



# Disaster Event Checklist: Shelter and Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

When a disaster occurs, the “Shelter Lead” will ensure that providers of emergency and disaster shelter and services are able to implement the agreed-upon plan. This checklist provides a list of key actions to ensure the people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable people receive shelter and services they are entitled to during the disaster.<sup>1</sup> If your community has not prepared for disaster shelter and services for people experiencing homelessness, see the [Disaster Preparedness](#) checklist.

## Disaster Event

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Make sure all the elements of your shelter plans are implemented. Stay apprised of developments so that you can address any issues that arise.

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- If the disaster is known in advance (e.g., hurricane), the shelter lead should contact all existing shelters as the disaster approaches to confirm that they are prepared for the disaster.
  - Help address any shortages in supplies, staffing, or other needs.
  - Identify vacancies in these shelters.
- Speak with disaster and emergency shelters regularly to address any needs that emerge.
  - Does each shelter know who they should contact in the emergency management office or the emergency operations center (EOC)?
  - Do they have space to take additional people?
  - Are there capacity issues that threaten health and safety?
  - Do they need additional food, water, medications, or supplies?
  - Are additional staff needed?
  - Are there any unexpected events?
- If the disaster period lasts longer than expected, identify resources to keep shelters and services running.
  - Find additional staff or volunteers who can provide backup for exhausted staff.
  - Check that shelters have sufficient food, water, and supplies.
  - Identify any failing facilities; for example, plumbing or HVAC may begin to fail after days of overuse in crowded facilities.
  - Coordinate with FEMA, Red Cross, and/or Emergency Operations Center, as appropriate in your jurisdiction, to ensure needs are communicated.

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<sup>1</sup> This checklist supports Emergency Support Function (ESF) #6 Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing, Human Services.



## Post Disaster

After the disaster, homeless and other vulnerable people may be the last to leave disaster shelters because they do not have a safe place to which they can return. This is an opportunity to help people move to a situation that is more stable than the one they had prior to the disaster. See the Long Term Recovery Guide for more guidance.

- Keep shelters open as long as necessary so that homeless and precariously housed people can find a safe place to reside. This may require advocacy.
- As shelters close, coordinate with local providers, FEMA, HUD, and any other stakeholders to make sure that all people have a safe place to go.
  - Find placements for those who need them in other shelters, hotels, or other temporary housing.
  - This is an opportunity to engage people who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness before the disaster event in services to ensure that they do not go back to the street. Leverage the local [coordinated entry system](#) if possible.
- As shelters close, make arrangements for transportation. Buses or other mass transportation is not adequate for people who have their pets or belongings with them.
- If you are in a Presidentially Declared Disaster area, use FEMA, Social Service Block Grant and other funding to extend the period of housing support. Be prepared to make the most of that time to find more permanent housing options.
- Follow up with service providers post disaster and discuss what worked and did not work in order to improve your planning for the next potential disaster.
- Include, in your recovery planning, a discussion of the housing needs of people experiencing homelessness. This is a longer-term discussion, but disasters can often highlight gaps in the system and create an opportunities to address unmet needs better than the community had before the disaster.