CORHA – Exploring the COVID-19 Crater: Lasting Impacts of COVID-19 on HAI/AR Outbreak Response

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Key Objectives:
Participants will hear from the Council for Outbreak Response: Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAI) and Antimicrobial-Resistant (AR) Pathogens (CORHA) about the impacts of the COVID-19 national response on healthcare outbreak activities conducted by state and local health departments. Participants will engage in a discussion about their experiences investigating and responding to healthcare outbreaks of COVID-19 and other HAI/AR pathogens, the shift in the landscape of HAI/AR outbreak response efforts in the context of increased resources and capacity-building support provided to health departments, and forecasts for the future of HAI/AR outbreak response practice. Participants will also share their experiences with the reporting and notification of outbreaks of COVID-19 in healthcare settings.

Brief Summary:
HAI/AR outbreaks can lead to preventable morbidity and mortality in persons receiving healthcare. Despite significant progress preventing infections, patients continue to experience infections due to outbreaks and adverse events stemming from emerging pathogens, lapses in infection control, unsafe injection practices, and contaminated drugs and medical devices. As a result, coordinated approaches to contain the spread of infectious disease threats in healthcare facilities have been introduced.

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained healthcare outbreak response and exerted additional pressure on outbreak investigation practices. More than 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths in the United States have been linked to nursing homes, with evidence pointing to transmission between residents and health care workers, and between health care workers and the community. These high rates of COVID-19 infections within health care facilities and nursing homes have increased the footprint of outbreak investigation and response while stretching resources to their limits. Recognizing this burden, CDC awarded funding to health departments through the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) Cooperative Agreement, in the form of the ELC Enhancing Detection and ELC CARES supplements to increase their outbreak response capacity. Additionally, significant technical assistance was provided by CDC and other public health partners to respond to COVID-19.

There will likely be lasting impacts on healthcare outbreak investigation and response practices. The national response to COVID-19 has accelerated changes in key healthcare outbreak response activities and strategies. Impacted areas include: healthcare outbreak reporting and notification, outbreak investigation practices, infection control assessments, data reporting and collection mechanisms, the roles of regulatory partners, and collaboration between public health and healthcare. Additional impacts that are beginning to be recognized and explored include the increased spread of AR pathogens and other non-COVID-19 infections.

As the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic shifts to recovery efforts, health departments may also observe a shift in traditional HAI/AR outbreak response activities. This shift might serve as an

opportunity for health departments to evaluate their response activities and explore the future of HAI/AR outbreak response activities in their jurisdictions. This roundtable presentation will provide a platform for health departments to learn from their colleagues' experiences during the pandemic, assess the current state of the HAI/AR outbreak activities and consider future changes.