

Sept. 3, 2008

HHS Program to Improve Disaster Assistance

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt today announced implementation of the Disaster Case Management demonstration program to make it easier for disaster victims to obtain a wide range of assistance and social services. The program will aid people from the Louisiana parishes covered under President Bush's disaster declaration related to Hurricane Gustav.

The demonstration project will assist individuals and families by linking them with a single case manager at a disaster assistance center.

The case manager will help them access the various programs available through federal, state and local governments, and nongovernmental organizations.

"This program is intended to provide fast, one-stop shopping for those who need help. Our goal is a coordinated system that links disaster victims with a single contact who will help them determine what help they need, who provides it, and how to get it," Secretary Leavitt said.

The program draws from existing state, local and voluntary agency programs to create a seamless system. Case managers, drawn largely from nongovernmental organizations involved in disaster relief, can assist people quickly in creating disaster recovery plans that will help them start to connect to service providers and resources.

The services could include linking individuals to emergency food and shelter, temporary financial assistance, transportation, legal assistance, health care including mental health care and counseling, employment, and other public assistance.

Most importantly, the program will follow clients throughout their recovery process to ensure they continue to get the assistance they need. If clients need assistance beyond the disaster aid, the case manager, to the extent possible, will connect them with the social service system within the state.

HHS' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) will manage the project.

"This program will help people in their time of greatest need," said Daniel Schneider, ACF acting assistant secretary. "When disaster strikes, people are in shock and great distress, and they may well not understand where and how to get aid. This program will help them overcome systemic and bureaucratic obstacles that can get in the way."

Objectives include deployment into a disaster area within 72 hours of a disaster declaration; integration with existing state, local and voluntary agency programs; filling gaps by augmentation of existing state, local and voluntary agency programs; and incorporation of lessons learned from previous disasters.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.