DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Information and Tools for Homeless Service Providers and Disaster Professionals

Objective: Identify and collaborate with partners to address homeless individuals’ disaster response & recovery needs.

Key Audiences:
- Homeless service providers
- Disaster coalitions (e.g. Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs))
- Local government (e.g. public health departments)
- Disaster relief (e.g. American Red Cross)
- Funders

Section 1: Build an Inclusive Emergency Management System

**PREPARE**

1. **Get to Know the Community**
   - Understand the homeless populations in the community
   - Identify key homeless service providers

2. **Design a Strategy for Collaboration**
   - Identify roles & responsibilities of partner agencies
   - Determine decision-making, collaboration & communication processes

3. **Establish or Strengthen Relationships with Potential Partners**
   - Expand non-disaster partnerships to include collaboration for disaster response

4. **Meet and Discuss Common Concerns**
   - Disaster response
   - Community capabilities
   - Collaboration opportunities
   - Ongoing nature of collaboration

5. **Maintain Relationships**
   - Bring something valuable to the table
   - Have a strategic plan and focus on small steps
   - Start working on homeless provider disaster plans (See Section 2)
   - Make sure key partners are present

**RESPOND**

6. **Use/Test the System**
   - Agree on clear roles & responsibilities in disaster response plans
   - Have a plan to communicate with partners after emergency
   - Connect homeless providers to government’s emergency response structure through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) (i.e. designate a community representative in EOC)

**RECOVER**

7. **Sustain an Inclusive System**
   - Include local homeless service providers in the Long-Term Recovery Group
   - Establish agreements and contracts with homeless service providers in advance of disaster

The toolkit can be viewed at: https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/nchav/education/VEMEC-Toolkit.asp
For more information, please contact: June Gin at June.Gin@va.gov

A joint project of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Information and Tools for Homeless Service Providers and Disaster Professionals

Objective:
Provide strategies, tools & guidance for homeless service providers to prepare & minimize disaster-caused service disruption

Key Audience:
- Homeless Service Providers

Section 2: Preparedness for Homeless Service Providers

1 Identify an Internal Champion and Preparedness Team
   * Internal Champion(s):
     - “Owns the process” within organization
     - Engage and motivate leadership and staff for preparedness
   * Disaster Committee:
     - Develop disaster plan and establish buy-in for preparedness

2 Identify Technical Assistance Resources to Initiate the Planning Process
   * CBOs can take the lead in identifying potential resources, including:
     - Local emergency management agencies, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), police and fire departments, public health departments
     - Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), American Red Cross, and other nonprofit organizations

3 Build Organizational Buy-In
   * Disaster Mission Statement:
     - The Disaster Committee drafts Disaster Mission Statement
     - Given limited resources in disaster, identify which services are most critical
   * Launch Meeting:
     - Present disaster scenario
     - Explore how organization would respond to disaster scenario
     - Review Disaster Mission Statement and obtain feedback
     - Secure buy-in from key participants and identify expectations

4 Prepare Staff
   * Disaster preparedness training for staff and key volunteers
     - Personal preparedness training
     - Search and Rescue, CPR, First Aid
   * Disaster Personnel Policies
     - Expectations of staff following a disaster
     - Identify disaster response skills of current staff

5 Meet Client and Staff Needs During and After a Disaster
   * Plan for the disaster needs of on-site clients & staff
   * Plan for the disaster needs of off-site clients
   * Helping clients prepare themselves for disaster
   * Plan for the possibility of delivering services at alternate location

6 Back up Unique Documents
   * Including financial records, personnel records, client records, legal documents, MOUs & other contracts, and state & local permits, credentials, and licenses.

7 Maintain Financial Operations
   * Maintain existing funding after a disaster and access new emergency/disaster funds
   * Staff compensation policies after a disaster should be written out in the organization’s plan

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Section 3: Guidance for Health Care Providers

1. Approach
   - Integrate a trauma-informed approach
   - Integrate cultural and linguistic competency
   - Recognize strengths, skills, and resilience
   - Co-locate mental health with medical services, bring services to individuals experiencing homelessness

2. Assessment and Diagnosis
   - Assess housing status and risk of homelessness
   - Assess health status, basic, and social service needs
   - Assess clinical needs for a range of medical issues (acute and chronic conditions, current medications)
   - Assess need for a range of mental and behavioral health needs (history of trauma, substance abuse)

3. Planning
   - Map community assets pre-disaster including resources and data to anticipate and effectively plan
   - Develop relationships with health care and services providers who treat individuals experiencing homelessness
   - Get to know the Community Health Centers, which provide primary and preventative health care to medically underserved communities, including individuals experiencing homelessness
   - Recruit disaster workers who represent individuals experiencing homelessness or homeless services
   - Maintain and monitor the inventory of community health care resources to ensure they are prepared to treat individuals experiencing homelessness
   - Healthcare coalitions must integrate the access and functional needs of individuals experiencing homelessness into plans and exercises

4. Prevention of Hospital Surge
   - Implement in-reach strategies at emergency departments and hospitals to redirect individuals experiencing homelessness to a “medical home” providing primary and preventative care
   - Develop health and hygiene protocols at emergency shelters to minimize secondary exposure risk
   - Assess disaster behavioral health capacity to facilitate effective collaboration and communication across agencies and strengthen identified weaknesses
   - Post-hospitalization management of individuals experiencing homelessness must address the needs of individuals who lack housing, but require effective discharge planning

5. Coordination/Continuity of Care
   - Homeless serving health care and services organizations must develop continuity of operations plans to ensure continuity of essential functions
   - Develop disaster behavioral health coalitions to facilitate communication across provider groups, coordinate behavioral health care efforts, and identify existing and emergency needs
   - Mobilize teams to find, locate, and treat individuals and families experiencing homelessness
   - Ensure coordination and communication between agencies providing disaster relief and individuals experiencing homelessness to support recovery

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