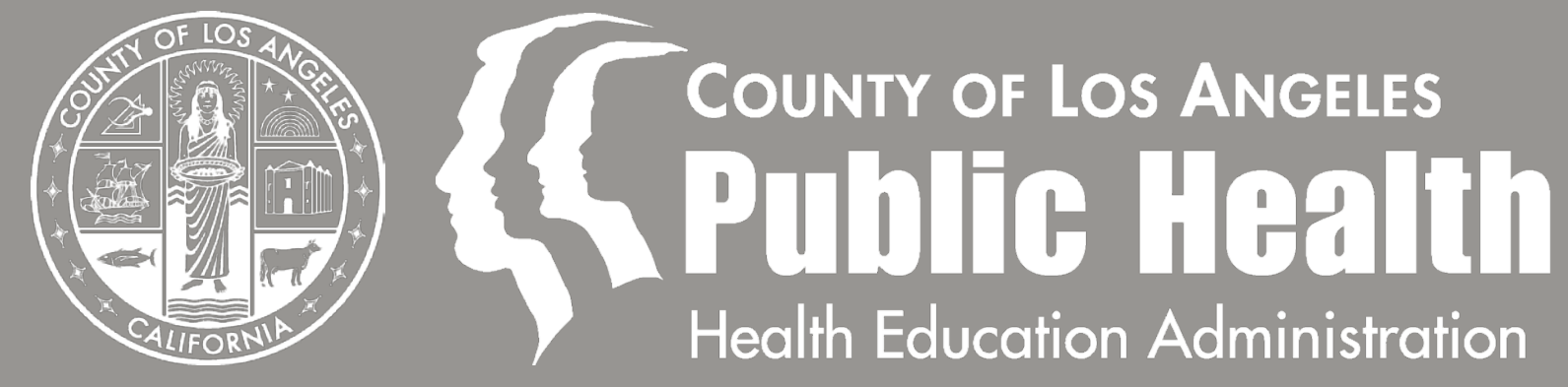


Communication Without Compromise: Maintaining Health Education Standards During a Crisis



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BACKGROUND

In April 2009, H1N1 flu caused the LA County Department of Public Health (DPH) to activate its Incident Command Structure (ICS). DPH's initial flu response highlighted the need to strengthen organizational capacity to effectively communicate with media, clinicians, community based organizations, DPH employees, and residents. As a result, a Communications Branch (COMM) was integrated into ICS in October 2009 to lead communications efforts during DPH's mass H1N1 vaccination campaign.

OBJECTIVES

- Describe 1 way to effectively reconcile educational content received from multiple stakeholders.
- Describe 2 strategies for adhering to health education standards during crisis message development.

METHODS

As part of ICS, COMM staff used their specialized skills and programmatic capacities to fulfill three responsibilities: message development and dissemination; inquiry management; and clinical messaging.

Chart 1: DPH's Incident Command Structure
April 2009 – December 2009

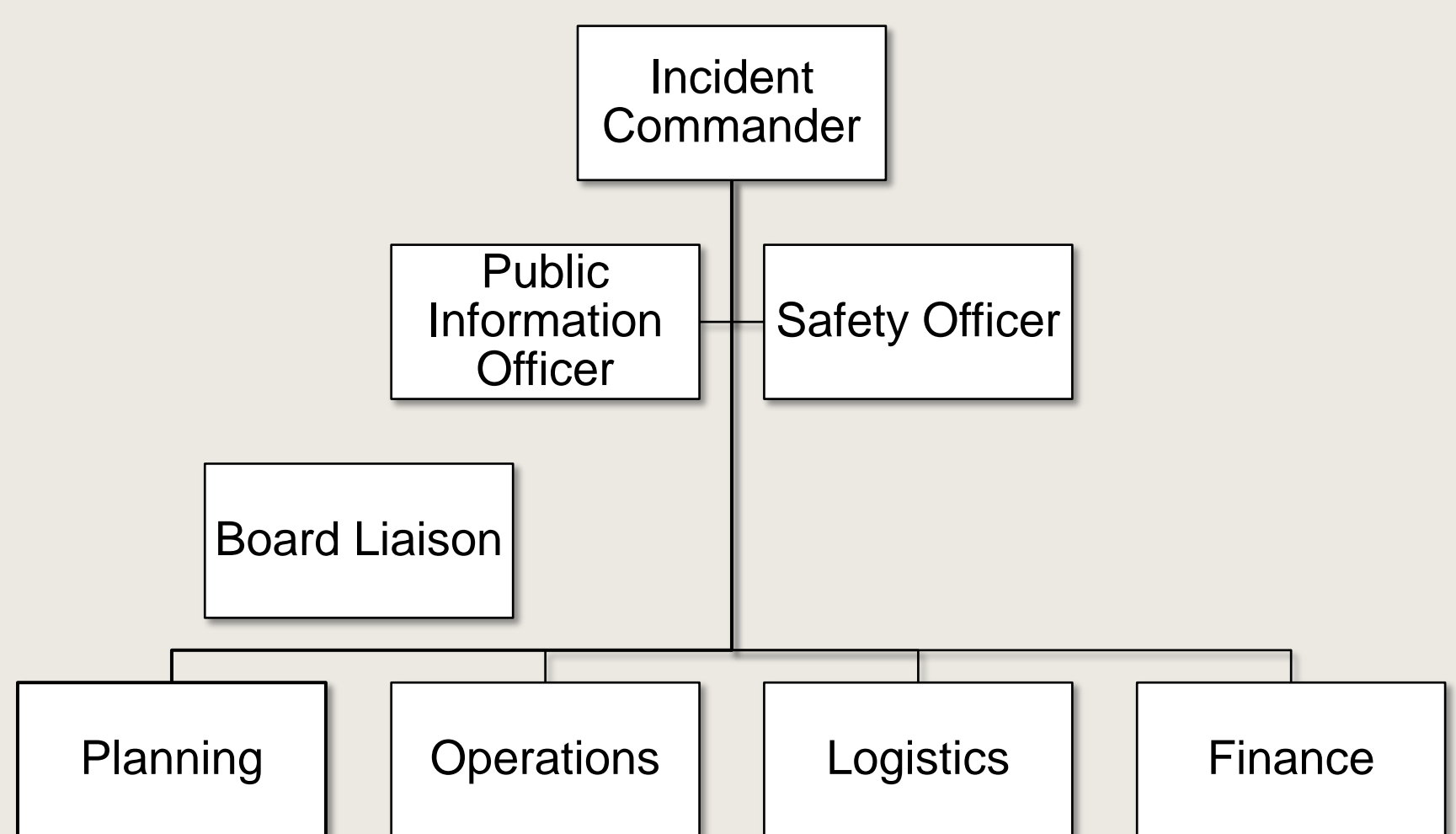


Chart 2: COMM Branch Structure & Key Responsibilities
July 2009 – December 2009

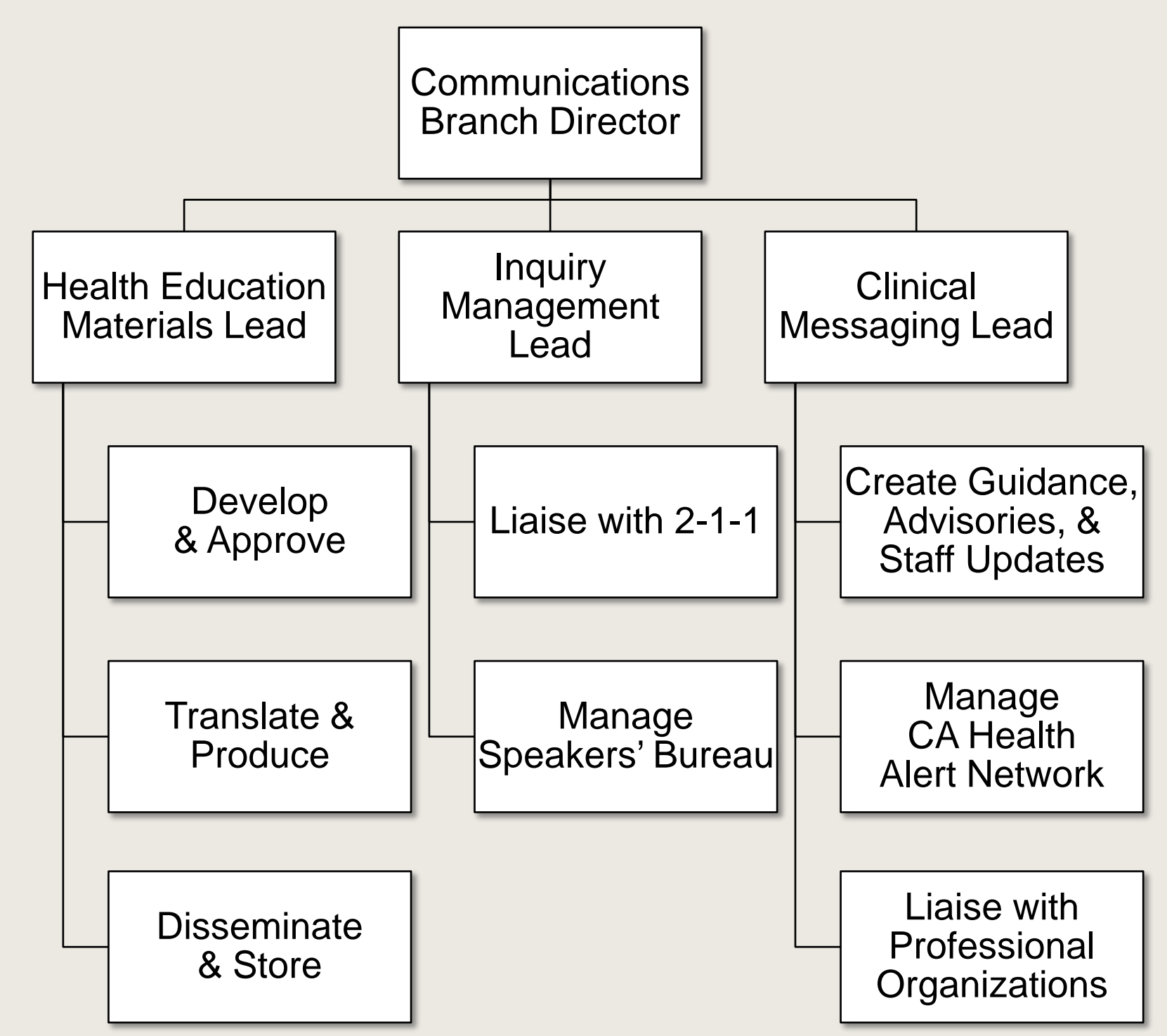
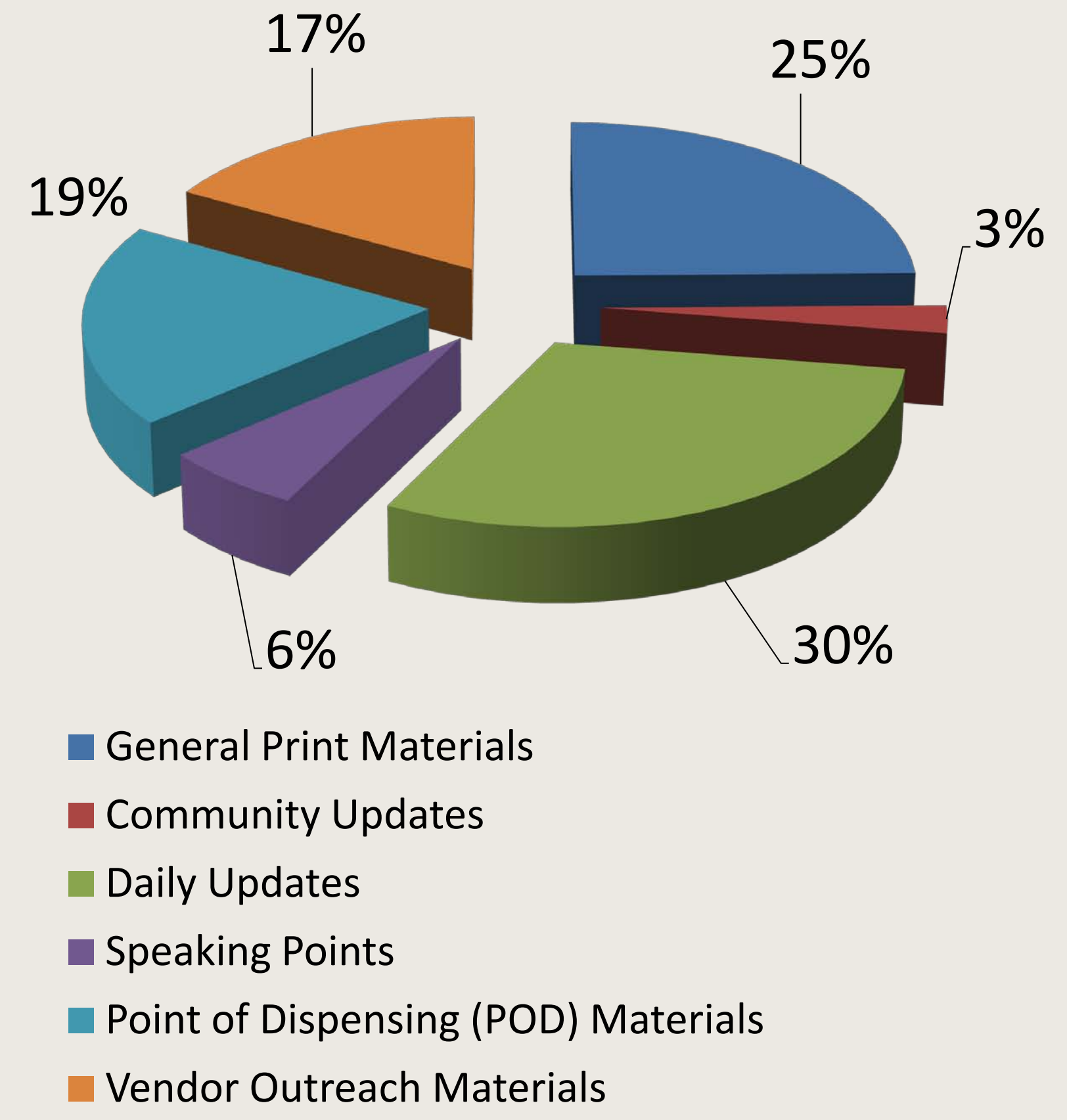


Chart 3: H1N1 Materials by Type
September 2009 – December 2009



Sample H1N1 Materials
September 2009 – December 2009



RESULTS

A suite of 60 DPH-branded print materials, web-based content, public service announcements, and training materials in 12 threshold languages developed over a 4 month period. All messages and materials incorporated health behavior theories (e.g. Health Belief Model and Stages of Change) and conformed to readability (8th grade or lower), layout, and community testing standards despite less than 24 hour development, review and approval deadlines.

CONCLUSIONS

It is challenging but not impossible to maintain basic health education principles at the forefront of message development while satisfying emerging needs of diverse stakeholders. Effective new infrastructure can be created in large bureaucratic systems by mobilizing in nontraditional ways and can (1) improve communication and (2) spur collaboration among internal and external stakeholders beyond emergency response situations.

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