EMI ADVISORS

PULSE Community Listening Session & Workshop Summary
February 9, 2022

This report summarizes the February 9, 2022, Patient Unified Lookup System for Emergencies (PULSE) Community Listening Session & Workshop that EMI Advisors LLC (EMI) organized and facilitated in collaboration with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC).

Background
ONC leads the PULSE initiative, an effort to support national resilience through access to health information during disasters, including public health emergencies. PULSE provides a process for states and localities to grant response personnel (e.g., epidemiologists, emergency medical services and health care volunteers) secure access to vital health information during emergencies and disasters, ensuring patients can continue to receive care when and where they need it.

PULSE can access health information across national networks (e.g., eHealth Exchange). PULSE is more than a technical solution—it is a state/local approach to access health information during disasters. Every disaster affects each state/locality differently, and PULSE allows states and localities to customize their approach based on their needs and policies or other health information technology (IT) systems in use. A brief history of the PULSE Initiative and PULSE Community can be found here.

Objectives & Agenda
The PULSE Community Listening Session & Workshop was held on Wednesday, February 9, from 1 to 4 p.m., EST. The objectives included:

- Raise awareness of the PULSE Initiative and PULSE Community.
- Discuss state and local planning and implementation considerations for PULSE Community.
- Engage in peer-to-peer discussions to identify challenges and mitigation strategies.
- Receive input on the future of the PULSE Initiative.
- Discuss opportunities for improving access to health information during disasters and emergencies.

During the PULSE Community Listening Session & Workshop, presenters from ONC and EMI provided background information on the emergency management landscape, shared information on the PULSE initiative, provided a deep dive on PULSE Community and featured a panel of states, including California, Florida and Texas that shared implementation experiences. With participants randomly distributed across three breakout rooms, EMI Advisors facilitated discussions on the ideal state of PULSE Community, barriers, opportunities, strategies for collaboration and other considerations.

The PULSE Community Listening Session & Workshop had 79 participants who participated for various amounts of time. Participants represented a diverse set of partners, including federal/state government, associations, technology developers, health information exchange consultants and consulting/contracting organizations.

Key Findings

A summary of key findings across themes from the PULSE Community Listening Session & Workshop appears below, including inputs captured during breakout sessions and participant feedback provided verbally and through the Zoom chat feature.

Funding & Sustainability: Challenges mentioned included the availability of funding for all associated costs (e.g., staffing, training, implementation, operations and maintenance) and limitations around federal funding to support all populations impacted by disasters (i.e., Medicaid and non-Medicaid). Participants requested information on implementation and maintenance costs, procurement-related resources and other opportunities to alleviate funding barriers.

Governance: Participants emphasized a desire for use of PULSE Community in more local level events, increased integration in day-to-day emergency management services and systems and embedded information into state disaster preparedness plans and operations (including training and logistics planning). Participants suggested clarification of the roles and responsibilities of partners and agencies that use PULSE Community. Participants identified challenges related to the processes that enabled the use of PULSE by out-of-state providers, approaches for a multi-agency initiative instead of being siloed in a single agency and state/local strategies and approaches for activation and employment of PULSE Community. Participants expressed an interest in peer-to-peer state government learning materials, federal collaboration and governance to manage PULSE Community, and the GitHub repository.

Policy: Participants suggested leveraging and aligning PULSE Community with the Trusted Exchange Framework and Common Agreement (TEFCA) to advance the use of PULSE Community and exploring opportunities for coordination and engagement across state borders. Policy challenges that exist today include:

- Engagement with a broad spectrum of providers.
- Equity considerations.
- Time-limited statewide executive orders for flexible deployment and use during emergencies.
- State policies to access patient-level data.
- Differences between federal and state-level emergency declarations.
- Need to better define use cases for PULSE Community beyond disasters (e.g., emergency medical services for day-to-day acute services, public health uses) to avoid potential gaps in policies.

Staffing & Training: Participants discussed the need for sufficient staffing resources, training/user guides and educational and outreach materials, and the importance of onsite local-level PULSE advocates during disasters to support end users. Some of the current barriers to success discussed are the availability of training resources and the capacity to focus on staffing

and training needs outside of an active emergency/disaster response. Participants also noted the benefits of a demonstration or training environment version of PULSE Community for training purposes.

Technical: Participants discussed opportunities to use Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources® (FHIR®), develop and reference implementation and testing resources for implementers and establish an accessible, well-maintained GitHub contributed to by the community of users. Technical challenges shared include:

- Access to data from all health care organizations across the state/local/regional landscape since not all groups participate in national networks.
- Need for guidance on audit capabilities and services.
- No system to auto-authenticate approved medical providers and volunteers.
- Broadband/internet challenges in rural communities.
- Potential emergencies that impact access to electricity and/or connectivity and the need for a more efficient credentialing process.

Participants also identified opportunities to develop and share implementation resources, support development of an application programming interface (API) and leverage the United States Core Data for Interoperability (USCDI).

Communications: Participants discussed challenges around limited advocacy materials and knowledge products to engage public health officials and other partners. Opportunities include increasing awareness of the availability of PULSE Community, sharing success stories/case studies on lessons learned and promising practices and developing other advocacy and communications materials to disseminate.

Broader Opportunities: Participants discussed broader opportunities and use cases for PULSE Community. Potential other use cases and users include public health (e.g., case investigations, disease surveillance and expansion of personal demographic information for contact tracing), emergency medical services for day-to-day acute services, mental health and behavioral health, substance use disorder/opioid use disorder and national stockpile of medical supplies.

Collaboration: Participants identified collaboration opportunities with other public and private partners across the federal, state and local landscapes. Suggestions for collaboration opportunities and groups to raise awareness and build capacity with included the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Incident Management System, Tribal Nations and councils, National Public Health Service, American Red Cross, U.S. Coast Guard and academic institutions.

Following the PULSE Community Listening Session & Workshop, the EMI Advisors team will use information gathered from the breakout sessions and partner discussions to inform an assessment of PULSE Community.