

9 Integrating Health

Introduction

Health is inherently complex and negotiating its challenges is the epitome of complexity management.

To the uninitiated, developing an event health plan becomes a crash course in balancing previously unappreciated risk with an ever growing list of needs and cost. All too often this is complicated by the need to negotiate a seemingly endless number of opinions, organizations and personalities, often while learning a new (medical) language.

Managing health in the dynamic and often unpredictable context of crowds is a specialist skill that requires strategic planning and experienced staff, working within effective systems and with appropriate resources. Expenses are real while funds and resources are limited.

Health planning is integral to event management, takes time and needs to commence early. Bringing all parties to the shared realization that everyone fundamentally wants a safe and successful event is an important early milestone.

Event and health managers need to understand complexity management from the other's perspective in order to successfully plan and manage events and crowds. An attempt at translation is provided on the following pages.

Event health planning (Process)

Crowds are inherently risky and unpredictable yet people understandably expect to be safe in public spaces, especially at planned events. As event managers, our goal is to plan and deliver a successful event and health planning often becomes a peripheral concern. As with all other aspects of event planning and crowd management, health planning challenges exist in identifying hazards, mitigating risk and maximising individual and community resilience.

Mass casualty incidents at public events are front page news, especially if terrorism is suspected. Pandemic influenza and Ebola Viral Disease are high profile global health issues. The lethality of heat waves is becoming increasingly understood. Mass drug overdoses at music festivals may result in catastrophic loss of life and inevitably evoke passionate community debate. Why then is health so often an after-thought in event planning?

Health is a complex, insular beast. Health culture and language are foreign, intimidating and often poorly understood by outsiders. Comprising many loosely-bound component agencies and perpetually running at or over capacity, Health typifies many of the challenges of complexity management theory and multi-agency incident command. Despite many similarities, Health is often only peripherally involved in event and emergency planning and regularly engaged superficially and late.

Event health planning is a niche skill and requires significant experience across a range of event types. The use of an established event health planning checklist is strongly recommended but is not a substitute for experienced event health planners. Early and ongoing consultation with local ambulance, hospital and reputable event health service providers is critical.

Within health, each organization involved may have different (and potentially conflicting) priorities. While triggers, risks and outcomes vary, many mitigation strategies share common principles. It is critical that the chosen service delivery model be agreed upon by all interested parties, and be flexible, scalable, adequately resourced and led by experienced health commanders.

Strategic health planning can dramatically reduce the impact of an event and/or crowd on local communities and health services. Consider the following scenario:

Example 9.1: Effect of a large music festival

A large music festival held near a small country town will congest local roads, busy local ambulances and likely exceed local hospital capacity. Without additional on-site health services to reduce this impact and with prolonged transport times to larger hospitals, the availability of road and air ambulances to respond in the local community will be reduced. Delays responding to medical emergencies like heart attack, stroke and cardiac arrest result in prolonged suffering, long term disability or death.

Event managers have a moral obligation, and often legal requirement, to minimize the adverse impact of events on local communities. Local standards and legislation vary widely with a number of excellent resources readily available.

Strategic event health planning can minimize the impact of events and incidents on local communities and health service. Committing event resources to the provision of high quality on-site health services and augmenting local health and ambulance services achieves:

- 1 On-site resuscitation and advanced life support teams** – some medical and trauma presentations require urgent and life-saving interventions. Ambulance transport times from events and through crowds to hospital are always longer than the theoretical transport times on a map.
- 2 On-site patient assessment, stabilization and management capacity** – allows for patients to be assessed, initial treatment commenced and ongoing management continued, awaiting transfer to hospital. This often results in reduced acuity and can safely avoid the need for an ambulance transport.
- 3 On-site primary care and definitive management health services** – allows for minor ailments and injuries to be assessed and patrons returned to an event or discharged home, avoiding the need for an ambulance transport and hospital presentation. Patron satisfaction