



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201  
www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs

## Community Services Block Grant

### Dear Colleague Letter

**DCL#:** CSBG-DCL-2021-15  
**DATE:** June 16, 2021  
**TO:** Community Services Block Grant State, Territory and Tribal Officials  
**SUBJECT:** Hurricane Preparedness and Response  
**ATTACHMENT(S):** N/A

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Dear Colleagues,

The Office of Community Services (OCS) is committed to ensuring the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Network can address the critical needs of people and communities with low incomes, as consistent with the purpose and allowable uses of CSBG. The purpose of this DCL is to remind CSBG state, territory and tribal lead agencies and eligible entities of flexibilities and resources available to support hurricane preparedness and response. The [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA) predicts another above-average Atlantic hurricane season (which is inclusive of the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea).

#### **Use of CSBG Funding for Disaster Relief**

CSBG eligible entities – more commonly known as Community Action Agencies (CAAs) – can serve a critical role in supporting low-income individuals, families, and communities before and after major disasters. To help ensure an efficient response to community needs, OCS supports state and community efforts to include CAAs in planning for disasters and removing barriers to recovery in response to disasters. At all levels of the CSBG network, a critical goal during natural disasters is to meet the needs of all low-income individuals and families, including seniors and individuals with disabilities. Please see [CSBG IM #154 "Disaster Flexibilities and Waivers"](#) for additional detail, to include what can be a CAA's priority area of focus during a disaster: serving as a central point of service in a community; providing access to facilities for urgent needs; and offering coordination and referrals. Additional support services can include providing access to fresh food, potable water, and other basic necessities, as well as financial supports for individuals experiencing a loss of income due to a disaster. OCS places a high priority on helping CAAs resume existing services where appropriate, and to modify existing Community Action Plans where necessary to free up resources to meet urgent priorities.

### **Eligibility Determination**

Section 673(2) of the CSBG Act specifies that the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) shall be used as a criterion of eligibility in CSBG and that the state may revise the poverty line to not exceed 125 percent of the official poverty line. The CARES Act authorizes states to revise the income limit for the eligibility ceiling from 125 to 200 percent of the FPL for CSBG services furnished during fiscal years 2020 and 2021, including services furnished with the state's regular CSBG appropriations during those years.

Also noted in [CSBG IM #154 "Disaster Flexibilities and Waivers,"](#) states may consider circumstances where individuals may have been made low-income by the disaster, including disaster-related unemployment, and may establish appropriate procedures based on individual and family needs. Particularly in situations that may be exacerbated by COVID-19, states are encouraged to review existing procedures and establish emergency procedures if appropriate to streamline the eligibility determination process following a disaster. If a displaced individual or family does not have immediate access to the eligibility documentation, emergency procedures may include flexibility in accepting signed statements from the family attesting to the necessary eligibility information pending availability of necessary documents to meet immediate emergency needs.

### **Resource Guides on Emergency Preparedness and Response**

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) has several resource guides and tip sheets related to hurricane preparedness and response. Such guides include: a hurricane preparedness checklist; what to do after a hurricane; as well as safety information for response workers.

In addition, we know that a natural disaster like a hurricane can affect mental health due to the associated stress. To make sure Community Action staff and customers are supported, please note that HHS's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has great resources available. [SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline](#), 1-800-985-5990, is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions after a disaster. Call or text [1-800-985-5990](tel:1-800-985-5990) to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. OCS looks forward to continuing to provide high-quality services to OCS grantees.

/s/

Charisse Johnson  
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Office of Community Services