US Department of Health and Human Services
The Administration on Aging
Hurricane Disaster Response Highlights

Introduction

This short fact sheet provides summary highlights of the AoA disaster response lessons learned. For specific answers to the lessons learned questions and the substantive detail behind these highlights, please see the complete lessons learned document.

Context

AoA roles in the emergency preparedness response were pursuant to the goals of the Older Americans Act as noted in AoA's strategic plan, especially the following:

1. Make it easer for older people to access an integrated array of health and social supports.
2. Help older people to stay active and healthy.
3. Support families in their efforts to care for their loved ones at home and in the community.
4. Ensure the rights of older people and prevent their abuse, neglect and exploitation;

AoA actions to address the affects of the disaster:

- Were done with and in support of state and local officials.
- Different state laws, plans and disaster readiness dictated different levels of assistance. Texas had strong readiness and was able to assimilate and assist many evacuees within 72 hours of the Hurricane Katrina. Florida also responded within 72 hours of hurricane Katrina by providing experienced staff for the AoA sponsored rapid needs assessment and disaster response teams.
- State and local community capability to address the needs of their elders was severely damaged and stressed in the hardest hit areas.

Approach

AoA's activities, working closely with the aging network in the affected areas, were based on two major objectives, one directly associated with *vulnerable elders' well being* and the second associated with the *systems that ensure this well being*. These objectives were:

1. Finding and assisting frail elders who did not or could not evacuate. Disruption of home and community based services (HCBS), the types of services the Older Americans Act (OAA) provides, exacts a disproportionate effect on vulnerable persons and frail elders, individuals with disabilities and limited income persons. Because of the dependence these elders have on OAA community based services, the disruption of services could induce life threatening circumstances for older residents in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas because these individuals cannot easily evacuate from their homes.

2. Immediately assess the impact of the disaster on local HCBS service infrastructure. Given the critical nature of Older Americans Act HCBS services, it was important to resume them as soon as possible. Teams on the ground needed to assess the impact of the hurricanes on this service infrastructure and develop plans to return capability to community long-term care systems. As of Friday, September 30th, of the 20 Area Agencies on Aging operating in the affected areas, 8 were either still down or operating at less than 50%.

The strategy to achieve these objectives was to partner with all available organizations in support of disaster responders, state and local officials; and provide additional resources to fill any gaps.

AoA Specific Actions

- *Experienced teams deployed* and stayed in the affected areas supporting the above objectives 72 hours after the disaster and continued through the week of October 3rd. Thus far, over **12,000 elders' conditions were assessed** in the disaster sites through these rapid assessment teams and local aging network officials.

- *Assistant Secretary Carbonell and her Executive Staff personally visited* impacted sites to learn the most pressing needs; as a

result, the Assistant Secretary authorized the release of **over $ 1.6M in immediate aid**.

- *AoA Central Staff maintained continuous contact* with field operations, collaborated with national organizations to coordinate support, manned HHS Special Operations Center OPDIV Liaison Desk, held daily conference calls with the field response team and, within 72 hours of the disaster, the Regional Administrators deployed in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana and communicated the day's events through reports circulated to key AoA line and executive staff. **Over 20% of AoA's staff had direct involvement in Katrina and Rita activities,** either in the affected areas or at the central office.

- *Long-term Care Ombudsman aggressively engaged* to assist nursing home residents affected by Katrina and Rita. **As of September 26, 1065 residents'** names had been reported from both evacuating and receiving facilities.

Governance Framework - AoA Grounded its Efforts with Data

AoA prepared a daily analysis of key data from state units on aging number of evacuees, numbers of older adults over 60 in the state, numbers of older adults affected by the disaster, services provided to evacuees and other information. This work is ongoing and is expected to continue through the reconstruction. **It is estimated that over 700,000** elders evacuated and over 54,000 Older Americans Act units of service were provided,** especially meals and transportation services. (This is probably a low estimate, as many of the most affected AAAs are busy performing service vs. counting service units, however, as the reconstruction proceeds, the standard AoA State Reporting System will capture this data.)

The disproportionate affect of the disasters on older persons is illustrated in the numbers and percentage of the older adult evacuee populations.

- Louisiana estimates over 350,000** older evacuees as a result of both hurricanes. This represents over 48% of the total state over 60 population of 719,028 (2004 US Census figures).
- Alabama estimates over 9,000 evacuees** or 1% of the state over 60 population of 810,132

- Mississippi estimates over 46,000** older evacuees or 10% of state the over 60 population of 477,206
- Texas estimates over 300,000** older evacuees or 10% of the state over 60 population of 3 million.

**In this case the definition of evacuees are individuals who had to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently and who now reside in shelters or facilities either in state or out of state, however, they are considered residents of their respective states. Additionally, these are state reported numbers.

Factors Related to Successful Disaster Recovery Actions

- Quickly leveraged an experienced network focusing on people and partnerships.
- Neighboring States and Area Agencies on Aging provided support.
- Experts from other geographies were dispatched.
- AoA Senior Staff knew how to network with other agencies and work with senior state officials.
- The Aging Network, it governance structure and its organizational culture- because of its direct link to and knowledge about seniors.
- Disaster Response Teams were compact, flexible, highly mobile, self-sustaining.
- Saw the long-term view in the midst of disruption, thus teams started the planning process with long-term goals in mind.
- Provision of expert technical assistance.
- Case management based long-term care model aided adaptation to new needs.
- Aging and Disability Resource Center model which focuses on integrated access and streamlined eligibility.
- AOA emphasis on Aging Network presence in Emergency Operations Centers