Recommendations of the National Commission on Children and Disasters

2010 Report to the President

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“Within hours of Hurricane Ike’s landfall in Texas, San Antonio officials had compiled precise statistics about their evacuee situation. They knew the city would need to care for 5,303 people (561 of whom had special medical needs) and 642 pets. … But there was one key group for which they had no figures: children.”

-- Newsweek, “Overlooked: The Littlest Evacuees” (October 6, 2008)
About the Commission

- Authorized by Congress December 26, 2007
- Administration for Children & Families provides support
- Mandated study different policy areas related to the needs of children affected by disasters, including:
  - Trauma, physical and mental health
  - Child welfare
  - Child care
  - Housing (sheltering, intermediate, long-term)
  - Evacuation and Transportation
  - Elementary and Secondary Education
  - Juvenile Justice
  - Emergency Management
About the Commission

Commission Members

- **Mark K. Shriver**, *Commission Chairperson*, Vice President and Managing Director for U.S. Programs, Save the Children
- **Dr. Michael Anderson**, *Commission Vice-Chairperson*, Interim Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, University Hospitals
- **Ernie Allen**, President & CEO, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
- **Merry Carlson**, Preparedness Chief, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, State of Alaska
- **Honorable Assemblywoman Sheila Leslie**, Nevada General Assembly, 2nd Judicial District Court
- **Bruce Lockwood**, Public Health Emergency Response Coordinator, Bristol-Burlington (CT) Health District
- **Graydon "Gregg" Lord**, Senior Policy Analyst and Associate Director, Homeland Security Policy Institute, George Washington University
- **Dr. Irwin Redlener**, President & Co-founder, The Children’s Health Fund & Director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness and Professor of Clinical Population and Family Health, Columbia University
- **Dr. David Schonfeld**, Thelma and Jack Rubinstein Professor of Pediatrics, Director of the Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, and Director of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center
- **Lawrence “Larry” Tan**, Chief of Emergency Medical Services, New Castle County (DE) Department of Public Safety

Mark Shriver, Chair

Merry Carlson, Alaska
Why Children?

- Children have unique needs – they are not “little adults.”
- Children comprise 25% of the population, but they are placed inappropriately into categories of “special needs,” “vulnerable,” or “at risk.”
- Pediatric health care gaps exist – e.g., only 6% of hospital ER’s and 20% of ambulances are equipped with appropriate pediatric equipment.
Why Children?

- Children exposed to Hurricane Katrina were nearly 5 times as likely as a pre-Katrina cohort to exhibit serious emotional disturbance.
- 40.8% of parents in Louisiana and 49.1% in Mississippi reported that their child experienced emotional or behavioral problems that they did not experience before Hurricane Katrina.
- Fewer than half of the children believed to need psychological help from Katrina received it.
- More than a third of parents living within a mile of the Gulf Coast say their children suffered physical or mental distress since the oil rig blew up April 20.

“Children as Bellwethers of Recovery: Dysfunctional Systems and the Effects of Parents, Households, and Neighborhoods on Serious Emotional Disturbance in Children After Hurricane Katrina” (David M. Abramson, PhD; Yoon Soo Park, MS; Tasha Stehling-Ariza, MPH; Irwin Redlener, MD), *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, August 23, 2010

http://www.childrenshealthfund.org/sites/default/files/files/Children_As_Bellweathers.pdf
Key Issues Today

- Mass Care & Shelter
- Child Care
- Child Welfare & Reunification
- Mental Health
- Pediatric Health Care
- Recovery

NCCD has not just made recommendations, but has developed tools for jurisdictions to use in planning for the needs of children.
Questions

- How many of you think you have addressed the needs of children adequately in your plans?
- Have you exercised your plan using children (if only notionally)?
- Have you had discussions with your local child care resource & referral, child welfare, schools, and pediatric health care partners?
- What agency in WA State is responsible for overseeing child care?
- What agency in WA State is responsible for overseeing child welfare?
NCCD has developed a set of indicators that jurisdictions can use to determine whether they are prepared to care for children in a disaster. Indicators are meant to help assess preparedness in:

- General preparedness
- Shelter Operations
- Public Information & Outreach
- Pediatric Emergency Response Training
- Pediatric Medical Supplies and Equipment
- Child Congregate Care Settings

www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov/reports_studies/resources/Preparedness_Indicators_Modified_from_CPG_101_2_v5.pdf
Mass Care & Shelter

What are the challenges for sheltering children?

✓ NCCD has developed guidance on “Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children”

-- Keep children with families
-- Provide “safe spaces”
-- Ensure children are accompanied wherever they go in the shelter

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/region10/programs/epr/nccd/shelter care standards
Mass Care & Shelter

What Special Supplies Do Children Need in a Shelter?

**Recommendation:** Provide Age-Appropriate Supplies in Shelters (Food, Beds, Hygiene, Toys, etc.)

- NCCCD has developed a sample list of shelter supplies.
- FEMA has developed CUSI packs for States.
Mass Care & Shelter

**Recommendation:** Screen Staff & Volunteers

*Implement common standards and training, including standards for criminal background checks, to mitigate risks unique to children in shelters such as child abduction and sex offenders.*

✓ NCCD has developed guidance for volunteer support: “Recommended Guidelines for Conducting Background Checks on Volunteers.”

[www.acf.hhs.gov/nccd/reports_studies/resources/NCCD_Volunteer_Background_Check_Guidelines_FINAL.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/nccd/reports_studies/resources/NCCD_Volunteer_Background_Check_Guidelines_FINAL.pdf)
Child Care Recommendations

More than 11 million children under the age of 5 are in some type of child care arrangement every week.

Recommendation: Improve Disaster Planning for Child Care Providers

- Develop Statewide child care disaster plans addressing continuity of services and provision of emergency child care
  - ACF Guidance: Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning for Child Care
- Establish disaster preparedness licensing standards for providers
  - NACCRA/Save the Children recommended standards
Child Care Recommendations

**Recommendation:** Improve capacity to provide child care services in the immediate aftermath of and recovery from a disaster.

- FEMA revised its Public Assistance policy to permit reimbursement to state and local governments for emergency child care services that coincide with the emergency sheltering period.

Disaster Assistance Fact Sheet 9580.107: Public Assistance for Child Care Services
Child Care Recommendations

**Recommendation:** Improve capacity to provide child care services in the immediate aftermath of and recovery from a disaster.

- FEMA has revised its Public Assistance regulations to codify child care as an “essential” service.

Nonprofit child-care providers may be eligible for assistance to repair damaged facilities if they do not qualify for SBA disaster loans or if the SBA approves a loan for less than the amount required to repair the damage.
Head Start Recommendations

Recommendation: Require disaster preparedness for Head Start Centers and basic disaster mental health training for staff.

- ACF staff is available to provide technical assistance to Head Starts.
Schools Recommendations

**Recommendation:** Improve School Preparedness and Recovery

- Do schools and districts have comprehensive all-hazards plans?

- Do schools plan, train, and exercise collaboratively with community partners including first responders, public health, and emergency management officials on a regular basis?

- Can schools be reopened and the learning environment be restored quickly? Have potential sources of support, including government, non-government, and private sector sources been identified to assist in restoration of operations?
**Schools Recommendations**

**Recommendation:** Improve School Preparedness and Recovery

- Are teachers and other school personnel trained to recognize signs of distress, adjustment difficulties, and other behavioral and emotional issues in children and provide basic supportive services?

  - ✔ Department of Education: Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities

  www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf
Child Welfare Recommendations

Child welfare includes adoption and foster care, child abuse and neglect, and family preservation. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita forced the evacuation of children in foster care to 19 different states, agencies struggled to locate children and families, provide critical services and ensure appropriate oversight of cases.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that State and local child welfare agencies adequately prepare for disasters.

- States are now required to have child welfare plans addressing continuity of operations.
- Within each ACF regional office, child welfare staff and the region’s emergency management specialist should collaboratively review and evaluate the State child welfare disaster plans.
Unaccompanied Children & Family Reunification

On any given weekday, more than 67 million children are away from their parents while attending school, or at child care (Save the Children 2010)

**Recommendation:** Ensure child care providers include provisions for communication and reunification with families in their emergency plans.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that shelters have plans for taking care of unaccompanied minors.

✓ American Red Cross has developed guidance on handling unaccompanied children in shelters.
Unaccompanied Children & Family Reunification

On any given weekday, more than 67 million children are away from their parents while attending school, or at child care (Save the Children 2010)

Recommendation: Develop and deploy a national information sharing capability to reunite displaced children with their families.

✓ FEMA is finalizing a cooperative agreement with NCMEC to expedite search and reunification of missing children.
Post-Disaster & Recovery Considerations

- Expect increase in family violence, child abuse, substance abuse, etc.
- Psychological “injury” far more prevalent than physical injury in a disaster.
- Between 2-10 mental health victims for every physically injured person.
Children’s Mental Health Recommendations

- Integrate mental and behavioral health for children into public health, medical, and other relevant disaster management activities.
- Enhance training in children’s disaster mental health for mental health professionals and individuals, such as teachers, who work with children.
- Strengthen the Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP) to better meet the mental health needs of children and families.
- Establish the position of Children’s Disaster Mental Health Coordinator within State-level CCPs.
Pediatric Health Care

Just a few of the recommendations:

- Establish a Pediatric Health Care Coordinator on each disaster medical response team.

- Increase pediatric surge capacity, including “reserve pool” of pediatric health care workers to assist in NDMS disaster response.

- Ensure all hospital emergency departments stand ready to care for ill or injured children.
Pediatric Health Care

- Strengthen pediatric training for first responders and other health professionals who may treat children in disasters.
- Create Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program incentive payments for providers in disaster areas.
- Ensure availability of and access to pediatric medical countermeasures.
- Expand research on pediatric environmental health risks associated with disasters.
Recovery: Housing Assistance

**Recommendation:** Prioritize the needs of families with children:

- Ensure children have access to needed services in disaster housing
- Reimburse State & local governments for providing wrap-around services to children and families in community sites
- Expedite transition into permanent housing for families with children
Progress Since NCCD Started

- Creation of Children’s Working Group at the White House, FEMA, and HHS
- Integration of children throughout FEMA’s CPG 101 v.2.0
- Revision of FEMA policy to support reimbursement of emergency child care services in immediate aftermath of disasters
- HHS guidelines on strengthening disaster preparedness for child care programs
- FEMA developed an online course, “Planning for the Needs of Children in Disasters,” with NCCD and Save the Children
Progress Since NCCD Started

✓ NCCD has developed these tools:
  - Preparedness indicators for children
  - Standards and indicators for shelter care for children
  - Shelter supplies list for children
  - Guidelines for volunteer background checks
  - Framework for state and local planning
What Are Your Challenges and Successes in Addressing the Needs of Children?
Additional Information

- Save the Children: The Unique Needs of Children in Emergencies
  

- FEMA Training Course: Planning for the Needs of Children in Disasters
  
  http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is366.asp

NCCD website:

www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov