

Request for Information about the Experiences of People with Disabilities Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

September 21, 2005

The National Council on Disability (NCD) (www.ncd.gov), an independent federal agency making recommendations to the President and Congress on issues affecting the 54 million Americans with disabilities, is gathering information on how Hurricanes Katrina and Rita affected people with disabilities and their relatives, friends, and neighbors, and how they have affected organizations that have been providing assistance to people with disabilities. Please take a few moments to share your experiences and consider the questions at the end of this document as guidance for your response.

NCD called for a federal disability response and recovery plan (<http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/news/2005/r05-496.htm>), and published two briefs on Hurricane Katrina affected areas. The first was released on September 2, 2005 (<http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2005/katrina2.htm>), the second on September 7, 2005 (<http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2005/katrina.htm>). Issues raised include the implications of how Hurricane Katrina has affected people with disabilities, where help can be sought, the response of the government, the additional help or assistance that is currently needed, the subsequent actions that must be undertaken, and the response made by the disability community to the hurricane.

In addition, NCD has published an April 15, 2005 report entitled Saving Lives: Including People with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness (http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2005/saving_lives.htm). This report outlines emergency preparedness, disaster relief, and homeland security programs, so that the Federal Government can plan, prepare, and act to include people with disabilities in all facets of emergency planning and execution.

Hurricane Katrina has brought focus on the need to document the experiences of people with disabilities from a broad array of diverse cultures and economic status as well as those of disability oriented organizations involved in responding to the resulting disaster. Your experiences will help NCD better target its guidance to policymakers in assisting the tens of thousands of people with disabilities affected in the Gulf Coast region.

The following questions can be used as guidance in your response to NCD's request for information. Please send your information to NCD in one of three ways: email (info@ncd.gov), U.S. mail (National Council on Disability, 1331 F Street NW, Suite 850, Washington, DC 20004) or fax (202-272-2022) by October 12, 2005. Please indicate whether you would like to make your response anonymous.

1. How were people with disabilities provided with information about the severity of the emergency caused by the hurricanes, how to prepare for it, and how to evacuate?
2. Was individual assistance (such as personal attendants, sign language interpreters, readers, and service animals) available to people with disabilities during and after the emergency?
3. What assistive devices (such as wheelchairs, walkers, canes, crutches, speech enabled or Braille notetakers, pagers, closed captioning, TTYs, hearing aids, and batteries) were people with disabilities able to keep with them during or after the hurricane? What assistive devices were they not able to keep? How were these assistive devices replaced?
4. What accessible temporary housing or shelter was offered to people with disabilities?
5. What accessible transportation was provided to people with disabilities when evacuating the hurricanes, receiving food and water, and reaching temporary shelters or housing? Were people who use assistive devices able to keep them during such transport?
6. What medical and mental health treatment, such as emergency care, counseling or medication, was offered to people with disabilities? What types of accessibility problems arose?

7. What schools offered accommodations to students with disabilities affected or dislocated as a result of the hurricanes?

8. What types of temporary or permanent employment opportunities were offered to people with disabilities?

9. What government services (such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, subsidized housing, food vouchers, or any other government assistance) were, and continue to be, made available to people with disabilities?

10. Describe the immediate, short-term, and long-term aid provided by private, civic, faith-based, advocacy organizations or other groups to people with disabilities.