

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**August 29, 2017****Contact: HHS Press Office****202-690-6343****media@hhs.gov**

Hurricane Harvey Response: OCR Identifies Practices and Resources for Emergency Responders/Officials to Help Ensure Individuals Have Equal Access to Emergency Services

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tom Price, M.D. declared a public health emergency in Texas and Louisiana in response to Hurricane Harvey, following the President's declaration that a disaster exists in the States of Texas and Louisiana.

As federally-funded assets are deployed to save lives and ensure the health and well-being of persons the affected areas, emergency responders and officials should consider the following practices to help make sure all segments of the community are served properly and effectively:

- Employing qualified interpreter services to assist individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing during response and recovery activities
- Making emergency messaging available in languages prevalent in the area and in multiple formats, such as audio, large print, and captioning and ensuring that websites providing disaster-related

information are accessible

- Making use of multiple outlets and resources for messaging to reach individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, and members of diverse faith communities.
- Considering the needs of individuals with mobility impairments and individuals with assistive devices or durable medical equipment in providing transportation for evacuation
- Identifying and publicizing accessible sheltering facilities that include accessible features, such as bathing, toileting, and eating facilities and bedding
- Avoiding separating people from their sources of support, such as service animals, durable medical equipment, caregivers, medication and supplies
- Stocking shelters with items that will help people to maintain independence such as hearing aid batteries, canes, and walkers

Being mindful of all segments of the community and taking reasonable steps to avoid exclusion in emergency response efforts will help ensure that responsible officials are in compliance with Federal civil rights laws and that the disaster management in Texas and Louisiana is successful.

“Emergencies such as these are especially hard on the most vulnerable members of our community, and all of us are committed to doing whatever we can to lend a hand in this public health emergency,” said Roger Severino, OCR Director. “OCR is providing resources and ongoing technical assistance to help

make sure people get the help they need from the emergency responders and management officials as they continue their tireless and heroic efforts to assist the people of Texas and Louisiana in this critical situation.”

For more detailed information regarding how Federal civil rights laws apply in an emergency, [click here](#).

For information on the Department of Homeland Security’s announcement that it will not be conducting routine non-criminal immigration enforcement operations at Harvey-related evacuation sites or shelters, [click here](#).

For information about how HIPAA laws apply in an emergency, [click here - PDF](#).

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