



Children's Health Fund

Statement by CHF President and Co-Founder Irwin Redlener, M.D. Regarding the Ending of Recovery Programs in the Gulf

With the ending of FEMA's Direct Housing Assistance program this weekend, the Children's Health Fund (CHF) and the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health are concerned about the estimated 1,500-2,000 children in the Gulf region being evicted from the FEMA trailers and the over 9,000 more that will potentially be in unstable situations by the end of the summer.

In addition to the ending of the housing program this Sunday, the federal government is also ended a case management program on Monday which was intended to connect Katrina and Rita victims with stable housing, healthcare and other social services. In Louisiana, this program was originally funded at \$32 million but was never implemented because of the federal and state governments' inability to secure a contract with an organization to administer the program. This is such despite an extension to the program granted at the start of the Obama Administration. With so many children still in need in Louisiana, it is a travesty to see this money go unused and disappear.

On August 31, the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), another federal disaster housing program that provides rental assistance to tens of thousands of Katrina and Rita victims in the Gulf will also end. In Louisiana, which has the most households on the rolls for this program, CHF estimates this will affect another 7,500-9,000 children. This is concerning because in disaster-impacted parishes, there are not enough affordable rental units to meet demands and there is a high potential for many of these children to wind up homeless. Statewide allocations only provide for 2 of 5 lost affordable housing units in Louisiana and preliminary estimates released by the Louisiana Housing Finance Authority say a gap of 9,930 affordable units between 2008 and 2013 will exist.

NCDP has found through the Gulf Coast Child and Family Health study, a long term look at how families in the Gulf are recovering, that at the current rate of moving people in to stable housing, it appears that it will take nearly 7 years after the event to get up to 95% of people in to stable housing. Unstable housing, defined as living in a trailer or being unsure as to where you will be living in a year, is associated with a number of poor psychological and academic outcomes.

According to the National Center for Family Homelessness, Louisiana has the highest rate of child homelessness in the nation which was largely influenced by the instability in housing that was caused by the hurricanes. Children in unstable environments such as when they are homeless, are less likely to get their healthcare needs met. They are less likely to have a medical home and be receiving comprehensive, quality, and continuous care.

CHF has long called for immediate and comprehensive case management services for the children and their families affected by the hurricanes in the Gulf in order to help them to secure stable housing and other needed services. CHF strongly advocated for comprehensive case management services to be provided to those families in Louisiana living in trailers before the closing of the largest congregate trailer setting, Renaissance Village. This was never done and now the final families living in trailers in Louisiana are being evicted without ever having received case management services. These individuals would have had access to case management services had the FEMA Disaster Case Management Pilot Program been implemented.

It is imperative that Federal and State leaders work together to address the needs of children still in recovery in the Gulf region going forward. In addition, the right framework needs to be in place so that the same mistakes aren't repeated in future recovery efforts.

One lesson learned from the most recent recovery efforts is that case management services must be immediate, comprehensive and coordinated (if being implemented by more than one federal agency). In addition, given the vulnerability of children and their development, specific focus should be put towards long-term monitoring and tracking the overall well-being of children affected by the disaster, at the start of recovery efforts.

Going forward, CHF and NCDP will continue their work in the Gulf by:

- Providing medical care and treatment to underserved children in Mississippi and Louisiana.
- Advocating for Stafford Act reform.
- Completing a new round of studies regarding long term recovery in the Gulf region.
- Advocating for adequate case management policies as a part of disaster recovery.
- Raising public awareness and educating lawmakers of the issues facing the children still in recovery in the Gulf region.