

Health and Social Services Recovery Support Function

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Strong, vibrant communities are built by healthy residents living in safe housing who have access to adequate nutrition, a safe work environment and health care. Disasters can put those basic needs at risk. The Health and Social Services Recovery Support Function (HSS RSF) supports locally led recovery efforts in the restoration of public health, health care and social services networks to promote the resilience, health, and well-being of affected individuals and communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. People displaced by the storm in need of housing also experience exceptionally high levels of stress managing their lives in unfamiliar surroundings, adapting to a new community, and managing the increased tension of cohabitating with other friends of family.

Hurricane Irma affected everyone in its path, but people who were vulnerable before the storm—seniors, individuals with chronic conditions, economically disadvantaged, and those with access or functional needs—were disproportionately impacted. Access to healthcare and social services has a major impact on the ability of a community to recover. The HSS RSF is helping communities restore and improve health and social services programs affected by Irma by working with state and local officials to shorten the distance between resource need and resource provider.

The [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) is the coordinating agency for the HSS RSF. On September 16, 2017, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requested the deployment of the HSS RSF Field Coordinator to assess Hurricane Irma's impacts to health and social services facilities and programs, as well as community members' access to those services, to identify unmet needs and develop recovery support strategies to support Florida's recovery. The HSS RSF's work centers on nine core recovery mission areas:

- ? Public health
- ? Healthcare services
- ? Behavioral health



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- ? Environmental health
- ? Food safety and regulated medical products
- ? Long-term responder health issues
- ? Social services
- ? Disaster case management/referral to social services, and
- ? Children and youth in disasters

Through the lens of these mission areas and based on the input received from state, local, and non-governmental organization (NGO) stakeholders, three major goals emerged to support the health and social services recovery efforts in Florida:

- ? Support local-level recovery planning by building a comprehensive understanding of community health and social service needs; and support community prioritization of these needs, including accessibility requirements, based on the whole community's input and participation in the recovery planning process.
- ? Restore healthcare capacity and access for impacted populations to include behavioral health, public health, impacts to children (including education), and social services functions.
- ? Restore and improve the resilience and sustainability of the healthcare system and social service capabilities and networks to promote the well-being of the community.

Identifying Resources

The HSS RSF works to bolster existing programs by connecting local health and social service organizations with additional resources, both financial and technical. Many times, local communities are not aware that additional funding exists for recovery efforts. The HSS RSF identifies precise recovery needs or barriers that may require additional assistance and then leans on its network of 17 federal department and agency partners to identify resources from government agencies or philanthropic organizations that may be available to local governments or organizations.

After Governor Scott issued an emergency rule requiring nursing homes and Assisted Living Facilities to install generators and develop an emergency management plan, the Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility (ALF)



Emergency Power and Mitigation Task Force was established to assess and recommend resources or programs to support nursing home and ALF compliance with the rule. Many nursing homes and ALFs are for-profit organizations and therefore, not eligible for FEMA funds to support this requirement. The HSS RSF developed a matrix detailing potential funding sources as a resource for compliance with the emergency rule.

The HSS RSF is working with health care providers—including behavioral health—and social service organizations to find additional resources that can supplement existing programs to help communities prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

Training Assistance

After a disaster, many local governments, social services organizations and health care providers may lack the ability to meet all the needs of their communities and do not have the funds to hire additional staff. Through training, the HSS RSF can help expand the knowledge and capability of local agencies, allowing them to better serve their community.

Examples of the HSS RSF organized training sessions in Florida include:

- ? Conducting a resiliency summit to exchange best practices information between Flint, Michigan and the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe.
- ? Improving awareness and mitigation of Environmental Health Hazards in Child Care programs for the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe.
- ? Developing a disaster recovery "Train-the-Trainer" workshop designed to give participants information which will enable them to go back to their communities and train others about hazard prevention and response in collaboration with the National Institute of Environmental Health and Sciences.
- Developing training materials on preparedness and recovery for child care providers.

Additional information on coping with stress after a disaster is available. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) offers resources for parents, educators and other professionals.



As the recovery from Hurricane Irma continues, the HSS RSF is reaching out to long-term recovery groups and workforce commissions to disseminate information about services, job opportunities and training that is available to meet recovery and resilience goals.



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