

# HHS emPOWER Program

## STORY FROM THE FIELD | COVID-19 RESPONSE IN PHILADELPHIA, PA

The HHS emPOWER Program's (emPOWER) innovative tools support state and local efforts to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to the needs of electricity and health care dependent individuals across the emergency management cycle.

### Why was the HHS emPOWER Program Needed?

Throughout the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, public health authorities across the nation have sought ways to protect the health of the at-risk members of their communities. In July 2020, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) identified the need for insight into populations at higher risk of adverse health outcomes due to COVID-19 infection: those aged 65 and older and those with chronic health conditions. Recognizing the benefits of the HHS emPOWER Emergency Response Outreach Individual Dataset (emPOWER Response Outreach Dataset), the State of Pennsylvania Department of Health officially requested the dataset to support response outreach activities in Philadelphia, fostering a state-to-county collaboration.

### How were the HHS emPOWER Program Tools Used?

**Public Health Engagement:** PDPH, using informational postcards, conducted a mail outreach response activity to reduce COVID-19 staff and individual exposure and provide critical public health and safety messaging and resources to approximately 13,000 at-risk individuals who were included in the emPOWER Response Outreach Dataset. The postcards advocated for the at-risk individuals to "Stay Home, Stay Safe", wear face coverings, social distance, monitor their chronic health conditions, and stay in touch with their providers via telehealth or phone. The postcards also provided direct phone numbers for individuals to call if they needed access to grocery delivery and other support services, required assistance with paying utility bills, or had questions related to COVID-19.

**Response Targeted Outreach:** PDPH also piloted a phone outreach response activity to better understand the challenges, needs, and behaviors of emPOWER at-risk individuals to further inform and target public messaging and response activities. PDPH performed a phone number look-up and conducted telephone outreach to a random sample, reaching 80 individuals who volunteered to participate and providing PDPH with valuable information that is being integrated into their COVID-19 emergency planning and response activities. The discussions also offered an opportunity for PDPH to reinforce public health and personal safety messages that were highlighted in the postcards previously sent.

**Home Health Agency Outreach:** PDPH understood the critical need to identify and engage with home health care agencies throughout the COVID-19 response. They reviewed the home health care agency contact information in the emPOWER Response Outreach Dataset and identified two agencies that had not been included in other lists they received, noting that these two agencies served many of the emPOWER at-risk individuals across the county. PDPH conducted outreach to these agencies to understand needs and distributed important public health and safety resources to help protect health and reduce risk of COVID-19 exposure for both staff and their patients.



#### Partners

- Pennsylvania Department of Health
- Chester County Health Department (PA)
- Philadelphia Corporation for Aging

### What was the Impact?

PDPH's innovative and comprehensive approach to using the emPOWER Response Outreach Dataset not only helped protect the county's at-risk population through targeted outreach, but it also set a precedent for continued partnership and collaboration with home health agencies and gave PDPH critical insights into preparing for potential future waves of COVID-19.

#### Lessons Learned:

- Engaging emergency management partners early on may streamline the phone number look-up process, allowing PDPH to conduct targeted outreach to more at-risk individuals included in the emPOWER Response Outreach Dataset.
- Using emPOWER home health provider information included in the Medicare data may provide a more accurate and complete picture of agencies serving at-risk individuals and facilitate more comprehensive and expedited outreach, compared to other, independently-developed health care provider datasets.
- Leveraging the experiences and peer-to-peer knowledge of another county department's emPOWER activities in the state (e.g., in Chester County, PA) can help PDPH more rapidly understand important actions to take to expedite state-to-county processes for requesting and integrating emPOWER data for current and other potential future responses.

#### What's Next?

PDPH plans to continue their partnerships and messaging activities with the home health agencies across the county, as well as to distribute 1,200 smart thermometers to home health agencies to encourage health care workers to monitor their health and stay home if experiencing symptoms to reduce the risk of exposing clients to COVID-19. By implementing best practices from others within the emPOWER network, PDPH also hopes to improve and augment its preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities related to COVID-19, hurricanes, and other potential incidents, emergencies, and disasters that may impact their communities in the future.

Updated: 9/2/2020

### Quick Facts

**Date:** July – August 2020

**Location:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



#### Tools used:

- ✓ emPOWER Emergency Response Outreach Individual Dataset

#### Stages of the Emergency Management Cycle:

- ✓ Response
- ✓ Recovery
- ✓ Mitigation

*"The emPOWER Program enabled us to communicate important information about COVID-19 community mitigation strategies and available social services to 13,000 highly vulnerable Philadelphia residents."*

- Dr. Thomas Farley, PDPH Health Commissioner

# Leveraging emPOWER Data for a COVID-19 Mail Outreach Response Activity

To reduce COVID-19 staff and individual exposure, PDPH mailed informational postcards to approximately 13,000 Philadelphia residents at higher risk of adverse health outcomes due to COVID-19 infection. Review PDPH's postcard below to learn how public health authorities and their community partners can share critical public health and safety messaging and resources with the at-risk population in their area.

 Develop an **impactful central message** that is easy to understand

 Use **simple graphics or images** and an **accessible color scheme**



## STAY HOME, STAY SAFE

**Your chance of getting very sick from COVID-19 increases as you get older and if you have chronic health conditions.**

Take steps to protect yourself when interacting with others:


- **Wear a mask** when you're near people you don't live with, and ask them to wear masks around you.
- **Wash your hands** often and carry hand sanitizer.
- **Stay 6 feet away** from people you don't live with.

**Stay Healthy**

- Call your doctor's office to learn how to connect by phone or video to manage chronic conditions.

**Medicines and Food**

- Get food and medicines delivered or ask a family member, friend, or neighbor to pick them up for you.

 Provide **direct phone numbers** for individuals to call if they need access to local support services or have questions related to COVID-19

 Encourage precaution-taking by sharing a **short list of easy-to-follow steps** to protect individual health and safety

## Services in Philadelphia

### PCA Helpline

- The PCA Helpline, **xxx-xxx-xxxx**, helps older adults access benefits and services. Call for help with transportation, food, housing, and other services.

### Help with Meals and Groceries

- PCA is working with senior centers to provide delivery and grab-and-go lunch options. Call the PCA Helpline or visit **[insert website]** for a list of sites.


### Help with Utility Bills

- Water: **xxx-xxx-xxxx**
- Heating and Electric (LIHEAP): **xxx-xxx-xxxx**
- PECO: **xxx-xxx-xxxx**

### Coronavirus Helpline

- Call **xxx-xxx-xxxx** to access the Greater Philadelphia coronavirus helpline. This free helpline is staffed by trained health care providers who can answer your questions about COVID-19 symptoms, risk factors, getting tested, and much more!



 Include **helpful website addresses** where individuals can learn more about support services in the area, such as eligibility requirements or hours of operation for each site location.

Updated: 9/2/2020

Contact [empower@hhs.gov](mailto:empower@hhs.gov)  
for more information

