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## **Sarasota County Health Department's emergency response readiness efforts get national recognition**

As local health departments nationwide strive to protect the public from new and infectious diseases, bioterrorism, natural disasters and other public health threats, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) has recognized Sarasota County Health and Human Services for its ability to respond to public health emergencies.

NACCHO's Project Public Health Ready (PPHR) program is the only known national standards for local public health preparedness and requires proven competency in three areas: all hazards preparedness planning; workforce capacity development; and demonstration of readiness through exercises or real events. Local health departments recognized by PPHR undergo a thorough evaluation process by peer review.

Sarasota County Health and Human Services met each of the comprehensive preparedness benchmarks required by Project Public Health Ready, a unique partnership between NACCHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This recognition confirms that Sarasota County has an emergency response plan in place, the plan is connected to other jurisdictional emergency response plans, agency staff members are trained, and the plan is exercised and used during public health emergencies.

"NACCHO commends Sarasota County Health and Human Services for being a model of public health emergency preparedness," said Robert Pestronk, executive director of NACCHO. "The public health system is making great strides, thanks to the good work of leaders in local public health preparedness such as Sarasota County Health and Human Services."

"We are excited to have had select areas of our plan chosen for inclusion into PPHR's best practice toolbox," says Sarasota County Health and Human Services Administrator Bill Little. "We have worked year-round in part through the Sarasota Community Organizations Active In Disaster (COAD), a coordinated countywide disaster preparedness planning initiative that aims to integrate human services agencies and faith-

based organizations into the county's disaster preparedness system. Through specialized team-based initiatives, the effort supports the design and adoption of standardized disaster plans that ensure common response goals and written coordination and communication procedures, linking those agencies to the county's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP)."

The mission of NACCHO is to be a leader, partner, catalyst and voice for local health departments in order to ensure the conditions that promote health and equity, combat disease and improve the quality and length of all lives.

For more information on all Project Public Health Ready recognized sites and project tools and resources, go to <http://www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/pphr.cfm>.

For more information about the Sarasota County Health Department's emergency response plans, contact Tammi Ketcham, preparedness planner, at 941-861-2906.

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