



Florida's Public Health & Medical System **PREPARES & RESPONDS**

VULNERABLE POPULATION: Individuals with Behavioral Health Concerns

The Florida Department of Children and Families

The Florida Department of Children and Families Mental Health Program is responsible for planning, managing and evaluating a statewide program of mental health services and supports, including community programs, crisis services for children and adults and state residential treatment facilities, for people who qualify for publically funded treatment services.

The Florida Department of Children and Families Substance Abuse Program Office is dedicated to the development of a comprehensive system of prevention, emergency detoxification, and treatment services for individuals and families at risk of or affected by substance abuse and mental illnesses to promote their safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency.

Florida's community mental health and substance abuse systems are privatized, although the state directly operates seven (7) adult mental health residential treatment facilities. Public funds are contracted with providers through the local Mental Health and Substance Abuse Program Offices. People who need services get them by going to those providers directly. Services and supports should be person-centered, community-based and results-oriented. People who need services may obtain them directly or they may be referred by agencies and resources in the community.

Florida's mental health and substance abuse treatment providers are expected to be able to either provide or coordinate simultaneous mental health and substance abuse treatment to persons with co-occurring disorders. Florida's mental health and substance abuse treatment providers utilize a range of evidence-based treatment approaches that emphasize policies and practices that are customer driven, are welcoming, instill hope, and promote recovery.

To find a local Substance Abuse or Mental Health Provider Agency, visit this link:
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/provsearch.shtml>

To find the local Florida Department of Children and Families Program Office, visit this link:
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/contacts.shtml>

Behavioral Health and Disasters

Disasters disrupt individual and community stability and structure by altering normal interpersonal, economic and social dynamics. This disruption comes with the potential for serious behavioral health consequences: bringing a sense of loss, grief, depression, and change to those impacted. Disasters are inherently traumatizing events, to some degree affecting everyone who experiences them. It is important to recognize that, while many people may be traumatized by a disaster, few will be incapacitated. Individual responses may also vary in the beginning and over time.

The focus of the behavioral health response is generally twofold. First, behavioral health assessment, crisis counseling and psychological first aid need to be readily available to all residents and evacuees impacted by disasters.

Second, during a disaster event, individuals with serious and persistent mental illnesses or substance abuse issues may need appropriate services and supports for their ongoing recovery. Many reside independently; others in a variety of therapeutic residential settings ranging from group homes to a secure treatment facility. Many homeless people in the community will also have significant behavioral health issues. In disasters, consumers of behavioral health services may be repeatedly relocated, subjected to placement in a specialized institution or denied access to shelters, based on assumptions about their needs and capacities. Consumers may not seek services for fear of being labeled and stigmatized.

General Public and Special Needs Shelter Planning Considerations

- Ensure a “no wrong door” strategy for accessing shelter services. Persons with mental health, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders should be as welcomed in emergency shelters as persons with other challenging health needs. Consumers of behavioral health services are as resilient as non-consumers and should be accommodated in general population shelters without stigma. However, persons with active or severe illnesses may require professional resources and supports that are more appropriately provided in special needs shelters.
- Planning discussions should include local service providers, peer-specialists or other consumer representatives and family members. Training manuals should include consumers, consumer leaders, and consumer–peer support information.
- Planners should identify and consider the specific transportation, shelter and support needs of the variety of group homes, jails, prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, adult homes, homeless shelters and other community settings in which this population may reside.
- Professional and para-professional Psychological First Aid and Crisis Counseling services should be coordinated with local behavioral health service

providers and / or voluntary response agencies such as the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, VOAD, etc.

- Shelter planners should ensure shelter management and staff are sensitized to the potential behavioral, emotional, cognitive and physical effects of disaster-related trauma. Training in basic principles of disaster behavioral health response should be included in shelter preparedness trainings.
- Shelter planners should ensure credentialed professional behavioral health services, including appropriate medication management, are on-site as part of the medical team. Behavioral health staff should also include peer support staff that have specialized training and experience in working with persons with behavioral disorders.
- When possible, shelter residents should be connected to their existing case managers, treating therapists and prescribing physicians to enhance continuity of services during the shelter event.
- Persons with medical disorders who also have substance abuse disorders should be assessed and treated for pain with the same level of compassion shown to persons that only have medical disorders.

Supporting Agency:

Department of Children and Families, Mental Health Program Office

<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/>

Department of Children and Families, Substance Abuse Program Office

<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/sa/>

To find a local Substance Abuse or Mental Health Provider Agency:

<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/provsearch.shtml>