



Mental Health Association in Texas

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Hurricane Katrina: Unprecedented Mental Health Needs Remain Unmet

AUSTIN, TEXAS (August 28, 2006) – A year after one of the largest natural disasters in American history, the country continues to struggle with the psychological toll of Hurricane Katrina. Mental health and other health care systems are strained beyond capacity and thousands of people with new episodes of mental health problems directly related to their experiences, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, continue to go without the treatment they need. The Mental Health Association in Texas urges lawmakers to increase funding for integrated mental health services and strengthen the infrastructure of the health care and emergency response systems.

“In the midst of such devastation, Texas’ under-funded, ill-equipped mental health system cannot adequately respond to the mental health needs of its citizens,” said Lynn Lasky Clark, president and CEO of the Mental Health Association in Texas. “Our nation, our state and our communities have reached a breaking point – without taking concrete steps to address the underlying failure to invest in mental health, Texas leaves itself vulnerable to the devastation of disaster.”

The following statistics illustrate the magnitude of the problem:

- Prior to the hurricanes, approximately 18 percent of Louisianans had mental health needs. Subsequently, an additional 30 percent are expected to exhibit signs of a diagnosable mental disorder.
- Research shows that 25 to 30 percent of people exposed to severe trauma – and five to ten percent of people exposed to moderate trauma – will develop substance use problems. Katrina directly impacted 500,000 people, suggesting that up to 200,000 could develop a need for substance abuse treatment.
- Over 260,000 Louisianans are estimated to be on the verge of developing post-traumatic stress syndrome – half currently live and will seek services in Louisiana. An additional 120,000 projected Louisiana children will develop post-traumatic stress and related anxiety disorders.

For free information on mental health and coping with disasters, please visit the Mental Health Association in Texas online at www.mhatexas.org.

The Mental Health Association in Texas, an original affiliate of the National Mental Health Association and state outreach partner for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), is the state's leading source for mental health information, education and advocacy.

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