



Highlights of [GAO-09-561](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

As a result of the unprecedented damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the federal government, for the first time, funded several disaster case management programs. These programs help victims access services for disaster-related needs. GAO was asked to review (1) steps the federal government took to support disaster case management programs after the hurricanes, (2) the extent to which federal agencies oversaw the implementation of these programs, (3) challenges case management agencies experienced in delivering disaster case management services, and (4) how these programs will inform the development of a federal case management program for future disasters. GAO reviewed relevant laws and guidance, obtained data from two programs, conducted site visits to Louisiana and Mississippi, and interviewed case management providers and officials from federal and state agencies involved in disaster case management.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FEMA (1) establish a time line for developing a disaster case management program, (2) include practices to enhance coordination among stakeholders involved in this program and (3) evaluate outcomes of disaster case management pilot programs to inform the development of this program. FEMA agreed with our recommendations and is taking steps to address them.

View [GAO-09-561](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Kay Brown at (202)512-7215 or [brownke@gao.gov](mailto:brownke@gao.gov).

## DISASTER ASSISTANCE

### Greater Coordination and an Evaluation of Programs' Outcomes Could Improve Disaster Case Management

#### What GAO Found

Federal agencies provided more than \$209 million for disaster case management services to help thousands of households cope with the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but breaks in federal funding adversely affected services to some hurricane victims. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) awarded a grant of \$66 million for initial case management services provided by Katrina Aid Today (KAT) shortly after the hurricanes made landfall. When this program ended in March 2008, FEMA provided funds for additional programs to continue services. As a result of ongoing budget negotiations between FEMA and Mississippi, the state-managed Disaster Case Management Pilot (DCM-P) program in Mississippi did not begin until August 2008, approximately 2 months after it was scheduled to, and FEMA's DCM-P program in Louisiana was never implemented. Consequently, some victims most in need may not have received case management services.

FEMA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided some oversight of disaster case management programs, but monitoring of KAT was limited and coordination challenges may provide lessons for future disasters. As recovery continued, FEMA and HUD provided additional monitoring of subsequent programs. Coordination challenges contributed to implementation difficulties, such as a lack of timely information sharing. For example, client information provided by FEMA to the Mississippi state agency implementing the DCM-P program was invalid or out-of-date for nearly 20 percent of eligible clients. As a result of incompatible databases and inconsistent outreach efforts, some victims may have received services from multiple agencies while others may not have been reached.

Case management agencies experienced challenges in delivering federally-funded disaster case management services due to large caseloads, limited community resources, and federal funding rules. Some case management agencies experienced high turnover, and some case managers had caseloads of more than 100 clients, making it difficult to meet client needs. KAT and HUD data indicated that the most frequently occurring needs among clients included housing and employment, but these resources were limited following the hurricanes. Further, case management agencies saw the ability to provide direct financial assistance for items such as home repair, clothing, or furniture as key to helping victims, yet only one federally funded program allowed case management agencies to use federal funds for direct assistance.

FEMA and other agencies are evaluating disaster case management pilot programs to inform the development of a federal disaster case management program for future disasters, but some of the evaluations have limitations. For example, some evaluations will not assess program outcomes, such as whether clients' needs were met. In addition, FEMA did not include stakeholder input in designing its evaluation of multiple pilot programs. According to FEMA officials, the agency does not have a time line for developing the federal disaster case management program.