

# Health and Social Services Technical Advisory Committee

A key determinant of successful community recovery is the level of social vulnerability that exists and the extent to which health and social services are effectively provided. New Orleans' continuing struggles with recovery from Hurricane Katrina offer an example of what can happen as a result of high social vulnerability and few preparations for dealing with social and health needs in a post-disaster environment. The Hillsborough County Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan (PDRP) will seek to address the long-term recovery health and social needs that will be exacerbated by a disaster and prepare for providing the best possible services in such a situation. An important component is ensuring the smooth transition of health and social services from short-term recovery operations to long-term redevelopment assistance. The purpose of the Health and Social Services Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is to address the spectrum of social, health, and safety issues that will affect the recovery of the community by indentifying avenues for enhancing services and opportunities to lower social vulnerability thereby increasing community resiliency to future disasters.

## Post-Disaster Redevelopment Issues for Health and Social Services

*Below are the Health and Social Services Recovery Technical Advisory Committee's prioritized issues with a brief description of each.*

1. **Hospital, clinic, and medical office restoration** – After disasters, healthcare providers often require special assistance as medical services are in high demand but providers often have trouble meeting payroll and keeping up with demand while also dealing with staffing, repairs, and rebuilding issues.
2. **Public safety service levels reestablished throughout county** – It is imperative that public safety service levels are quickly reestablished after a disaster. This may necessitate a temporary increase in local safety personnel.
3. **Public transportation restoration and improvement** – After a disaster, changes in the locations of housing and employment centers (temporary or permanent) may alter a community's public transit needs, or the population dependent on public transit may increase. Post-disaster redevelopment projects may present unique opportunities to expand existing transit capabilities.
4. **Children and family services** – Disasters may cause an increase of families seeking assistance while service providers may have fewer personnel and resources available. Unfortunately, studies of recent disasters have shown that domestic abuse often increases during the stressful recovery period from a disaster. Also, children have been found to do poorly in school many years after a disaster due to changed living circumstances and other issues deriving from the event.
5. **Daycare, after-school, and teen programs restored** – The availability of childcare will be a major factor in getting parents back to work and enabling business to resume. Parents can also focus on reestablishing their homes and pre-disaster

conditions if they also have safe places for their children to be during working and non-working hours.

6. **Schools, higher education reopened** – It is important to get schools reopened after a disaster to establish a sense of normalcy and consistency in students' lives and allow parents to get back to work. During recovery, public schools are often used as community shelters. In order to reopen schools, the county needs to assist in relocating all residents to long-term temporary housing as soon as possible. Higher education and private facilities may also need assistance in reopening whether through permitting repairs or convincing faculty and students to return to the area.
7. **Assisted living and nursing home safety** - As elderly residents return, there could be a shortage of qualified staffing and suitable facilities. The return of these residents must be closely coordinated with emergency management personnel, and financial assistance or mutual aid agreements may be needed.
8. **Recreation, cultural activities restored** – An important part of the long-term recovery process is restoring the quality of life to which Hillsborough County residents have become accustomed and which has attracted large numbers of tourists annually. This includes resuming recreational activities through public access to parks and facilities and supporting cultural activities. These are activities that will have to be suspended during early recovery efforts. These are also activities that can be easily overlooked as redevelopment progresses, but are necessary to reviving community involvement, tourism, and a sense of normalcy within the community.
9. **Medical personnel retention and recruitment** - Even during normal times, retaining quality healthcare professionals can be difficult, and many communities after Hurricane Katrina, most notably New Orleans, had an extremely difficult time of reopening neighborhood doctor offices, clinics, and maintaining hospital emergency room and daily operations with reduced staff, physical damages, and inadequate financial assistance in the early recovery period.
10. **Mental health assistance** – A disaster is a very traumatic event to live through, particularly after a major hurricane. Looking out for the mental health and well-being of residents could include providing special services through county and non-governmental programs as well as making sure that mental health providers have the resources they need to deal with the influx of patients. Many people are not going to seek counseling, so programs may need to be readily available in temporary housing communities and other long-term recovery assistance centers.
11. **Coordination and assistance for non-governmental organizations and volunteers** – Immediately following a disaster there could be an influx of volunteers to aid in short-term recovery efforts, which with coordination and organization, can be a substantial asset to the recovery process. If a volunteer effort is particularly organized and well-promoted, it could be extended into the long-term recovery period operations as well.
12. **Low-income assistance** – Low income residents are often hit the hardest by disasters and will require more government assistance than normal. This may

require an increase in social service personnel or identification of additional funding for assistance programs.

13. **Long-term assistance for special needs population** - In Hillsborough County there is a large population segment that may require special accommodations following a disaster. Many of these residents are registered on the Department of Health special needs shelter list to receive assistance during immediate recovery. There may be many, registered or not, that will need long-term assistance dealing with traumatic changes, loss of residences, and getting back to normal circumstances.
14. **Homeless programs** – There is often an increase of the homeless population after a major disaster due to the destruction of a significant amount of affordable and older housing stock. The already existing homeless population should not be overlooked during post-disaster recovery.
15. **Health-related pollution and environmental justice** – A major contributor to post-disaster health issues is mold, which can quickly grow to unhealthy levels in a home, business, or public building that has had flood damage and may not yet be obvious or thought to be a health hazard immediately. Other post-disaster health-related issues can occur from handling debris or coming into contact with contaminated water or soil. It is often low-income housing and neighborhoods that are impacted the worst by health-related problems and these areas are often the slowest to get immediate attention.
16. **Community redevelopment from a “Healthy Communities” perspective** – An “unhealthy” community infrastructure, such as ones that limit opportunities for daily exercise, create inefficiencies and challenges to maximizing the health of its residents. Therefore, communities being redeveloped after disasters should take the opportunity to redesign the community based upon “Healthy Communities” principles rather than rebuilding the “unhealthy” infrastructure that was present before the disaster.