

## **VII. Disaster Social Services**

The first priority for the use of funds available from the Administration on Aging, whether they are Title IV or Supplemental Funds, is the provision of Disaster Advocacy and Outreach Services. These services, as described in the previous chapter, help to assure that older persons receive disaster services established for the general population. If special efforts are not made to assure that older persons receive these services, experience has demonstrated that they will receive fewer of the services they need as compared to the general population. Once this priority is addressed, the AAA should address the need for additional services that older persons require which are not otherwise available. As a group, these services are gap-filling disaster services.

### **I. Gap-Filling Disaster Services**

Gap-filling services are those services that are necessary after a disaster because: (1) they are not available and are necessary for older persons; (2) they are not in sufficient quantity to provide services to the older disaster victims who need those services; or (3) will not be available for a long enough period of time to meet the need. Gap-filling disaster services are those provided immediately following the disaster which often continue to be necessary during long term recovery. These services may be provided for as long as one year, or even longer in catastrophic level disasters. These services are those which are necessary to maintain older disaster victims until they have recovered to the point where they do not need further assistance, to help provide the capacity to address problems that develop as a result of the disaster, and finally, to provide services that will be on-going in nature and that will transition to existing programs.

These services may be as individually designed as individual disasters are different in their impact. Most commonly identified services include:

- A. Chore Services are those which provide assistance in initial clean-up and on-going assistance with the process of restoring the home to order. This service includes the physical assistance needed in helping older persons to move from one residence to another.

- B. Legal Services are those which are provided to assist older persons in problems with insurance settlements, bureaucratic decisions, appeals, service quality and others that develop as a consequence of the disaster.
- C. Transportation services are those which may enable an older disaster victim to go to a DAC, to go shopping, to obtain prescription drugs, and attend a nutrition site or receive other services.
- D. Handyman Services include the repairing of windows, furnaces, steps or other minor repairs which are not available through other sources. This may be a major expenditure or a surprisingly small expenditure depending upon other resources that become available. For example, in some areas, the Mennonites provide tremendous support in this area.
- E. Meals Programs may include the provision of food in bulk, meals through a nutrition site, or through other avenues as available. These meals are immediate as necessary and for the period of recovery. If the general public is to be served, immediate contact with the Red Cross concerning reimbursement of the costs of the service should be initiated.
- F. Miscellaneous Programs may be developed separately, such as a house sitting service for older persons who cannot leave their homes because of a fear of looters, to moving assistance programs which will be included under the umbrella of a broader service such as chore services. The key aspect to this service is flexibility and the ability to respond to the unique individual needs of the older persons. Another example might be the provision of a generator in an isolated area so that a basement can be drained.

A common problem developing after disasters is a reluctance on the part of administrators to proceed with the provision of needed assistance because they want to be absolutely sure that they are not providing services which might be available from other sources. Sometimes, lengthy periods of time have passed while determinations are made about individual situations. While this is the intent of the strategy to provide such services within this context, it is not intended that the strategy become a barrier to the provision of needed services on a timely basis.

The best approach in such situations to assure that timely decisions can be made is the use of a defensible process. Administrators should review the service within the context of the criteria provided. A second step includes the establishment and use of a review panel which can assure that reasonable efforts have been made to explore other options. This panel should include representatives of other disaster service organizations who assure that they do not have the resources readily available to provide the service and that their information indicates the provision of services is warranted.

In many disasters, unmet needs committees are established where disaster service organizations meet to determine how needs can be met with the resources available overall to the individual organizations. The unmet needs committee is an excellent choice among potential approaches in conducting the service review.

A cautionary note is appropriate at this point. There are unscrupulous persons who will try to take advantage of the confusion that follows a disaster and will misrepresent their situation and their resources. There should not only be intensive efforts to verify the representation, especially when more substantial resources are involved for an individual, but networking with other organizations to verify the situation is important. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is an important resource, among others, to assure that the overall situation as described is accurate and that the response is appropriate.

## **II. Service Provision Mechanisms**

The role of the AAA is to assure that needed services are identified, that funding for the services is obtained, and that the service is provided. This means that the range of activities will range from an advocacy position to the direct provision of services.

For example, mental health services are often critical after a disaster. AAAs are not normally involved in the direct provision of mental health services as there are other community organizations that provide this service. Before the disaster, the role of the AAA may have been to advocate for increased mental health services for older persons, to advocate for increased funding for these services or to fund an organization for these services. The AAAs most direct role may have been in referral of individuals. Following a disaster, the same role is assumed by the AAA within the context of the needs and the resources available.

At the other extreme of possibilities, the AAA may be funding transportation or nutrition services through a provider, or in some instances, directly. Another service may not be provided at all. In the case of pre-existing services, the AAA would need to identify the expansion necessary, seek funding, and assure implementation of the expanded services. **The AAA should have clauses included in contracts and grants with service providers assuring their response when natural disasters occur.** There have been instances when service providers, or more often, the staff of the service providers have refused to respond. If this happens, the only recourse is to find immediate substitutes. The situation then is the same as if the service did not previously exist and must be immediately established.