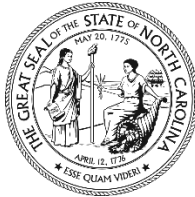




**North Carolina Child Welfare
2020-2024 Disaster Plan**



**NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Social Services

DISASTER PLAN

North Carolina is a county administered, state supervised system. As the supervising agency, North Carolina requires each county to have their own disaster plan that addresses how counties, inclusive of county departments of social services will mitigate risk as well as plan for response and recovery. North Carolina does not require counties to utilize the same template for their disaster plan.

Components of the Disaster Plan

1. *Identification, location, and continued availability of services procedures for children under the supervision or in the custody of NC child welfare agencies, including non-minor dependents, residing in foster care, out-of-county placements, ICPC children, and out-of-state non-minor dependents who may be displaced*

If, at any time a county department of social services is not able to effectively discharge all or any its duty for child protection (including Intake, Assessment, In-Home Services, Foster Care, and Adoptions) - as defined in NCGS 108A, consequent to a disaster, the county director of social services or their designee must inform the State Child Welfare Director. The State Child Welfare director will work with the county to determine strategies and resource needs to continue the work of child protection in the county.

During disasters, counties may have challenges accessing information technology systems used to conduct daily business. As part of disaster preparedness activities, counties must consider the types of information that can be printed for use during the disaster period. DHHS is committed to providing individual counties assistance in retrieving information that will assist them in locating families that are currently receiving child welfare services should county data systems be inaccessible.

NC DSS maintains child abuse and neglect data in NCFAST and the Central Registry. These data systems for Child Abuse and Neglect would be able to provide historical data on families that have received services and the specific details surrounding their involvement with child protective services and CPS in home services. NCFAST also maintains information regarding children, families and the placement home providers. For counties not yet enrolled in NCFAST, the Child Placement and Payment system (CPPS) tracks children and their placement with licensed providers. As the foster care licensing authority, NC DSS ensures evacuation plans with our foster care facilities.

When the disaster plan is activated NC DSS will access NCFAST, Central Registry, and CPPS to determine where children are placed and follow up with the counties as to the whereabouts of the children if counties are evacuated and/or those placements are no longer viable. NC DSS and counties will coordinate daily during an emergency to maintain placement locations and status of all children, whether in custody or under the supervision of the child welfare agency, until they are able to return to their designated placement. Additionally, NC DSS will maintain daily contact with any foster care facilities that must evacuate or are no longer viable to maintain placement locations and status of all residing children until they can return or are assigned another designated placement. NC DSS will also maintain a list of facilities that can assist with providing placements and services for those displaced. Similarly, NC DSS also maintains contact with its contractors who provide services including family preservation and post-adoption services to ensure services are not interrupted or are continued as soon as possible.

Specific procedures include:

- NC DSS requires local county child welfare agencies to identify its child welfare children and families in anticipation of impending natural disaster and/or evacuation using NCFAST, Central Registry, and CPPS address data and mapping on children in placement.

- NC DSS requires local county child welfare agencies, private child placing agencies, and residential child care facilities to provide information and instruction to foster home providers, relatives, group homes, etc. to assist with evacuation and relocation as they are needed during an impending natural disaster or an emergency.
- Local county child welfare agencies are required to provide a daily report to NC DSS on all displaced children and families served in child welfare including those governed by ICPC regulations by maintaining daily contact with this population, tracking placements, tracking barriers to returning to designated placements, and providing resources and referrals as needs are identified. This procedure also allows North Carolina to provide appropriate information to the Administration of Children and Families regarding the status of all children receiving child welfare services in our state. A format for such a report will be provided to counties with children placed in affected counties.
- When a local child welfare agency is challenged to provide child welfare services for any displaced children and families or cannot provide services to those not displaced, NC DSS will work to identify resources and staff from counties who are not affected and are able to temporarily assist in the provision of services and well as identify counties who can provide services where children and families are found to be staying while displaced.

2. Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases

Depending on the extent and outcome of the disaster, NC DSS and local child welfare agencies will continue business with regular operations maintained and all job functions covered. If this is not possible due to the disaster or its impact in certain locations, ongoing non-essential services may be postponed as needed until normal business operations can be restored. If some offices are inaccessible or closed, the local county director designates an open office as central point for coordination of assignment and workload activities. Modifications to service delivery must be communicated to the State Child Welfare Director/designee.

Online systems are accessed as available and updates to NCFast, Central Registry, and CPPS are processed when available, otherwise, manual tracking forms are used to capture information until online systems are available. NC DSS will designate staff to receive calls from local child welfare agencies who may be unable to perform essential functions including responding to new CPS reports of neglect or abuse. NC DSS will identify and coordinate with counties to identify who is able to respond to reports and ensure that timely responses occur. NC DSS will also coordinate meeting other needs as identified.

3. Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster

NC DSS will begin communication with counties anticipated to be affected prior to a known impending disaster event. Routine, statewide conference calls will be scheduled to assure all child welfare agencies are prepared and ensuring they are able to reach their caseworkers and other essential staff. NC DSS will remain in contact with impacted agencies by any and all methods available including phone and email.

NC DSS will have contact numbers for its own staff in order to have readily available information and staff to contact child welfare agencies as necessary. It is expected that local child welfare agencies will maintain lists of contact numbers for case workers as well as resource families, shelters, and families involved in in-home service cases. NC DSS licensing and regulatory staff will contact any group homes or facilities that were in impacted areas or were evacuated to ascertain their status until their functioning becomes normal. Once a disaster event has ended, NC DSS will utilize Children's Program

Representatives to contact impacted agencies to assess the status of agency functioning as well as the status of local agency's available staff. NC DSS will utilize the information to ensure essential functions are available.

4. *Preserve essential program records*

NC DSS will, as the keeper of records, coordinate with its IT Division to ensure steps are taken to maintain the NCFAST, CPPS, and Central Registry systems if at all possible before, during, and following a disaster. It is expected that local child welfare agencies will work with their IT section to handle local access issues to all state systems. NC DSS Staff will assist with record searches and update systems for counties where access is interrupted. In the event electronic systems are unavailable, there is a back-up system for staff using a paper-based system for recording critical information that will be needed to restore/update the electronic system when it is operational. State systems including NCFAST and CPPS are backed up offsite and are available via any internet connected computer. If the main system is unavailable the systems will be routed to those backups. Steps to preserve paper records in disaster plans for county child welfare agencies prone to flooding include storing records off site and ensuring records are on highest floors.

5. *Coordinate services and share information with other states*

The State ICPC Compact Administrator is responsible for assisting the local child welfare agencies in contacting other states regarding sharing information and coordinating services. NC DSS staff will be in contact with the ICPC Administrator within the local child welfare agency to ensure that services are continuous. Both local agencies and NC DSS maintain written lists of children involved with ICPC.

The State ICPC Compact Administrator will assist local agencies in contacting out of state Child Welfare Offices to coordinate communication with parents, family and attorneys of out of state children. State ICPC Liaisons will work with local points of contact to collect, and share, as appropriate, pertinent information regarding children and families receiving ICPC services; including initial location and relocation information, previously identified well-being needs, status and new needs, need for services and the communities' ability to provide, and ability to communicate with supervising agency and family members.

Increased Focus on Disaster Planning

NC DHHS began providing more oversight of disaster plans in the past year after Hurricane Florence but has not yet established a review plan. Currently, a work group that includes NC DHHS and county Directors of social services is addressing disaster planning and response. Decisions about implementing a template and state review will be made by this workgroup.

In the last five years, North Carolina was noticeably impacted by Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Hurricane Florence in 2018. Our communication plan and daily required responses have assisted us in maintaining the status of all children in foster care as well as the status of service provision in impacted areas. In the aftermath of Hurricane Florence NC DSS licensing and regulatory staff worked to develop an expedited approval process for foster families who might have to relocate to a temporary home. NC DSS also worked with those providing therapeutic care to have a time-limited waiver for the weekly supervision requirement when travel conditions were compromised. Both these strategies proved beneficial and will continue to be in our disaster plan.