



National Commission on Children and Disasters



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Commission Urges President and Congress to Make Children a Priority in Disaster Planning

Interim Report offers solutions to close gaps in disaster planning that neglect children

The National Commission on Children and Disasters today approved an Interim Report to President Obama and Congress. The report identifies several shortcomings in disaster preparedness, response and recovery and provides recommendations designed to make children an immediate priority in disaster planning.

Most disaster planning fails to address the unique needs of children. This means the unique needs of children are less likely to be considered when medicines are developed, when school and child care staff are trained, and when families are separated in the aftermath of a disaster.

Children are at most risk during a disaster when they are away from their families and, in fact, 67 million children are in schools or child care on any given week day making them particularly vulnerable.

“The most vulnerable Americans in the most vulnerable settings are made even more vulnerable by government inaction,” said Mark Shriver, Chairperson of the Commission. “Disasters don’t strike on government’s timetable which means the time for government to act is now.”

The Commission is examining the performance of government and non-governmental organizations supporting the needs of children. The report identifies several gaps in disaster preparedness that neglects the safety of millions of children, including emergency shelters, delivery of medical and mental health services, and disaster preparedness in schools and child care facilities.

Key recommendations include:

- Incorporating children as an immediate priority within the White House and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

- Adopting national disaster planning standards for facilities that serve or house children, such as schools, group homes and juvenile justice centers.
- Adopting national standards to provide a safe and secure emergency shelter environment for children, including access to age-appropriate services and supplies.
- Requiring state child care regulatory agencies to include disaster planning, training and exercising requirements within the scope of the state's minimum health and safety standards for child care licensure or registration.
- Integrating child mental and behavioral health training into preparedness and response activities.

“This report offers a clear roadmap toward a disaster preparedness, response and recovery system that finally meets the unique needs of children,” said Shriver.

The Commission is collaborating with the FEMA Children's Working Group, the Department of Health and Human Services and other organizations to implement the recommendations as quickly as possible.

To read the Commission's *Foreword* to President Obama and Congress [click here](#).

The draft Interim Report being voted on at this morning's public meeting is available at www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov.

An embargoed copy of the final report will be posted later this week. A final report is due by October 2010.