

# PHHS BLOCK GRANT SUCCESS STORY 2016

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## CALIFORNIA HEALTH ALERT NETWORK

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**Issue:** When disaster strikes, timing is literally a matter of life and death. Every hour of delayed information or response in a large-scale emergency can add over 1,000 new casualties to an already overwhelming number. Thus, the value of intensive exercises to test emergency plans, staff training, and emergency communications channels before public health and safety is actually at risk cannot be overemphasized.

The 2015 Statewide Medical and Health Exercise (SWMHE), a week-long, full-scale, statewide infectious disease and bioterrorism exercise held November 14-20, 2015, was such a test. Simulating a massive bioterrorism attack on Southern California, the exercise included federal partners (e.g., FEMA, CDC); four state government departments; 11 Southern California counties; 13 local public health departments; and hundreds of hospitals and health care facilities.

Central to this scenario was administering life-saving antibiotics to 20,000,000 affected people over the entire Southern California area within 48 hours of exposure, an objective requiring massive multi-agency coordination, statewide information sharing, and multiple communication methodologies. In short, it was the perfect role for the California Health Alert Network (CAHAN) to fill.

**Intervention:** CAHAN, available 24/7 and funded by PHHSBG funds, was born to get the word out. As the official state emergency alerting and information system, CAHAN connects over 25,000 contacts, from state and federal government agencies, county public health departments, hospitals and health care facilities, and emergency medical services, to vital emergency alerts and information.

1. CAHAN sent 239 alerts to 24,815 exercise participants during the 2015 exercise, ranging from focused local alerts to extensive statewide information and resources for nearly 3,000 people. The 39 statewide CAHAN alerts included vital exercise-scenario information; conference calls to coordinate public information, laboratory testing, regional information sharing, and medical countermeasure efforts; and personnel assembly to staff the four state emergency-activation centers open for exercise play.
2. Forty-seven local CAHAN coordinators sent 200 CAHAN alerts to county and city partners and served many of the same information-sharing and staff-assembly purposes as the statewide alerts, as well as advance exercise play with new scenario updates and complications.
3. CAHAN alerts (a) activated medical countermeasures warehouse staff and local medication dispensing site staff, and (b) assembled local public-information officers for statewide conference calls to coordinate public-outreach actions.

**Impact:** SWMHE, the most extensive and inclusive full-scale exercise conducted in California, was a huge success, due in large part to CAHAN's ability to simultaneously place the right information in the hands of the people who need to act on it.

At the height of exercise play, participants loaded and delivered roughly 1,000,000 courses of antibiotic therapy per hour to the affected areas. Timely response and prompt, active communication is essential for reducing casualties and death in a disaster.