

# The Advancing and Evolving Role of Pharmacy in Preparedness and Response

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The role of pharmacies and pharmacists in preparing for and responding to disasters has evolved markedly since Hurricane Katrina. A myriad of novel programs and initiatives—along with a recognition of pharmacists as essential responders—have helped position the field to better protect patient access to medications during disasters and strengthen the preparedness posture of the healthcare and public health sector.

Advances in the field have contributed to patients and emergency planners alike appreciating pharmacies as more than [“just a place to get medication refills.”](#) Pharmacies, pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians are recognized and trusted sources of [public health information](#), [healthcare services like vaccines](#), [and more](#). Pharmacists are routinely ranked among the [most trusted healthcare professionals](#). Pharmacies are often considered among the most accessible part of the healthcare system and these findings have had an important impact in emergency preparedness and response. Notable advances and contributions to the field are included below.

## *In Preparedness*

- [“Refill-too-soon” overrides](#) can be implemented by jurisdictions during declared states of emergency, allowing patients to obtain early refills of prescriptions before an event.
- Text message notifications have been shown to encourage patients to obtain refills and other needed medications before an event.
- Expansions to pharmacists’ scope of practice, such as statewide protocols and standing orders, [authorize pharmacists to contribute more broadly to preparedness and prevention efforts](#), like administering select vaccinations.

## *In Response*

- Expanded use and adoption of e-prescribing systems, and partnerships between these technology providers during times of emergencies, are helping to [make prescription medication history information available to healthcare responders](#).

- Maps displaying available pharmacy resources, like [Rx Open](#) and [Vaccine Finder](#) leverage partnerships to make important information available to the public and responders.
- Across the country, pharmacy stakeholders are an important member of local, state, and federal business emergency operations centers during disaster responses.

As recent hurricane seasons and other events such as the California wildfires have underscored, pharmacies continue to play an important role in diminishing surge on hospitals and helping meet the health and medical needs of shelters in impacted areas. For example, the Rx Open pharmacy status [reporting map](#) can help providers locate operational pharmacies able to receive patients and provide supplies to nearby shelters. Using locally available resources at pharmacies in disaster areas is often a faster solution during times of crisis and can save time and resources needed to move supplies.

[Healthcare Ready](#) is a public-private partnership that works to improve access to medications and other services during disasters.

[Originally founded](#) as Rx Response after Hurricane Katrina, we use relationships with government and the healthcare supply chain, particularly pharmacies, to enhance resilience and protect patient access to medicines and care during emergencies. In 2008, Healthcare Ready created Rx Open, a one-of-a-kind nationwide map that displays the operating

status of pharmacies in areas impacted by a disaster. Over the past decade, record-breaking wildfires, record-breaking hurricane seasons, massive cyber-attacks on healthcare, and disease outbreaks (e.g., Zika, Ebola and influenza) have served as a reminder of the importance of their and their partners' work to build and maintain an agile and responsive healthcare and public health sector. These events can strain healthcare systems and prevent patients from getting the

medication and care they need, when they need it. Healthcare Ready—positioned as a liaison between the private and public sectors—has contributed to the positive outcome that partnerships can have in strengthening the healthcare system and protecting patients. ■

**Figure 1: Examples of Healthcare Ready's Response Work to 14 Disasters from 2017-2018**

