



Mental Health Services Post-Hurricane: A Disaster  
Response Plan  
Orleans Parish, United States

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# Preface

The South Louisiana region, with a rich cultural heritage and diverse population, faces significant challenges due to its location along the Gulf Coast, where hurricanes frequently make landfall. Specifically, Orleans Parish has recently experienced devastating impacts of hurricanes, which have resulted in adverse mental health outcomes for its inhabitants. The demographic makeup, including a mix of urban and rural communities, elderly populations, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, heightens the necessity for specialized disaster preparedness and response plans for mental health management in this region.

Hurricanes can lead to acute stress due to witnessing destruction, experiencing a threat to life, or the loss of a loved one. Additionally, hurricanes often result in displacement, loss of property and livelihood, and loss of community structures and social networks. The financial strain of hurricanes also contributes to adverse mental health outcomes.

Services are crucial for immediate crisis intervention and for long-term mental health support mechanisms that foster community resilience and recovery. This plan provides a framework for deploying mental health services post-hurricane to aid the resilient people of South Louisiana in their recovery and rebuilding efforts.

The foundation of this plan is built upon a collaborative effort, leveraging the expertise and resources of local partners and the community at large. These efforts exemplify the city's commitment to not only navigate these storms but to emerge stronger, with a mental health support system that reflects the spirit and strength of the region.

This annex to the Louisiana Department of Health sets forth guidelines and recommendations for managing the response to mental health needs of individuals and communities in Orleans Parish post-hurricane.

# Signature Page

I have read the Emergency Operations Plan and agree with its scope. By signing below I approve the adoption of the updated San José Emergency Operations Plan and agree to support its implementation.

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Director of Louisiana Department of Health

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Date

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Mayor of New Orleans

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Date

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Emergency Services Coordinator

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Date

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Office of Behavioral Health

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Date

I have read the Disaster Response Plan and agree with its scope. By signing below I approve the adoption of the updated Orleans Parish Disaster Response Plan and agree to support its implementation.

# Mission

The mission of the Louisiana Department of Health is to protect and promote health and to ensure access to medical, preventive, and rehabilitative services for all citizens of the State of Louisiana.

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to outline a comprehensive response to address the mental health needs of individuals and communities in Orleans parish who are impacted by hurricanes. This plan focuses on resilience, recovery, and the promotion of mental well-being, and incorporates aid from partner organizations such as non-profits and non-governmental organizations.

## Authorities

The Louisiana Administrative Code, Title 48 - Public Health is an administrative code that contains regulations related to mental health services, including licensure and certification requirements for mental health providers, standards for mental health facilities, and guidelines for emergency and disaster response.

The Louisiana Emergency Health Powers Act (LEHPA) grants the Louisiana Department of Health and other relevant authorities power to coordinate and provide mental health services in disaster-affected areas:

“C. Effect of the declaration.

The declaration of a state of public health emergency by the governor shall activate the state's emergency response and recovery program under the command of the director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

D. Emergency powers.

During a state of public health emergency, in addition to any powers conferred upon the governor by law, he may do any or all of the following:

(2) Utilize all available resources of the state government and of each political subdivision of the state as reasonably necessary to cope with the disaster or emergency.”

The Louisiana Crisis Standard of Care is a declaration that gives specific legal/regulatory powers and protections for healthcare providers in the necessary tasks of allocating and using scarce medical resources.

The Stafford Act is a federal law that governs disaster response and recovery efforts in the United States. It authorizes the President to provide assistance to states and localities during declared disasters or emergencies, including funding for mental health services through FEMS

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is an organization that provides disaster response and recovery assistance, including mental health services. FEMA works with state and local agencies to ensure that mental health needs are addressed in disaster-affected agencies.

## Definitions

**Emergency** - a situation or event that poses an immediate threat to the health, safety, and well-being of individuals or communities and requires prompt action to mitigate its impact.

**Mental Health** - our emotional, psychological, and social well-being that affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices.

**Resilience** - the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties

**Disaster** - a sudden event, such as an accident or a natural catastrophe, that causes great damage or loss of life.

**Hurricane** - a tropical cyclone with maximum sustained winds of 74 mph. A major hurricane is a tropical cyclone with maximum sustained winds of 111 mph or higher, corresponding to a Category 3, 4, or 5 on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.

**LDH, OPH (Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health)** - protects and promotes the health and wellness of individuals and communities in Louisiana.

**FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)** - Over 20,000 agency employees form a team of dedicated emergency management leaders to help people before, during, and after disasters. These leaders work collaboratively to share experiences and resources, building the FEMA that the nation needs and deserves.

# Communication Plans

## Communication Plan Objectives

1. **To Inform:** Provide timely and accurate information about available mental health services and resources.
2. **To Coordinate:** Facilitate efficient coordination among mental health providers, emergency services, and support agencies.
3. **To Support:** Offer reassurance and support to those affected, reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.

## Internal Communications

- **Emergency Response Coordination:** Establish a clear chain of command and communication among the Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Behavioral Health, FEMA, local hospitals, and mental health organizations.
- **Regular Updates:** Implement scheduled briefings for staff and volunteers on the ground to update on the current situation, available resources, and deployment strategies.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Set up a system for field workers to provide real-time feedback on challenges faced and resources needed, enabling rapid response to evolving needs.

## External Communications

- **Public Information Campaigns:** Launch multi-platform public information campaigns before, during, and after hurricanes, focusing on mental health awareness, available services, and how to access them.
- **Hotlines and Digital Platforms:** Establish hotlines and utilize social media, websites, and mobile apps to disseminate information, offer support, and guide individuals to the necessary services.
- **Community Engagement:** Work with local community leaders, schools, and religious organizations to spread information and reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues.

## Tools and Channels

- **Social Media:** Use platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for real-time updates and engagement.
- **Traditional Media:** Collaborate with local radio, television, and newspapers to disseminate information.
- **Digital Platforms:** Utilize the official websites of the Louisiana Department of Health and partner organizations for updates and resources.
- **Emergency Alert Systems:** Use Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) and the Emergency Alert System (EAS) for critical alerts and instructions.

## Key Messages

- **Preparation:** Information on how to prepare mentally for a hurricane.
- **Immediate Response:** Guidance on coping strategies and where to find emergency mental health support post-disaster.
- **Long-Term Recovery:** Information on accessing long-term mental health resources to support recovery and resilience.

## Evaluation and Adaptation

- **Monitoring:** Regularly monitor the effectiveness of communication efforts through engagement metrics, hotline call volumes, and feedback from the community.
- **Adaptation:** Be prepared to adapt the communication strategy based on feedback and the changing needs of the affected population.

This communication plan aims to ensure that every individual affected by hurricanes has access to the mental health support they need, understands how to access these services, and feels supported throughout the recovery process.

## Mutual Aid Agreement

- **FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and Louisiana Department of Health:** Agreement for the provision of federal resources and support for mental health services in disaster-affected areas, including funding, personnel, and technical assistance.
- **Office of Behavioral Health and New Orleans Mental Health Collaborative:** Collaboration to ensure the availability of mental health professionals and support services, including crisis intervention teams and counseling services.
- **Catholic Charities and Louisiana Department of Health:** Partnership to provide emergency shelter and long-term housing assistance, alongside mental health counseling and support services for displaced individuals and families.
- **NOLA Ready and Local Hospitals:** Agreement for the coordination of emergency medical services and mental health support, ensuring hospitals and clinics are prepared to address the surge in mental health needs following a hurricane.
- **Local Universities with Psychology or Social Work Programs and Office of Behavioral Health:** Arrangement for the mobilization of trained volunteers and interns to support mental health interventions under the supervision of licensed professionals.

These mutual aid agreements ensure that a comprehensive, coordinated, and effective response is in place to meet the mental health needs of individuals and communities affected by hurricanes in Orleans Parish. By leveraging the strengths and resources of a wide range of partners, the plan aims to promote resilience, recovery, and community well-being.



# VI: Concept of Operations- Mental Health Services Post-Hurricane, Orleans Parish

## Assessment of Population Needs Including the Needs of Vulnerable Populations

Orleans Parish's population is known for its vibrant culture and community resilience resulting from surviving detrimental hurricanes in the past. Studies show that survivors of previous hurricanes are more likely to experience psychological distress and mental health disorders following future hurricanes.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the recent hurricanes in Orleans Parish have highlighted the critical need for an organized disaster response plan focusing on the mental health needs of its residents, and especially the needs of vulnerable populations including the elderly, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

Loss of employment and property, disruption in healthcare services, and displacement and relocation contribute to hurricane survivors' increased susceptibility to adverse mental health conditions.<sup>4</sup> The assessment of vulnerable populations' needs in Orleans Parish post-hurricane involves understanding the psychological impact of such disasters on these groups. This includes acute stress, PTSD, anxiety, depression, and the exacerbation of pre-existing mental health conditions. Factors contributing to their vulnerability, such as age, economic status, accessibility to mental health services, and pre-existing conditions, are carefully considered to tailor the disaster response effectively. Especially vulnerable populations are listed below.

1. **Elderly:** Often experience isolation, may have mobility issues, and might be living alone, increasing their risk during and after a disaster.
2. **Socioeconomically Disadvantaged:** Lack of resources to evacuate, recover, or access mental health services post-disaster.
3. **Individuals with Pre-existing Mental Health Conditions:** Disasters can exacerbate conditions such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, requiring immediate and ongoing support.
4. **Children and Adolescents:** Particularly sensitive to the chaos and trauma of disasters, requiring special attention to their emotional and psychological needs.

## Matching Available Resources to Population Needs

In Orleans Parish, the disaster response plan for mental health services post-hurricane emphasizes the need for preparedness and rapid deployment of resources to address the psychological aftermath of such an event. The plan involves a comprehensive resource assessment to identify required mental health services and available resources, with consideration for developing local caches of supplies. It highlights the importance of supporting vulnerable populations, including those with limited resources and those at greater risk of trauma related disorders.

To meet the emergent mental health needs, the plan advocates for redirecting staff within the Louisiana Department of Health and Human Services from non-critical functions to emergency response roles, focusing on mental health support. Staff are to be prepared for extended duties during emergencies and encouraged to have personal contingency plans to ensure their ability to remain focused on providing care.

Partnerships with public and private entities are essential for augmenting resources, with Memoranda of Understanding established in non-emergency times to facilitate swift assistance when needed. Additional personnel and supplies may be sourced through mutual aid agreements, community-based groups like the Medical Reserve Corps, and even retired professionals or students in relevant fields.

The plan also includes protocols for activating external support such as the Strategic National Stockpile for medical supplies, should local resources be depleted. A detailed annex will outline the processes for managing, distributing, and prioritizing these resources.

In terms of clinical care, the Emergency Services Coordinator is tasked with ensuring access to appropriate mental health services, managing resource allocation, and potentially designating specialized facilities for comprehensive care. Strategies to reduce health impacts focus on environmental health, injury prevention, infectious disease control, and managing chronic diseases, alongside specific mental health interventions to address stress, trauma, and related conditions.

This disaster response plan positions Orleans Parish to effectively address the mental health challenges posed by hurricanes, through preparedness, robust resource management, and strategic partnerships, ensuring the community's psychological well-being in the face of disaster.

The Office of Behavioral Health is tasked with working collaboratively with partners to develop and implement a comprehensive integrated system of behavioral health services, social supports, and prevention services that promote recovery and resilience. The use of mobile mental health units and 24/7 hotlines will allow those with limited resources and transportation to access immediate care post-hurricane. The presence of long term support services will aid those with pre-existing mental health conditions and trauma as well as children affected by hurricanes to cope with the aftermath of the disaster and detect and prevent long term mental health effects. Community engagement and education and preparedness will help build resilience within the Orleans parish community, further protecting hurricane victims from adverse mental health effects.

#### Strategies for Addressing Identified Needs

- 1. Immediate Crisis Intervention:** Establishing mobile mental health units and hotlines for emergency psychological first aid and counseling.
- 2. Long-term Support Services:** Implementing programs for ongoing mental health care, including therapy and support groups, tailored to the needs of vulnerable populations.

3. **Community Engagement:** Empowering community leaders and organizations to participate in mental health support initiatives, enhancing resilience and recovery.
4. **Education and Preparedness:** Offering workshops and resources on coping mechanisms and stress management to prepare for future disasters.

## Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Disaster Response

### Methods for assessing effectiveness of disaster response

- **Surveys and Interviews:** Conducted with affected individuals and families to gather data on their mental health status and needs.
- **Collaboration with Local Organizations:** Partnering with local healthcare providers, NGOs, and community groups to identify those at greatest risk and their specific needs.
- **Utilization of Existing Data:** Reviewing health records (with proper authorization) to identify individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions.

### Evaluation

#### Planning and Preparedness

##### Strengths

- Community engagement
- Local expertise
- Resource allocation

##### Areas for Improvement

- Training and capacity building
- Scalability and Flexibility

### Response

##### Strengths

- Rapid Mobilization
- Integrated Support Services

##### Areas for Improvement

- Communication Channels
- Accessibility of Services

### Recovery and Resilience Building

##### Strengths

- Long-Term Support
- Community Resilience

#### Areas for Improvement

- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Sustainability

#### **Conclusion**

To conclude, a disaster plan for Orleans Parish that is built on collaboration, expertise, and resources of local partners, organizations, as well as the community holds great promise for supporting mental health needs after a disaster. While it presents strengths in planning, preparedness, response and recovery, training, scalability, communication, accessibility of resources are all areas that need attention to enhance the effectiveness of this plan, continuous education and adaptation, based on monitoring and evaluation, will be crucial to refining the approach and ensuring that it meets the evolving needs of the community when it comes to mental health. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Disaster Behavioral Health Concept of Operations*, was used to inform this plan, and it was adapted to fit the specific needs of the Orleans' population, taking into account resources available specifically in Louisiana.<sup>6</sup>

**Annex 1: Threat and Hazards Assessment Table  
Louisiana Department of Health + Orleans Parish**

Natural	Technological	Human-caused
Resulting from acts of nature	Involves accidents or the failures of systems and structures	Caused by the intentional actions of an adversary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tropical cyclones/ Flooding</b> : New Orleans' geography makes it particularly vulnerable to tropical cyclones, leading to severe flooding. The city's history of disaster declarations primarily involves tropical storms, emphasizing the need for robust flood management and hurricane preparedness strategies.</li> <li>• <b>Epidemic/ Pandemic</b>: Given global mobility and dense urban areas, New Orleans is at risk for the spread of infectious diseases. Planning should include public health infrastructure reinforcement and widespread access to medical services.</li> <li>• <b>Climate Change related hazards</b>: Increased sea level rise, tornadoes, and flooding due to climate change call for adaptive infrastructure and community resilience measures. Additionally, The rise in frequency and intensity of heatwaves requires strategies for cooling centers, public health advisories, and infrastructure capable of withstanding higher temperatures.</li> <li>• <b>Coastal erosion</b>: Erosion threatens land loss, impacting habitats, and increasing flood risks. Strategies should include shoreline protection, habitat restoration, and sustainable land management.</li> <li>• <b>Subsidence</b>: The downward movement of the Earth's surface, exacerbated by human activities, increases risk of flood and affects infrastructure stability, requiring monitoring and mitigation efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Infrastructure Failure</b>: Includes power outages, water supply contamination, and levee failure. Mitigation involves robust maintenance, emergency backup systems, and public awareness campaigns.</li> <li>• <b>Hazardous materials</b>: Chemical and industrial accidents pose risks of spills, release, and contamination. Requires strict regulation, emergency response plans, and community right-to-know policies.</li> <li>• <b>Transportation accidents</b>: Orleans Parish's transportation infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and ports, poses risks related to accidents and incidents. This includes vehicular accidents, maritime incidents, and rail accidents, which can result in injuries, fatalities, and disruptions to supply chains.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Terrorism</b>: The city of New Orleans is also home to two federal buildings, making it subject to potential terrorism threats. Preparedness strategies should include intelligence sharing, security enhancements, and public safety drills.</li> <li>• <b>Civil unrest</b>: There is lots of gang violence in New Orleans. Addressing underlying social issues, promoting community engagement, and preparing law enforcement to handle unrest peacefully are key strategies for preparation and response.</li> </ul>

**Annex 2: Drills and Exercises**  
**Louisiana Department of Health + Orleans Parish**

<b>Training Seminar: Building Mental Health Resilience Post-Hurricane</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	Educate the community on recognizing and managing stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues post-hurricane.
<b>Estimate Length of Training</b>	<b>2 hours:</b> 1 hour for presentation and interactive activities, followed by 1 hour for Q&A and resource sharing.
<b>Target Audience and max size of audience.</b>	<b>Target Audience:</b> Residents of Orleans Parish, with a focus on vulnerable populations (families, elderly individuals, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups particularly affected by hurricanes). <b>Max Size:</b> 50 participants per session to encourage interaction and personalized attention.
<b>Who would be a good candidate</b>	<b>Ideal Facilitator:</b> Mental health professionals experienced in disaster response, such as psychologists, counselors, or social workers, alongside survivors of previous hurricanes who can share personal stories of resilience and recovery.
<b>What do you want community members to do as a result of their attending this session?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will learn techniques to manage post-disaster stress and anxiety.</li> <li>• Community members will feel empowered to seek mental health support when needed and offer support to others.</li> <li>• Increased community engagement in mental health resilience initiatives.</li> <li>• Participants will emerge resilient and resiliency will increase in the community as a whole.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies to increase community uptake of your mitigation</b>	<p><b>Free and Accessible Sessions:</b> Offer the training at no cost and at various times to accommodate different schedules.</p> <p><b>Engaging Materials:</b> Provide easy-to-understand materials, such as brochures and checklists, on recognizing signs of mental distress and available resources. Materials will be provided in English and Spanish</p> <p><u>Example handouts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recognizing and Managing Post Traumatic Stress:</b> A brochure that explains common psychological reactions to disasters, symptoms of stress, and when to seek professional help.</li> <li>• <b>Mental Health Preparedness Checklist for Hurricanes:</b> A checklist that helps individuals prepare mentally for the impacts of hurricanes, including tips for relaxation and stress reduction techniques.</li> </ul> <p><b>Follow-Up Support:</b> Establish a follow-up system, such as support groups or buddy systems, for participants to continue learning and support post-training.</p>

### Annex 3: Table for Emergency Operations Plan Short-Term Recovery Strategies

Necessities	Possible Resources	Distribution Strategies
Water	Donation of Water from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neighboring Parishes</li> <li>- American Red Cross</li> <li>- FEMA</li> <li>- Cajun Navy</li> </ul>	Priority Recipients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elderly</li> <li>- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged</li> <li>- Children and adolescents</li> </ul> Distribution Mediums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shelters, places of worship, community centers</li> </ul>
Food	Donation of food from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- American Red Cross</li> <li>- Second Harvest Food Bank of NO</li> <li>- Greater New Orleans Foundation</li> <li>- Local restaurants</li> <li>- Community food pantries</li> </ul>	Priority Recipients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same as water</li> <li>- Those with mental health conditions surrounding food intake</li> </ul> Distribution Mediums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same as water</li> </ul>
Housing	Habitat for Humanity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help rebuild or repair homes for low income families</li> </ul> FEMA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can provide temporary housing to eligible individuals</li> </ul> American Red Cross <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emergency shelter and housing assistance to disaster survivors</li> </ul>	Priority Recipients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same as water</li> <li>- Individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions</li> </ul> Considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those with pre-existing mental health conditions should have priority relocation from affected health facilities.</li> </ul>
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emergency mental health response teams</li> <li>- Immediate crisis intervention</li> <li>- Access to appropriate mental health service</li> <li>- Long-term support services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Redirection of staff within Louisiana Department of Health and Human Services</li> <li>- Emergency Services Coordinator (clinical care team)</li> <li>- Office of Behavioral Health (resource management)</li> </ul>

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