

Informal leadership and networks: Lessons from the response to the West Nile Virus outbreak in North America

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Sharing information across organizational boundaries in support of a governmental response to crises requires intergovernmental collaboration and information sharing. Examining these efforts provides an opportunity to explore questions about the role of various actors in such response efforts; in particular, informal leaders. This paper, based on a comparative case analysis of the response to West Nile virus (WNV) in two US states, New York and Colorado, extends what is known about leadership by providing new understanding about how informal leadership affects collaborative information sharing. The case analysis contributes to current knowledge about government leadership in complex networked environments such as a public health crisis. A set of propositions drawn from the analysis provides a preliminary model of the mechanisms through which informal leadership affects intergovernmental information sharing in crisis response. The findings also provide lessons about the role informal leaders play in cross-boundary information sharing and, consequently, in generating government capacity to respond to complex public problems as well as the foundation for a set of recommendations for practitioners.