

Mental Health Services During an Emergency:

What's needed? Who Convenes? Who is Involved?

Disasters cause tremendous harm to the physical environment, as well as loss of life, economic loss, and displacement of impacted residents. These dramatic and sudden changes can also cause major stresses to the mental and behavioral health of everyone affected.

The range of stakeholder groups involved with assisting those impacted—and the differing local policy requirements they operate within—is diverse and numerous. At the local level, mental health services are primarily carried out at the county level, but distinct community-based organizations (CBOs) exist at the city level as well. In a 'normal' daily environment the web of mental health services and how to coordinate them is complicated at best; during an emergency the relationships become even more unclear, confusing and reactionary.

Your team is tasked with planning a public meeting to discuss what are the most important services that are expected to be needed in your jurisdiction for mental health support during a disaster. The numerous provider groups are expected to attend as well as community members.

Q: What pre-meeting work would you undertake and how would it determine your public meeting design?

- Estimating the number of people that will show up to the meeting.
- Recruiting support organizations (non profits, NGO, comm org., etc) to partnership
- Organizing potential stakeholders.
- How are the stakeholders feeling
- Figuring out security and capacity of buildings to hold meetings.
- Analyzing if the situation needs to be one single meeting, or a series of meetings tackling different subjects for a variety of different groups.
 - There might be different meetings for different groups of people based on language barriers and understanding.
- Seating chart

Where would you hold this public meeting and how would you gather input in an orderly fashion?

- Meetings should be held inside the community, most likely within a community center like city hall, the library, or a school gym.
 - Would give the community a sense of familiarity and security.
- Set the agenda
- Input gathering: Go around the room?
 - Giant sticky notes!

What other factors or issues would you need to consider?

- Accessibility
- Language Access
- Cultural Competencies

- A “real world” comparative analysis. Contextualize the issue.
- Depending on the severity of the trauma caused by the natural disaster, we need to figure out if people have been displaced.