



NEWS RELEASE



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HHS SECRETARY LEAVITT UNVEILS NATIONAL PSA CAMPAIGN TO PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO HURRICANE SURVIVORS

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt today launched a national public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to encourage people who may be experiencing psychological distress following the recent hurricanes to consider seeking mental health services. The PSAs, the result of a partnership between HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Ad Council, will be distributed to 12,000 media outlets nationwide.

According to SAMHSA, past research on the mental health consequences of major floods and hurricanes suggests that the psychological impacts of the recent hurricanes could be extensive. SAMHSA estimates that -- in those areas that have been significantly impacted by the hurricanes -- 25 percent to 30 percent of the population may experience clinically significant mental health needs and an additional 10 percent to 20 percent may show sub-clinical, but not trivial, needs. Up to 500,000 people may be in need of assistance.

"Since the beginning of this unprecedented disaster we have been concerned about the mental well-being of those impacted," Secretary Leavitt said. "We've continued to work with the states to provide access to mental health and substance abuse services to help Americans through this tough time. I hope these public service announcements, our toll-free number and website will provide information and support to those who need help."

People who were displaced by the storms have lost their homes, schools, communities, places of worship, daily routines, social support, personal possessions and much more. In some cases, these losses were coupled with losing loved ones and witnessing death, destruction and criminal violence. According to SAMHSA, the psychological impact of these experiences can be both serious and long-lasting. Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder -- including depression, grief and anger -- are to be expected among some who survived the hurricanes. They may also develop physical health and behavior problems, such as substance abuse disorders among adults and conduct problems among children. Some of these problems may not surface for months or years.

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“Most hurricane survivors demonstrate remarkable resiliency and will rebuild their lives without significant mental or substance abuse issues,” SAMHSA Administrator Charles Curie said. “We also know that there are a smaller but still significant number of people who will have difficulty achieving recovery without professional assistance. Help is a phone call away.”

The new PSA campaign is designed to help adults, children and first responders who have been impacted by the hurricanes and are in need of mental health services. The campaign includes television and radio spots, which are available in English and Spanish, and addresses the fears, thoughts, concerns and questions faced by the victims. The PSAs aim to reach adult victims and first responders directly, as well as parents and caregivers who can assess their children’s emotional well-being. Viewers and listeners are encouraged to take time to check in on how they and their families are doing, and call a confidential toll-free number (1-800-789-2647 for adults/parents and 1-800-273-TALK for first responders) to speak to a trained professional who can assist with information and referrals to local services, or visit www.samhsa.gov.

“The hurricanes have had a devastating impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans. As they struggle to rebuild their lives and focus on their immediate physical needs, it is important for them to also consider their short and long-term emotional needs,” said President & CEO of The Advertising Council Peggy Conlon. “This poignant campaign, created pro bono by Grey Advertising, will encourage victims to get help and hope if they need it, especially during the holiday season when all that they have lost may be more difficult to cope with.”

To view the ads, please visit www.samhsa.gov. The PSAs are being distributed to television and radio stations nationwide via the FastChannel Network and will air in advertising time that will be donated by the media.

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