

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

P.O. Box 60427

Nashville, TN 37206-0427

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E-mail: council@nhchc.org

Website: www.nhchc.org

Telephone 615/226-2292

Fax 615/226-1656

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Rebuild No Shelters

Relief and Reformation in the Wake of Katrina

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council laments the tremendous destruction, suffering, and loss of life along the Gulf Coast. Our thoughts are with all those struggling in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, including the clients and staff of demolished HCH projects in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. We are moved by the generosity of those contributing to the HCH Katrina Fund (www.nhchc.org/katrinafund.html) and by the leadership of HCH projects throughout the country readily bearing additional burdens to attend to the needs of those left homeless by the storm. The effective response of HCH providers should come as no surprise given their daily commitment to meet the emergent needs of people without homes. As two decades of experience teach us, relief alone is never enough; permanent structural solutions must accompany emergency intervention. With essential relief for those left homeless by Katrina comes the call for reformation – not only to end *this* homelessness, but to end *all* homelessness.

Inequality and Injustice

In many ways, the deadly winds of Hurricane Katrina exposed what already existed beneath the surface – the inequality and injustice upon which contemporary America is constructed. Many of the individuals and families most devastated in the wake of Katrina have much in common with the three million Americans who experience homelessness throughout the nation each year. They are victims of economic crises, affordable housing shortages, personal health emergencies, health system dysfunction, and other on-going disasters. Those left homeless by Katrina require more than emergency medical care, temporary emergency shelter, and short-term financial assistance; to cope with current and future natural, economic, or personal hurricanes, they need the appropriate resources – comprehensive health insurance, permanent affordable housing, and living wage employment. These same resources are required to end the homelessness of all Americans.

Rebuild No Shelters

Over the past 25 years, as the nation has wrestled with the contemporary phenomenon of homeless, the short-term “emergency” shelters and programs of the 1980s have become a permanent multi-billion-dollar fixture of American life. In the wake of Katrina, as the relief and reconstruction of the Gulf Coast proceeds, let us insist that no homeless shelters be rebuilt. Rather, let us plan to replace them with sufficient housing for all in need. People experiencing homelessness, whether the proximate cause is a hurricane, lack of health insurance, a mental illness, or the dearth of affordable housing, deserve more than a short-term fix. Katrina can

become our inspiration for a nation that values all its residents, not in word, but in deed. Housing, not shelter; health insurance, not indigent care clinics; a living wage, not the minimum wage: these are the principles that should form a new foundation. Guided by this vision, the National Council will work with other organizations in the coming weeks and months to advance the specific policy recommendations necessary to respond most effectively to natural and unnatural hurricanes. We urge *Mobilizer* readers to join us.

May this horrible disaster stimulate us to end *all* homelessness in this country.

ACTION:

- **Learn what you can do to help:** A new web page containing information about Hurricane Katrina and Health Care for the Homeless is available at www.nhchc.org/aboutkatrina.html. The site includes information about donations of cash and medical supplies, volunteer opportunities, professional liability, record-keeping, infectious disease, shelter health care, and the activities and policies of relevant government agencies and advocacy organization.
- **Tell your Member of Congress to “rebuild no shelters:”** Write your elected representatives to tell them about your efforts and those of your organization to provide relief to the individuals and families displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Urge them to rebuild not a single one of the shelters destroyed by the storm – but rather to ensure true relief for those experiencing homelessness by guaranteeing health insurance, affordable housing, and living wage employment for all Americans. Find out who represents you at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.
- **Watch for future NHCHC analyses and action alerts:** The National HCH Council is collaborating with other national organizations to develop and disseminate information about a progressive plan for reconstruction. Share this *HCH Mobilizer* and forthcoming analyses with your Board, staff, and clients, as well as with homeless service providers and advocates. Connect with coalitions working to reform health care, housing, and income policies.

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\$15 per year by fax, free by e-mail.

Please pass this on to your colleagues, clients, and Board of Directors.