

# INTRODUCTION

## Policy Forum: *Pandemic Influenza Preparedness in North Carolina*

Concern about the potential for an influenza pandemic has been at the top of the nation's agenda since 2004. In November 2005, President Bush introduced the *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza*, which outlines how the federal government plans to prepare, detect, and respond to a pandemic. It describes the various roles of the federal, state, and local governments, private and international partners, and individual citizens during a pandemic. Congress has supported preparations for an influenza pandemic through appropriations since fiscal year (FY) 2004. Congress has approved over \$6.1 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations to support flu pandemic preparedness and research. The bulk of that funding was provided to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which will manage the federal public health and medical response during a pandemic.

The *Pandemic Influenza Plan* will guide the HHS response to an influenza pandemic at the national level. It focuses on developing infrastructure for vaccine production capacity, stockpiling antiviral drugs and other medical supplies, ensuring the capacity of public health to detect and respond to a potential pandemic, monitoring disease spread, coordinating federal, state, and local preparation, and enhancing outreach and communications planning. The North Carolina Division of Public Health will lead the influenza pandemic response at the state level. It has developed the *NC Pandemic Influenza Plan*, which it will use to coordinate activities during an influenza pandemic. The article by Jeffrey Engel, MD, in this issue of the *Journal* describes the potential consequences of an influenza pandemic and the state's planned response to the crisis.

A moderate influenza pandemic in North Carolina is expected to impact over three million people, with 1.6 million doctor visits, 35,000 hospitalizations, and 8,000 deaths. It is projected that more than 40% of the state's workforce would be out of work due to illness or caring for an ill family member. Such a widespread epidemic would have a huge impact on the state's economy, local businesses, and individuals' lives. In this issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, we are focusing our attention on the impact an influenza pandemic will have on a number of different communities in North Carolina, including industry, faith, health care, and the underserved, and how those communities can prepare for such an emergency. Commentaries present the issues faith communities will face and the important role they can play in guiding the responses of their congregations, the models critical industries have used to develop pandemic influenza business plans, and the perspectives of private and public health providers who will be called to serve during a pandemic. Other commentaries highlight the need to understand the differences between quarantine, isolation, and social distancing and examine public health's authority to implement such measures, the importance of including representatives from underserved communities in the planning processes to avoid discrimination and bias during the pandemic, and the preparations that are being made outside of public health to prepare for the emergency.

Finally, this issue features the work of the NC Division of Public Health and NC Institute of Medicine Task Force on Ethics and Pandemic Influenza Planning. The Task Force was convened to assist the Division of Public Health in developing an ethical framework for evaluating ethical dilemmas that are likely to arise during an influenza pandemic, such as requirements that workers in critical industry perform despite increased risks of contracting the virus and the reciprocal benefits they are owed for such hazards; restrictions on individual rights due to isolation, quarantine, or social distancing measures instituted to limit the spread of disease; and prioritization of limited health care resources such as vaccines and antivirals.

We hope this issue of the *Journal* will help inform North Carolina communities and providers of the potential for an influenza pandemic, the steps being taken at the state and local levels to prepare for such an emergency, and what individuals and organizations can do to prepare themselves.

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