



5 Actions Governors Can Take Immediately To Improve Disaster Planning for Children

Children represent nearly 25 percent of our population, but when an emergency or disaster strikes, their unique needs are typically unmet or misunderstood.

The National Commission on Children and Disasters, a bipartisan, independent advisory body, examined children's needs in relation to the preparation for, response to, and recovery from all hazards and concluded that children require specific recognition, planning, and coordination within and between Federal, State, tribal, territorial, and local governments and their non-governmental disaster-relief partners.

Recognizing the vital role of Governors in leading State disaster preparedness, response and recovery efforts, the Commission recommends the following 5 actions to improve disaster planning for children:

1. Establish an advisory body such as a Governor's Cabinet on Children and Disasters to ensure that the State appropriately incorporates, coordinates, and supports the safety and unique needs of children in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. The Cabinet would consist of relevant State agency leaders and be charged with conducting a gap analysis of current practices, programs and expenditures across State agencies with regard to children and disasters, and would make annual recommendations to the Governor to close the gaps (i.e. administrative, fiscal, statutory, or regulatory actions). The Cabinet would direct agencies to identify specific target outcomes and performance measures related to children and track progress, capability improvements and implementation of Cabinet recommendations.
2. Designate permanent staff responsibility in the Governor's office and relevant State agencies to focus on intra- and inter-agency integration and coordination of children's disaster needs, identification and elimination of gaps in disaster policies and programs for children and families, and implementation of Cabinet recommendations. Create agency-wide working groups to help accomplish these tasks.
3. Direct Federal disaster preparedness grants to support the needs of children. Provide training and technical assistance to improve the preparedness of schools, child care, child welfare, juvenile justice, juvenile courts, and other child-serving systems; purchase age-appropriate supplies and equipment for child-serving systems, emergency rooms, supply caches and emergency medical response vehicles; and exercise capabilities to assist children, such as evacuation, sheltering and emergency medical care. Require annual progress report.
4. Require all-hazards disaster planning standards for child-serving systems, including: written guidelines for evacuation, family reunification and accommodation of children with disabilities or other special needs, and collaborative planning, training and exercises with emergency management professionals.
5. Adopt standards and indicators for mass care shelters that are responsive to children (e.g. keep families intact, provide supervised play areas, on-site health/mental health services). Purchase age-appropriate supplies (e.g. formula, baby food, diapers, cribs, wash basins).

For more information, please contact Christopher Revere, Executive Director
Christopher.Revere@acf.hhs.gov (202) 205.9561 or visit the Commission's website
www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov