

Experiences of Adult Home Residents During Hurricane Sandy: Implications for Evacuation and Sheltering

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Residents of adult homes across New York City faced unique hardships in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. In order to shed light on these experiences, student researchers from the Columbia University School of Social Work partnered with Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled (CIAD) to conduct focus groups and interviews in adult homes throughout New York City. Researchers asked a series of questions on seven main topics concerning: the evacuation process, shelter conditions, medication, cash allowance, communication issues, safety concerns, and accessibility of evacuation sites. The project was undertaken with the guidance of Dr. Lori McNeil, Director of Research and Policy for the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center.

This brief highlights preliminary findings from the report, which will be released in the coming weeks. The results from this participatory research project will serve as evidence in support of key recommendations backed by numerous organizations and reflected in proposed legislation.

Selected Findings:

- 100% of residents who were evacuated reported issues with the evacuation process.
- All of the residents who were evacuated reported concerns with conditions at the shelters, ranging from food and overcrowding to staff and operations.
- One-third of residents reported having issues with access to monthly personal allowance.
- Nearly 20% of all adult home residents interviewed reported having issues with medication during the evacuation or sheltering process.

“The worst part for me was when the lights went out. I have trouble walking and the elevators were not working. We were told we had to take the stairs to evacuate and I was scared someone would push me.”

“I have health conditions and for me to sleep on a cot for weeks was absolutely horrible.”

“Several residents were missing at different times during the two weeks (at the shelter). They were not reported missing by the staff. There was no daily census taken until a family member came over and had no idea where her brother was. The police got involved and it was discovered that there were other people that were also unaccounted for.”

“I unite myself to the voice of all of my fellow residents that they should have evacuated us the day before. As a matter of fact, management made the remark that everything was going to be ok, that we did not need to evacuate. The opinion of management did not coincide with what that the mayor of our city was advising everyone to implement for the evacuation.”

Selected Findings Continued:

- 100% of residents evacuated to DHS-operated shelters reported difficulties with access to restrooms.
- 85% of residents evacuated to DHS-operated shelters identified issues with shower operations, including lack of privacy and inconsistent coordination.
- Of the residents who were evacuated or sheltered in place, nearly 30% reported accessibility issues at their shelter or facility.
- 28% of residents who were evacuated reported issues with safety at the evacuation site or the surrounding neighborhood.

“All of our medical records were completely destroyed. The medical staff from our facility had to start interviewing all of our residents, asking questions about everything that went into opening new medical records. It’s like starting all over again...”

“I had an issue with medication because they gave me the wrong pills. My face blew up like a balloon and I landed up in the hospital (for) about two weeks. They had to bring my blood pressure down... I was all messed up.”

“In my case, I was accommodated with another resident of my facility in a room that was already occupied by two local residents of the home... There was tension there, animosity between residents of their facility and residents of ours... I heard many people say that they were dying for us to get out of their facility.”

“There was a total lack of resident input in the process. We have to have input in the decisions that affect our lives. We have to be able to advocate for our own safety. It’s our lives.”

Recommendations:

1. New York City and New York State must work together to develop a comprehensive evacuation plan for adult homes and nursing homes in hurricane flood zones to ensure close coordination and cooperation before, during and in the aftermath of an emergency.
2. New York City should conduct a thorough review of shelter accessibility and safety for residents of institutions.
3. Emergency planning must be participatory – with involvement and input from adult home residents.
4. Mandatory evacuation orders should apply to adult homes, taking into account the additional advanced planning and coordination necessary in moving institutionalized residents.
5. Adult homes in unaffected areas should not be considered an acceptable place to evacuate residents of other adult homes unless there are empty beds available. An adult home’s capacity standards should not be waived in emergency situations.

For details on the full report, email:
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