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## Mather LifeWays' "PREPARE" Training Program for Healthcare Workers

**SUMMARY**

Mather LifeWays' "PREPARE" program trains senior-living and long-term care (LTC) professionals to address the medical and psychosocial needs of elderly residents affected by emergency situations. It also gives trainees the skills to train other members of their organizations.

**BACKGROUND**

Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging is a non-profit organization based in Evanston, Illinois, that is dedicated to enhancing the lives of older adults. In 2005, Mather LifeWays' director of research conducted a Web-based needs assessment survey of LTC healthcare professionals, direct care workers, and other staff members from 194 LTC facilities in 30 states to measure participants' emergency preparedness. Ninety-one percent of participants reported that they were not prepared to deal with bioterrorism threats or public health emergencies. Additionally, less than 10% of participating facilities said that they had trained staff in performing disaster drills and in helping residents cope with emergencies.

The survey results revealed the need to train LTC professionals in disaster preparedness and response. Mather LifeWays received a grant from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in September 2005 to develop and implement the program over 3 years. Mather LifeWays staff, in coordination with a team of content experts in the fields of disaster preparedness and LTC, decided to develop the program as a train-the-trainer module in order to give LTC workers the opportunity to train their own staffs in a way that fits each facility best. Mather LifeWays completed development of the program and launched its first training sessions in March 2006.

**GOALS**

The PREPARE program gives senior living and LTC providers the skills and capabilities to respond to disasters and other public health emergencies. Each letter in the acronym corresponds to a key program goal:

- Prepare the LTC workforce with knowledge and competencies to deal with bioterrorism/public health emergencies;
- (Enable) Readiness, recognition, and multidisciplinary response to terrorist events;
- Educate core trainers;
- Produce an effective LTC workforce able to treat elders in such emergencies;
- Alert the public health system of bioterrorism events;
- (Provide) Resources for continuing bioterrorism preparedness education; and

- Evaluate the program's impact.

## **DESCRIPTION**

PREPARE enables LTC staff to meet the special needs of the elderly adults in their care and to take a coordinated approach to alert and involve local, state, and national agencies in emergency situations. PREPARE training consists of two 8-hour days of training that combine lectures, classroom discussions, and scenario-based tabletop exercises. The curriculum equips participants with the knowledge and tools to return to their facilities and train the rest of the staff. As of September 2007, Mather LifeWays had trained 550 organizations in 45 states.

## ***Training Program***

### **Curriculum**

The PREPARE program is composed of eight learning modules to ensure that trainees understand the fundamental issues facing elderly persons in disasters and know how to respond effectively. Mather LifeWays staff and instructors organized the modules in the following order to achieve comprehensive understanding:

- Responses of Older Adults to Disaster/Emergency Situations: Special Considerations;
- Psychological Needs of Older Adults in Long-Term Care;
- Biological and Chemical Agents: What Long-Term Care Providers Need to Know;
- Leading and Communicating in Long-Term Care During a Disaster or Emergency;
- Surveillance and Infection Control;
- Emergency Preparedness Drills and Exercises;
- Local, State, and Federal Plans and Resources for Long-Term Care in a Disaster/Emergency;
- Effective Disaster Planning for Long-Term Care: Components and Template; and
- Resource Module Disaster/Emergency Preparedness in the Home: Resources for the Long-Term Care Workforce (Optional).

## **Training Materials**

PREPARE equips trainees with clear, concise tools that they can take back to their facilities to train their staffs and use to refresh their own training in the future. Mather LifeWays provides specialists with the following tools: a trainer guide for all 8 learning modules; a CD-ROM of disaster resources and disaster plan templates; *Updating Your Disaster Plan*, an American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) publication; comprehensive handouts; DVDs with videos of selected modules; Spanish versions of selected training materials; continuing education units; a self-study version of the modules to allow for flexibility in training; overhead transparencies; and a post-test and evaluation forms. In addition to these handouts, specialists gain access to the PREPARE specialist Web page, which provides more resources and communication channels with Mather LifeWays staff. These training materials consider a diverse array of LTC needs, enabling PREPARE specialists to train their staffs in the most effective way possible.

These training materials help PREPARE specialists fulfill ongoing education requirements after completing training. In order to receive the training, participants must agree to train at least 60 members of their organization's staff on at least 4 of the 8 learning modules and to conduct 1 tabletop exercise at their facility within 4 months of completing the training. In addition, 1 participant from each organization participates in two 10-minute follow-up surveys, 4 and 8 months after the workshop.

## **Participants**

PREPARE training is open to any employee of a long-term care facility. This includes education directors or specialists, healthcare or nursing home administrators, human resources directors, medical directors, risk managers, and social workers.

The HHS grant supports the train-the-trainer workshop and materials for two persons from each organization. These two persons gain the necessary tools to become PREPARE specialists capable of training their entire LTC staff. All train-the-trainer workshop participants receive certificates of completion and are eligible to receive continuing education credit.

## **Partners**

Partners in the PREPARE program offer input on learning modules and the training program. Many of the organizations originally contacted Mather LifeWays to request workshops and then became invested in the program.

Mather LifeWays' partners include the Institute for the Future of Aging Services, the Bioterrorism Educational Program in Aging Collaboratory, Rush University College of Nursing, several national and state LTC industry associations, and the National League for Nursing.

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[The Institute for the Future of Aging Services](#) is an independent applied research and policy center housed within the AAHSA.

## **Program Evaluation**

Mather LifeWays created pre- and post-training surveys to evaluate the PREPARE program's impact on participating LTC communities. Participants who register for the program fill out 1 survey before the training to determine their initial level of knowledge and experience and complete 2 more surveys 4 and 8 months after the training to evaluate what they have learned. The surveys have shown a marked improvement in LTC facilities' preparedness levels. In addition to the surveys, Mather LifeWays staff assesses the PREPARE program's effectiveness through monthly conference calls with project instructors who provide anecdotal examples of program challenges and successes.

The PREPARE program has evolved significantly since its inception due to participant feedback as well as changes in the field of disaster preparedness. Participant feedback indicated that many LTC staff members have trouble finding time for disaster preparedness training in addition to their state-mandated responsibilities. Mather LifeWays responded to this challenge by reviewing the PREPARE program and streamlining the content in order to provide the most essential information to participants in the most user-friendly format. An additional modification was the Spanish translation of selected content. Finally, disaster preparedness information and updates to federal plans and policies are incorporated on an on-going basis.

The PREPARE program has received accolades from the LTC industry and from trainees. In 2007, the American Society on Aging recognized PREPARE for Innovation and Quality in Healthcare and Aging.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### **Keys to Success**

#### **Clear and Easily Understandable Instruction**

PREPARE offers trainees emergency preparedness and response information in a clear, concise, and easy-to-understand format that facilitates training and mitigates misunderstandings.

#### **Ongoing Support and Education**

Mather LifeWays gives each trainee supplemental materials, including a self-study CD-ROM and a disaster plan template, that enable trainees to return to their facilities and to train their entire staff easily and effectively.

#### **Resources**

Mather LifeWays receives funding to run the PREPARE program through a 3-year Bioterrorism and Curriculum Development Program cooperative agreement grant from the HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

#### **Links**

Mather LifeWays' PREPARE

[http://www.matherlifeways.com/re\\_prepare.asp](http://www.matherlifeways.com/re_prepare.asp)

## **REFERENCES**

Sangram, Theresa A. PREPARE Project Coordinator, Mather LifeWays. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 30 Aug 2007.

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