

Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief Resources

Options for Limited-English-Proficient Individuals, Immigrants, and Their Families

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) expresses support for the many individuals who have been affected by the tragic events of Hurricane Katrina. There are a number of organizations and resources that have been activated for those who need assistance to ensure the health and well-being of victims of the hurricane. In addition, the U.S. Congress will soon consider proposals that could increase access to relief services. Of particular concern to NCLR, are limited-English-proficient (LEP) individuals and immigrants who experience unique barriers when accessing important safety-net programs. NCLR has already seen the deterrent effect in the Latino community by those who fear coming forward for disaster relief. This document provides a basic overview of the assistance and services that can be accessed during this crucial time and the rights of individuals seeking services. *This document will be updated as new resources are established for hurricane victims. If you know of additional services that are available, please contact NCLR Health Policy Analyst Jennifer Ng'andu at jngandu@nclr.org.*

Finding Disaster Services

Hurricane Katrina victims who are in need of disaster relief may be able to receive services outside of their state of residence. Most disaster relief services are available to persons in states hit by the hurricane, including Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and in states and territories accepting evacuees including: Arkansas, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington and West Virginia.

Citizenship and Immigration Status Requirements for Disaster Relief Services

Most short-term, non-cash emergency relief is available to all persons in the United States, regardless of immigration status. When applying for short-term, non-cash services for oneself or for other family members, hurricane victims are not required to disclose their own immigration status. NCLR strongly suggests that those who are undocumented refrain from declaring their own status or providing fraudulent documentation or documentation that is not their own during application for services. The following website has additional questions and answers specifically related to undocumented persons seeking services:

<http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=12562>

More extensive, long-term disaster relief is limited to certain lawfully-present non citizens and their families. Citizens, non citizen nationals, and "qualified aliens"¹ are generally allowed to

¹ "Qualified aliens" is a public benefits category used to determine immigrant eligibility for federal means-tested public benefits, including Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplement Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). According to FEMA, a "Qualified Alien" includes anyone who has been granted legal permanent residence ("green card"), refugee or asylee status, withholding of deportation, conditional entry, parole into the U. S. for at least one year; or a Cuban-Haitian Entrant;

seek assistance for most disaster relief programs if they are otherwise qualified. This also applies for other federal public benefits programs, which may provide relief to victims of the hurricane. **Even if a victim does not qualify for certain types of disaster relief because of immigration status, other family members, such as a citizen child, can apply for broader assistance programs, without indicating the immigration status of their family members.**

Below are some assistance programs that are available to hurricane victims. They are meant to represent the common disaster relief services that are sought by victims of natural disasters. Those assisting hurricane victims should also contact FEMA to find out if there are additional resources that are not identified on this list. In addition, the Coalition on Human Needs has compiled a list of relief services, which have been expanded in recent weeks, to help accommodate the essential needs of hurricane victims. This list is available on their website: <http://www.chn.org/issues/katrina/index.html>

Types of Assistance Available to All Persons Regardless of Immigration Status

- *Crisis Counseling (1-800-273-TALK)**
- *Disaster Legal Services*
- *Emergency Health Care and Vaccinations*
- *Emergency Shelters*
- *Short-Term, Non-Cash Assistance, such as Food and Water*

Types of Assistance Available to Citizens, Non Citizen Nationals, and “Qualified Immigrants”

- *Cash Assistance*
- *Damaged Vehicle Assistance and Transportation*
- *Disaster Food Stamps*
- *Disaster-Related Medical and Dental Services*
- *Housing Assistance, including Housing Repair and Mortgage and Rental Assistance*
- *Job Placement Assistance*
- *Medical Coverage*
- *Small Business Administration Loans*
- *Social Security Benefits*
- *Supplemental Security Income*
- *Unemployment Insurance*

Qualified immigrants may be subject to further restrictions on these benefits, such as a five-year residency requirement or employment authorization. Given the pervasive loss of documentation during the flooding of Hurricane Katrina, many agencies have eliminated their federal verification procedures, such as collection of Social Security numbers (SSNs). However, eligible victims may be asked to declare their immigration status when seeking benefits.

or a battered spouse or child(ren) with a pending or approved spousal petition or petition for relief. Lawfully residing immigrants who do not fall into these categories may not be a “qualified alien.”

Access to Services for Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) Victims

Several national public and private institutions have language services for victims whose primary language is not English; FEMA has bilingual operators who can assist victims in locating resources. To seek disaster relief in Spanish, please call 1-800-621-3362, and then press 2 to speak with an operator who can speak Spanish. The Red Cross, which provides assistance in seeking food, water, and shelter, also has a line available for Spanish-speaking individuals, 1-800-257-7575. NCLR is in the process of identifying other national resources for LEP victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Civil Rights of Hurricane Victims Seeking Services

Federal agencies and their contracted service providers cannot discriminate against a person based upon race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, or economic status. If a victim has been denied disaster relief because of his/her Latino background, or for any of the above characteristics, contact an Equal Rights Officer by calling 1-800-621-3362. A written complaint should also be sent to the Office of Equal Rights within 180 days of the act of discrimination.

Helping Immigrant Victims of Hurricane Katrina

Like all Americans, Hispanic Americans are deeply concerned about and engaged in supporting the many victims of Hurricane Katrina. NCLR and its affiliates are working closely with colleagues in relief agencies and in the African American community to provide support where it is most needed.

While relief agencies such as the American Red Cross are doing extraordinary work in assisting those affected, NCLR has learned through its network of affiliates and coalition partners that many Latinos in the area have been unable to access any assistance and are not under the care of any government agency or relief organization. In particular, there is an urgent need for financial assistance to those seeking to join relatives, locate housing, or purchase basic supplies for their families.

To provide medical attention and temporary shelter and to assist rebuilding lives, it's going to take a tremendous amount of spirit and money. NCLR has established a short-term relief fund to assist its affiliates in meeting the immediate needs of those who are currently not being served by federal or relief agencies. Our affiliates urgently need resources to help families reunite with relatives, move out of shelters, purchase clothing and school supplies, and access other basic necessities. NCLR's Katrina Relief Fund will provide short-term financial assistance to affiliates who are working to meet immediate needs while we simultaneously work to strengthen the relief infrastructure to reach all of those affected by the disaster.

You can donate to the NCLR Katrina fund by visiting our website: <http://www.nclr.org> or mailing a check to the following address:

National Council of La Raza
Raul Yzaguirre Building
1126 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Attn: NCLR Katrina Relief Fund

Other Helpful Resources*

- *Catholic Charities, USA* – 800-919-9338
- *Department of Health and Human Service* – <http://www.hhs.gov/katrina/index.html>
- *Family Links Registry* – <http://www.familylinks.icrc.org/katrina> (in English) or <http://www.familylinks.icrc.org/katrina/spa> (in Spanish)
- *Food and Nutrition Services* – Phone numbers for state hotlines located at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/contact_info/hotlines.htm
- *Salvation Army* – 800-725-2769
- *United Methodist Committee on Relief* – 800-554-8583

* NCLR has no knowledge of the ability of these organizations to serve LEP individuals.

This paper is updated at of September 12, 2005, at 5:00 PM.