

North Carolina Justice Center

The NC Justice Center, PO Box 28068, Raleigh, NC 27611

www.ncjustice.org

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Aiding Victims of Hurricane Katrina

Over 1,000 victims of Hurricane Katrina have been evacuated to North Carolina

As victims move out of their home state, they will need assistance accessing public benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, unemployment insurance and housing assistance. If they are recipients of Social Security or SSI they will need to change their address for delivery of their monthly check and they may need to recover missing past checks. They may not have identification normally needed to apply for assistance. Because both state and the federal governments fund and regulate some of these programs, it can be difficult for persons to apply for assistance or continue receiving assistance while they are temporarily displaced in another state. To try to help with this matter, several national organizations and federal agencies are posting disaster assistance regulations, manuals, and resource lists on the internet. Service providers and advocates should check these web sites regularly for updates and changes to regulations. Below is a listing of some of the national and state, official and expert resources available.

1. Federal Guidance and General Information on Disaster Assistance

Resource Website: The Coalition on Human Needs is compiling information about access to Medicaid, Food Stamps, Head Start, unemployment benefits, public education and other services for people displaced by the catastrophic storm. <http://www.chn.org/issues/katrina/index.html>.

Resource Website: U.S. Government website for victims of Hurricane Katrina:
http://www.firstgov.gov/Citizen/Topics/PublicSafety/Hurricane_Katrina_Recovery.shtml

2. Legal Assistance Resources

Resource Website: The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law has created a webpage devoted to legal resources on the Internet that may be helpful to advocates assisting low-income and displaced persons. http://www.povertylaw.org/disaster_assistance.htm.

Free Legal Assistance for evacuees:

- . • Legal Aid of North Carolina (statewide) 919-856-2564, <http://www.legalaidnc.org/>;
- . • Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont (Charlotte and surrounding counties) <http://www.lssp.org/>, 704-376-1600, 1-800-247-1931;
- . • Pisgah Legal Services (Asheville, Western NC) <http://www.main.nc.us/pls/>, 828-253-0406, 1-800-489-6144;

North Carolina Disaster Legal Services Manual (may be dated, check regulations for updates)
<http://www.legalaidnc.org/publications/Brochures/DisasterLegalServicesManual-2000.pdf>

3. Job Assistance and Disaster Unemployment Benefits

Press Release and Contact Information: North Carolina Employment Security Commission Assistance to Victims of Hurricane Katrina

http://www.ncesc.com/pmi/news/PressReleases/General/Kat_Claims_Update_9-7-05.pdf

Fact Sheet by National Employment Law Project "Disaster Unemployment Assistance: How Families Can Access the Program After Hurricane Katrina"

<http://www.nelp.org/ui/federal/initiatives/duakatrina.cfm>

4. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

• Primary US Government agency for emergency relief for individuals and businesses
<http://www.fema.gov/>

• FEMA online registration <http://www.fema.gov/register.shtm>

• Phone Registration: • 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) • TTY 1-800-462-7585 (speech & hearing impaired)

• Emergency Aid to Evacuees in North Carolina
<http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=18629>

5. Social Security/SSI Benefits

• Social Security Administration (SSA) guidance on how victims can get their Social Security and SSI checks. <http://www.ssa.gov/emergency>

• SSA emergency instructions issued on 9/2 explaining how the SSI income and resource rules apply in disasters.
<http://policy.ssa.gov/public/reference.nsf/1bb8ac5165f7ca5d85256c230074491b/ecafa81990c6f952852570700051881c!OpenDocument>

• National Senior Citizens Law Center:
http://www.nsclc.org/news/05/09/katrina_aftermath.htm

6. Crisis Hotline for Victims of Hurricane Katrina

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced the availability of a toll-free hotline for people in crisis in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. By dialing **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**, callers will be connected to a network of local crisis centers across the country. All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.

7. Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, HIPPA and Medicare

US HHS has declared a federal public health emergency for Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida, which will allow HHS to waive certain requirements under Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. It is not clear yet how the emergency declaration and the increased flexibility it provides will impact on the resolution of these and other disaster-related Medicaid and Medicare issues. North Carolina has announced it will offer Medicaid assistance to the Hurricane Katrina victims.

- Federal Guidance: US Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services
<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/katrina/>
- NC Press Release: North Carolina Offers Medicaid Assistance to Victims of Hurricane Katrina
<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dma/Katrina%20Medicaid.pdf>
- NC Policy: North Carolina Administrative Letter on Emergency Medicaid for Victims of Katrina
http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dma/abd/adm/MA_AL11-05.htm#P4_40
- Where to Apply: Apply at one of North Carolina's 100 County Departments of Social Services
<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/local/index.htm>
- The HHS Office of Civil Rights issued a bulletin that provides information on Health Insurance Portability

Act (HIPAA) privacy and disclosures in emergency situations:
www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/KATRINAnHIPAA.pdf.

9. Food Assistance Programs

- Federal Guidance: Victims evacuated to North Carolina may apply for Disaster Food Stamps in North Carolina (expedited and reduced certification requirements)
http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/disaster_relief/pdfs/Expanded%20Evacuee%20Policy.pdf; See also, http://www.frac.org/pdf/refuge_policy.pdf
- Federal Guidance: For certification status and replacement EBT Cards for persons who had been receiving food stamps at the time of the disaster see,
http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/disaster_relief/pdfs/Information%20Numbers.pdf
- North Carolina Policy: Food Stamp Program Administrative Letters, see Letter No. 9-2005 September 6, 2005, but check for revisions that may be issued later
<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/ei-30/adm/index.htm#TopOfPage>
- North Carolina Policy: North Carolina Food Stamp Disaster Manual:
<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/ei-70/man/index.htm#TopOfPage>
- Where to Apply: County Social Services workers are going to evacuation sites, but persons not staying in the evacuation site should apply at one of North Carolina's 100 County Departments of Social Services
<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/local/index.htm>
- Expert Guidance: *An Advocates Guide to the Disaster Food Stamp Program* by The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) www.frac.org.
- Other information on emergency food assistance
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm#stamps>

10. Housing

Emergency evacuation centers have been opened in Wake, Mecklenburg and Guilford counties to accept Hurricane Katrina evacuees. For the longer term, many of the victims may remain in North Carolina with few if any personal resources to use for housing. The US Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency has issued guidance to all state and local Housing Authorities that they must provide Hurricane Katrina victims with top priority when filling public housing vacancies. This is problematic since there is no clear indication yet that additional public housing/voucher funding will be made available to accommodate the increased demand for affordable housing and thousands of North Carolinians are already waiting, often for years, to receive housing assistance.

. • Federal Guidance and Toll Free Number: HUD has established a Public and Indian Housing Resource Information Center, and a toll-free number, **1-800-955-2232**, to assist displaced public housing residents and Section 8 voucher holders. <http://www.hud.gov/news/release.cfm?content=pr05-117.cfm>

. • Federal Guidance and Toll Free Number: Federal Housing Administration lenders must implement a 90 day moratorium on foreclosures of FHA insured properties in disaster areas. Number for FHA-insured homeowners: **1-866-641-8102**.

. • Expert Guidance: National Low-Income Housing Coalition <http://www.nlihc.org/mtm/mtm10-34.html#HUD> and National Housing Law Project <http://www.nhlp.org/>

11. Public Schools

School age children who are evacuated to North Carolina may be enrolled in North Carolina public schools under reduced residency requirements. For more information contact: N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Office of the State Superintendent, 919.807.3441, or the NC DPI Communications Office, 919.807.3450. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2005-06/20050906>