcase R7DHRE community readiness opportunities. Bleeding control demonstrations were provided from the American College of Surgeons STOP THE BLEED® program.



**I believe the  
R7DHRE is an  
instrumental tool  
for the HPP program  
because of the leadership and  
guidance you offer.**

Rae King, Iowa Service Area 1C HPP  
Coordinator

# R7DHRE TIMELINE

**Y1**  
2019

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

Developed COVID-19 playbooks for risk mitigation and provided virtual technical assistance to community partners and various industries including meat processing, correctional facilities, and shelters.

## CRISIS STANDARDS OF CARE

Created Nebraska Crisis Standards of Care planning guidance document, codified into Nebraska law in 2021.

## NEBRASKA-CENTRIC COLLABORATIONS

First year of the grant project was known as Nebraska Regional Disaster Health Response Ecosystem (NRDHRE).

## LEGAL REFERENCE GUIDE

Development of a legal reference guide covering emergency declarations, 1135 waivers, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, and the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

## KNOWLEDGE CENTER

Integration of incident management technology platform in 93 Nebraska counties for a shared operational perspective.

**Y2**  
2020

## SPECIALT

Development of six spe  
an all-hazards approach  
matter experts in pla  
recovery strategies  
range of potential l

## MONOCLONAL AN

Led the monoclonal anti  
which resulted in 513  
long term care resident  
19 infection. Nebraska  
COVID-19 mortality ra  
residents among US



3  
21

### INFORMATION SHARING

Provided training and technical assistance in Nebraska's transition from incident management technology platform Knowledge Center to Juvare Systems.

Y5  
2023

### HEALTH EQUITY

Created a new line of effort to further our efforts in addressing access to care and examining the ramifications of health disparities on pandemic morbidity, mortality, and disruptions to the health care system.

### SPICIA LITY TEAMS

Specialty teams employing... incorporating subject... nning, response, and... that address a wide... hazards or threats.

### ANTIBODY PROJECT

body distribution project, doses administered to... s to treat acute COVID-... had one of the lowest... rates for long-term care... states in 2020-2021.

Y4  
2022

### PEDIATRIC "TRIPLEDEMIC"

Convened 22 pediatric-capable hospitals in Region 7 to collaborate on expanding capacity and identified 8 cross-state transport teams for rapid pediatric care access.

### LEVEL 1 TRAUMA CENTERS

Assembled 30+ ACS trauma program managers throughout Region 7 to exchange best practices and trauma initiatives, aiming to enhance regional trauma care and collaboration.

### DISASTER EDUCATION

Sponsored disaster trauma education sessions for EMS responders and health care providers, emphasizing all-hazard care treatment to enhance their readiness in responding to a wide range of traumatic incidents during emergencies.

# About the NUMBERS



# 327

## Professionals trained

from multiple disciplines including business, health care and education

- + Advanced Hazmat Life Support
- + Disaster Management Emergency Preparedness
- + Fundamental Critical Care Support: Crisis Management
- + STOP THE BLEED®
- + Until Help Arrives

# 11



## Local, regional, and national conference presentations

# 7 Specialty Teams



Chemical



Biological



Radiological



Burn



Trauma



Pediatric



Behavioral Health

# 19

## Exercise planning, support, and execution engagements

Ranging from tabletop to full-scale exercises



# 1,100

## National & International Attendees viewed

## 8 webinars

as part of the "R7DHRE Preparedness Webinar Series"

# 250+



## Collaborators

- + State Health Departments
- + Hospital Associations
- + Health Care Coalitions
- + Subject Matter Experts
- + Federal Partners



# YEAR FIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS



## Information Sharing Platforms

- + Completed Juvare incident management software handover to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to support situational awareness, emergency management, and health care professionals during disasters, large-scale events, and daily operations.
- + Launched a R7DHRE monthly newsletter to foster connections among regional and inter-regional partners. The newsletter features spotlights, educational and training opportunities, and current events.
- + Focused refinements to the R7DHRE website and increased social media audience:
  - + Website: <https://www.regionviidhre.com/>
  - + LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/r7dhre/>
  - + Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/regionviidhre>
  - + X (Twitter) <https://twitter.com/R7DHRE>



## Chemical Specialty Team

- + Developed 10 chemical exposure clinical guidelines for use by poison centers, health care facilities, and providers.
- + Presented on the role of the Chemical Specialty Teams and Delayed Toxic Syndromes, and participated as a member of a scenario-based panel presentation on chemical exposures for

878 attendees during the American College of Medical Toxicology Chemical Agents of Opportunity for Terrorism Course.

- + Created a Chemical Burn First Aid reference document in partnership with the Burn Specialty Team.
- + In response to four domestically-acquired malaria cases, presented on the availability of artesunate for the treatment of malaria and the procedure for emergency access of the pharmaceutical during the Nebraska Statewide Infectious Disease Meeting.
  - + Consequently, a Nebraska hospital activated the process and rapidly procured artesunate to treat a patient diagnosed with malaria.



## Biological Specialty Team

- + Created and disseminated situation reports during three domestic and international special pathogen outbreak events (Mpox, Sudan Ebola Virus, Marburg virus) to emergency medical services, health care facilities, HCCs, and state and local public health departments.
- + Conducted quarterly assemblies with an average of 15 regional participants from HHS Region 7 health care facilities and emergency medical service partners that tackled outbreak issues using the “identify, isolate, and inform” process, and facilitated recurring education and training



### Radiological Specialty team

- + Assisted the leadership board of Nebraska Douglas County Health Department with community readiness center planning by developing plans identifying locations, recommending equipment, and providing templates and key Centers for Disease Control and Prevention references. Created a robust asset to the Omaha area in managing large at-risk populations and relieving pressure on hospitals during a radiological incident.
- + Supported the development and provided SME guidance for the River City Silent Thunder exercise hosted by the Department of Energy, FBI, and University of Nebraska Medical Center. The event involved a radiological terrorism incident affecting the greater Omaha community and fostered collaboration among representatives from local, state, federal, and private sector agencies responding to a radiological disaster.



### Burn/Trauma Specialty Team

- + Registered the Burn Specialty Team in the Emergency Management Assistance Compact as a virtual and/or deployable resource.
- + Collaborated with the Trauma Advisory Board and updated the Nebraska burn annex to include trauma centers and their American College of Surgeons levels.
- + Participated as a trauma subject matter expert in a full-scale readiness exercise involving large-scale events in partnership with the Department of Defense and Regional Emerging Special Pathogen Treatment Center in Omaha, Nebraska.



### Behavioral Health Specialty Team

- + Increased regional recruitment of behavioral health specialists and potential disaster behavioral health responders by identifying 40 large behavioral health hospital-based departments from urban and rural areas. In conjunction, coordinated with hospital leaders for their subject matter expert contacts and concept of operations education.
- + Partnered with the Emergency Management Assistance Compact and executed a mock activation exercise. The exercise addressed preparedness planning, deployment, redeployment, recovery, and sustainability.



**Knowing that there is concerted effort and planning going into not just disaster response preparation but also community recovery gives me considerable piece of mind. I have confidence in knowing that there are trained and competent medical and mental health professionals in the region standing by to assist — not if, but WHEN they are needed!**

Jerry Walker, PhD, ABPP  
Behavioral Health Specialty Team Lead



# FUTURE OF THE R7DHRE YEAR SIX VISION

In Year 6, we will build upon lessons learned and successes from Year 5 as our cross-jurisdictional R7DHRE efforts continue to expand regional capacity and capability for managing public health emergencies.

As a convener, the R7DHRE is moving forward with a “Response Ready” framework by:

- + Establishing processes to provide support during an incident activation.
- + Mitigating barriers to information-sharing in the region.
- + Continuing integration of comprehensive training programs aimed at health care providers, promoting long-term resilience within the community.
- + Developing standards for deployable Medical Radiological Specialty Team, working toward submission to FEMA National Qualification System.
- + Developing and distributing a quick legal reference guide for Region 7 to facilitate effective navigation of emergency situations. This will include accessible information on emergency declarations, 1,135 waivers, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, and the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.
- + Coordinating with regional psychological professional associations to develop a joint Psychological First Aid training program.
- + Expanding cross-regional efforts with the other three RDHRS programs to build shared communications, common standards, enhanced resourcing mechanisms, and sustainable ecosystems for disaster preparedness.
- + Focusing efforts on generating new models and economic incentives for community and health system preparedness funding.
- + Launching a new initiative to explore large dataset analytics and develop quantitative assessments of health preparedness.
- + Strengthening efforts to assess the intersections of health emergency preparedness, disaster response, health disparities, inequity, and misinformation.
- + Continuing development of a Region 7 Medical Operations Coordinating Center to identify and share key patient transfer resources; furthermore, provide manual bed occupancy and availability status from health care facilities within the region.

# EXECUTIVE BIOS

## James Lawler, MD, MPH, FIDSA



James Lawler is the associate director for International Programs and Innovation, Global Center for Health Security. He is also the Woody and Paula Varner Professor and Professor of Medicine in Infectious Disease at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Dr. Lawler is Deputy Medical Director of the Nebraska

Biocontainment Unit. Dr. Lawler serves as the medical director for the R7DHRE grant.

Before joining UNMC in Nov. 2017, he served 21 years in the United States Navy Medical Corps. Dr. Lawler's work includes research, policy, and field activities related to

emerging and high-consequence infectious diseases, medical and public health preparedness, pandemic and outbreak response, along with global health. Dr. Lawler held national policy positions in both the White House Homeland Security Council Biodefense Office and National Security Council Resilience Directorate spanning two administrations. In 2012, Dr. Lawler founded the Austere Environment Consortium for Enhanced Sepsis Outcomes (ACESO), an international research collaboration focused on improving sepsis survival in resource-limited settings and conducting high-impact research in six countries across four continents.

## Shelly Schwedhelm, MSN, RN, NEA-BC



Shelly Schwedhelm serves as the associate director for Clinical Operations and Emergency Management at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Global Center for Health Security.

Shelly currently is the executive leader for the National Special Pathogen System and associated tiered system of care expansion, providing support to regions in the development of the hub and spoke model of support and readiness for special pathogens. In addition, Shelly co-leads the R7DHRE grant, serves as a subject matter expert for the NDMS pilot research grant, and is a

liaison to the emergency management program at Nebraska Medicine. Locally, Shelly serves as a member of the Omaha Metropolitan Healthcare Coalition and is chairperson of the Board of Directors.

Shelly has 40 years of health care leadership experience to include emergency, trauma, preparedness, and accountability for biocontainment unit operations and logistics during the care of repatriated Americans with Ebola virus disease in 2014 – 15. Leadership in collaboration with local, state and federal partners to support quarantine missions for repatriated Americans from Wuhan China and others returning from the Diamond Princess cruise ship from Japan who required care for COVID 19.



**The Region VII Disaster Health Response Ecosystem welcomes your feedback on additional ways to engage and strengthen our regional partnerships.**

Visit us online at [www.regionviidhre.com](http://www.regionviidhre.com), or email us at [R7DHRE@unmc.edu](mailto:R7DHRE@unmc.edu) to explore ways in which we can work together to meet the readiness and preparedness needs of Region 7.



**Questions regarding the information in this report should be directed to:**

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