

NDRF Spotlight: The Health and Social Services Recovery Support Function

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Recovery planning in the pre- and post-disaster environment empowers state and local leaders and stakeholders, improves recovery outcomes at the individual and community levels, and builds short- and long-term community resilience. An example of this recovery support is the ongoing long-term recovery work in Puerto Rico, in partnership with Puerto Rico government and FEMA, from Hurricanes Irma and Maria from 2017, which includes the establishment of a seven new “hub & spoke” preparedness regional plans that provide more effective medical access throughout the territory in the event of a national disaster. The Health and Social Services sphere is a critical focus of recovery planning because sustainable public health, healthcare, social services, and education systems both are necessary for the well-being of individuals affected by disasters and are pillars of the whole community’s functioning. For instance, healthcare is not only essential for the health of community members, but healthcare is also an economic driver in many communities. Additionally, social services have a major impact on the ability of a community to recover, as the support of social services programs for at-risk and vulnerable children, individuals, and families affected by a disaster are essential to these impacted members of the community.

Coordinated at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (HHS ASPR), the **Health and Social Services (HSS) Recovery Support Function’s (RSF) mission** is to assist locally led recovery efforts in the restoration of a variety of systems to promote the resilience, health, and well-being of affected individuals and communities through attention to the following nine core mission areas:

- Public health
- Health care service
- Environmental health
- Behavioral health
- Food safety and regulated medical products
- Social services
- Referral to social services / disaster case management
- Long-term recovery impacts to first responders
- Children in disasters (including schools, children, and youth)

As an example, from among these core mission areas, the HSS-RSF focuses on problem-solving to help restore and build capacity of health, education, and social services systems impacted by disasters. Based on the issues and barriers within those essential systems, the regional recovery coordinator and recovery team sets targeted goals with partners to identify funding opportunities, find peer support, deliver helpful technical assistance, and support local decision making based on community input and programmatic data.

Additional HSS RSF Activities Include:

- Leverage federal expertise to support state, local, tribal, or territorial entities in completing assessments of community health and social service needs and prioritizing those needs based on the whole community’s participation in the planning process.
- Develop a comprehensive recovery timeline.
- Identify sources offering technical assistance, and capacity building opportunities to support:
 - Goal-oriented training initiatives with learning objectives.
 - Restoration of community-based public health system functions.
 - Measured resilience improvements of the health and social service systems to promote the independence and well-being of community members.
- Leverage federal cross-agency coordination for integration of behavioral health services to fill gaps.
- Support the health and social services of children, youth, and families through educational infrastructure and services projects touching key areas like food insecurity and behavioral health.
- Develop processes to increase coordinated health and social service recovery through federal interagency and cross-sector collaborations that involve advancing ideas while troubleshooting policy hurdles.

For more information about ASPR’s Division of Community Mitigation & Recovery, visit the [ASPR website](#). You can also find recovery planning resources at [ASPR TRACIE](#).