IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN DISASTER: A SHELTER SCREENING AND STAFFING ANALYSIS

**Issue:** After Hurricane Katrina many operational problems in disaster shelters were identified. One of them was a gap in receptivity and ability of shelters to take in and care for persons from the whole community. Six years later, there are still challenges in screening and providing adequate resources to meet needs of displaced populations in disaster shelters. There is no evidence-based research to support any particular staffing plan the population-based, non-medical setting of a disaster shelter.

**Description:** A mixed-method qualitative study of intake screening for access and functional needs of clients in general populations, congregate care shelters was done in 2011. The intent of screening was to identify ADL’s, health and mental health needs. A goal of the study was to apply a staffing model equation to predict staffing needs and thereby better support these now displaced populations. A panel of subject matter experts reviewed the data collected and a proposal for disaster shelter intake and staffing.

**Lessons learned:** In three out of four shelters studied, the shelter population had twice as many clients with needs as might be predicted from the county statistics of persons with disabilities. Client needs for support were not discovered on arrival through screening, but through ongoing assessment and relationships built with shelter nursing and mass care staff.

**Recommendations:** A proposal called Cot-to-Cot assessment, a public health model of relational care, will be written into practice guidelines for sheltering. Within this model, nursing staffing based on core minimums will reflect community demographics and client need.

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