

# COMMUNITY-LEVEL PREPAREDNESS FOR SEVERE WEATHER

## DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In 2025, The Environmental Collaboratory at Drexel University (TEC) hosted the first Community-Level Preparedness for Increasingly Severe Weather convening and published [an Action Plan](#) synthesizing surveys, interviews, workshops, and virtual consultations with stakeholders nationwide. Thirteen themes emerged from this process, underscoring a core finding: community-centered preparedness requires coordinated action across agencies and sectors at a scale that matches the urgency and magnitude of climate risk.

In 2026 a follow-on convening was organized to move from insight to implementation. Participants built on the report's findings by identifying practical, near-term actions that close known gaps in community-level preparedness.



### Using this Summary

This document summarizes the four areas selected as priorities, describes a vision for each area, and provides viable recommendations for action. It also provides a description of how TEC and its partners can continue to make progress between convenings by creating a community of practice.

## CREATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In order to drive this effort and build the tools and capacity for community institutions to be prepared and resilient TEC is beginning to host individual sessions with circles of stakeholders organized around individual areas of focus. **To support ongoing collaboration between convenings, TEC has planned the following communications and engagement activities to maintain connection, advance implementation priorities, and keep partners aligned around the Themes for Action.**

<b>Webinars</b> focused on the implementation of the Themes for Action	<b>Healthcare Memo Series</b> translating healthcare concerns into decision-ready briefs.	<b>Podcast Mini-Series</b> elevating one actionable barrier and one practical implementation path.
<b>Newsletter Series</b> covering the core problems, examples, and ways to participate in each theme.	<b>Nonprofit/CBO Engagement</b> (system-level) formalizing how CBO/nonprofit partners participate between convenings.	

### How You Can Get Involved

The Environmental Collaboratory needs your participation, your ideas, and your willingness to step up to this challenge in order to continue making progress. To get involved visit [drexel.edu/environmental-collaboratory](https://drexel.edu/environmental-collaboratory).

- [Community-Level Preparedness Report](#)
- [Heat Memo](#)
- [2026 Convening Narrative](#)

## THEMES FOR ACTION

### 1. EARLY WARNING: EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS, ACCESSIBLE EMERGENCY MESSAGING & MULTILINGUAL SUPPORT

*Vision: Early warning systems are durable, multimodal, and practically reach communities in clear, understandable language.*

Recent disasters underscore how fragile warning infrastructure can be when systems are not pre-emptively tested, rely heavily on opt-in enrollment, or fail to provide clear, actionable, and culturally relevant instructions. The 2025 report frames this theme as a preparedness gap because delays in life-saving information impacts us all and disproportionately endanger older adults, people with disabilities, and residents with limited literacy. people who are already most exposed, particularly non-English speakers, immigrant and refugee communities.

#### Recommended Actions

- Advance a scoped plan for evaluating multilingual messaging effectiveness and documenting real-world delays in comprehension and receipt among non-English-speaking and vulnerable groups.
- Support existing policy and resource concepts already in practice (i.e., multilingual alert mandates in top community languages; inclusive systems aligned with accessibility/plain language; and investment in translation/interpretation staffing and tools)
- Design partnership approaches that explicitly position CBOs as co-designers/co-deliverers of emergency messaging with local government.

### 2. HEAT: HEATWAVE PREPAREDNESS AND RIGHT TO COOLING

*Vision: Communities and their institutions share aligned understanding of extreme heat and have policies that protect a right to cooling that supports immediate interventions and long-term solutions.*

During the convening conversations centered around effective heat responses that require cross-agency coordination and the need for a common understanding of operational “triggers” for action (such as thresholds for opening cooling centers). This also included trusted messengers and community groups that are essential for local dissemination of public-facing health materials, particularly in neighborhoods facing compounding risks from the built environment, older housing stock, and higher burdens of air-quality impacts and asthma. These ideas were explored TEC’s [Heat Gaps Memo](#) which categorized heat as a public health and housing issue, calling for guidance from public health professionals on diagnosing and documenting heat illness, alongside in-home cooling initiatives, weatherization, and heat-resilient housing retrofits as part of a broader right-to-cooling agenda.

#### Recommended Actions

- Keep building the “Right to Cooling” pathway by supporting city-first planning with an eye toward state-level expansion and track operational levers like lowering thresholds for opening cooling centers and embedding heat in emergency declarations.
- Create an Aligned Understanding of Extreme Heat: clarify cooling/heating policy triggers, map public + private cooling/heating locations, and convene the identified multi-organization action team.
- Collect examples of effective heat interventions that support frameworks for risk/economic benefit assessment; and elevate renter/small business gaps and threshold drivers.

### 3. HEALTH SYSTEMS: PUBLIC HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SYSTEMS

*Vision: Public health and hospital systems have transparency, visibility, and alignment with community based stakeholders*

Extreme weather can drive mass public health incidents while simultaneously disrupting care continuity, often harming medically vulnerable populations most, particularly in under-resourced, rural, or historically marginalized communities. Convening discussion reinforced that climate-related health impacts are both immediate and cumulative, affecting work, caregiving, and household stability alongside acute illness. Severe weather can also reduce operational capacity and constrain already-stretched systems.

Participants acknowledged hospitals' limited capacity to prioritize preparedness amid other pressures. However, participants pointed to hospitals' IRS-required community benefit spending as a key opportunity area that is too often not aligned with direct resilience outcomes and might be targeted toward preparedness and prevention.

#### Recommended Actions

- Convene/coordinate the “parallel strategies” approach by engaging health departments, regulatory authorities, funders, community leadership, government, and hospital partners around emergency healthcare provision improvements.
- Create a targeted agenda that address supply-chains vulnerability from “just-in-time” systems, flood risk from basements housing critical equipment, and the need for standards/compliance visibility and transparency of preparedness plans.
- Explore how community benefit spending could better support direct resilience outcomes.
- Reinforce formal partnerships for response capacity and create connection between policy/emergency management and community health needs.

### 4. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

*Vision: Community organizations have defined, supported relationships with the institutions that rely on them for emergency support.*

Grassroots organizations are trusted messengers and are critical in addressing the knowledge gap in preparations and protection from extreme weather events. They are often the first to respond in emergencies, yet they lack consistent funding, formal recognition, and integration within disaster in government emergency. Messaging for both extreme heat and public health crises hinges on community partnerships that understand the barriers of vulnerable populations including poverty, education, and limited language access. The working group discussed formalizing partnerships with governance structures, MOA/MOU templates, legal/admin support (including pro bono), and convening through trusted parties.

#### Recommended Actions

- Move from “discussion” to implementation by clarifying: (1) a working definition of resilience hubs, (2) hub standards/capacity expectations, and (3) a hub directory concept (including potential student-led support).
- Support formalization infrastructure: draft MOA/MOU templates, identify pro bono legal pathways, and answer governance questions.
- Build trust and communication pathways : map touchpoints from after-action reports, define information flow during/after disasters, and address staffing constraints across OEMs and CBOs.