Crisis Counseling Assistance: Questions and Answers

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

CRISIS COUNSELING ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING

What is the purpose of the Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program?

The Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP) provides supplemental funding to States for short-term crisis counseling services to eligible victims of Presidentially declared major disasters. The purpose of the CCP is to relieve mental health problems caused or aggravated by the disaster or its aftermath.

There are two separate portions of the CCP that can be funded: (1) immediate services, and (2) regular program. The immediate services portion is intended to enable the State or local agency to respond to the immediate mental health needs with crisis counseling services. Immediate services may be funded for up to 60 days after the Presidential declaration. If a regular program application has been submitted, the program period for the immediate services may be extended an additional 30 days and additional funding may be awarded. A longer extension may be approved by FEMA if the review process of the regular program application exceeds 30 days. Costs incurred from the date of the incident to the date of declaration are reimbursable under the immediate services portion. The regular program provides up to 9 months of crisis counseling services, community outreach, and consultation and education services to people affected by the disaster. Funding for the regular program is separate from the immediate services. The State may apply for either or both portions of the CCP.

How does a State determine if a CCP is needed?

The State department of mental health should contact the mental health service providers in the declared area to determine if the local resources can meet the needs of the population impacted by the disaster. If the State and local providers cannot meet the needs of the impacted population, the State should consider applying for Federal assistance.

What types of services are typically included in a CCP?

Crisis counseling services include those screening, diagnostic, and counseling techniques, as well as outreach services such as public information, community networking, consultation, and education, that can be applied to meet mental health needs immediately after a major disaster declaration.
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The CCP helps disaster survivors to recognize typical reactions and emotions that occur following a disaster and to regain control over themselves and their environment. Crisis counseling is not treatment for substance abuse, mental illnesses, or developmental disabilities. Mental health workers specified in the CCP grant application are eligible for training that will enable them to provide crisis counseling services. In addition, other disaster workers are eligible for general instruction designed to enable them to deal effectively and humanely with people affected by the disaster.

**Should the CCP rely on existing staff or hire new staff?**

Most programs rely heavily on newly hired staff with some involvement of existing staff. Ongoing service demands often preclude the extensive use of existing staff. CCP funds may not be used to supplant pre-existing services. If existing staff are detailed to the CCP, the way in which their ongoing work will be covered should be addressed in the application. Many of the activities of the CCP do not require fully credentialed mental health professionals. A blend of paraprofessionals and mental health professionals may be used to provide the need services to the impacted communities. Funding may be requested to provide training for paraprofessionals and professionals involved in the CCP.

**How does a State apply for CCP funding?**

The application deadline for immediate services funding is 14 days after the Presidential declaration. The regular program application is due within 60 days of the declaration. FEMA will provide the State Department of Mental Health with guidance on the application process for the CCP. DAP-9, Crisis Counseling Program: A Handbook for Grant Applicants, describes the application process for immediate services and regular program funding. The Workbook for Developing an Application for Crisis Counseling Services for Disaster Victims provides detailed instruction on developing a regular program application. Applications for funding are submitted by the Governor’s Authorized Representative to the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center.

**Can the State get technical assistance with the application process?**

The FEMA Human Services officer is the State contact for general information and assistance. The Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services provides technical assistance on the CCP through a FEMA and CMHS interagency agreement. Staff from the Emergency Services and Disaster Relief Branch of CMHS are available to provide assistance with the application process.
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The State should contact the Human Services Officer in the Disaster Field Office if technical assistance from CMHS is required. The immediate services application is due within 2 weeks of the declaration date. In order to meet the deadline, the State should request assistance as early as possible.

Who is the approval authority for CCP?

Approval authority for the immediate services program is generally delegated by the FEMA Regional Director to the FEMA Disaster Recovery Manager. Once the application is submitted by the Governor’s Authorized Representative to the Disaster Recovery Manager, it is forwarded to CMHS for review. CMHS provides the Disaster Recovery Manager with a recommendation on the extent to which the Federal assistance is warranted. The approving official for the regular program is the Director of the Human Services Division, Response and Recovery Directorate, FEMA Headquarters. The State will submit the application to the Disaster Recovery Manager, who will forward it with a recommendation to approve or disapprove to the Director of the Human Services Division. In addition, CMHS will conduct a committee review of the application.

What are the reporting requirements for CCP?

The State is only required to submit a midprogram report on the immediate services program if a regular program application is being prepared. The midprogram report is included as part of the regular program application and describes the transition plans from immediate services activities to regular program activities. The final report on the immediate services program is submitted to the FEMA Regional Director and the CMHS project officer within 90 days after the last day of immediate services funding. For the regular program, the State is required to submit two quarterly (every 90 days) progress reports and a final report due within 90 days after the end of the program. Regular program reports are submitted to the Regional Director, Director of the Human Services Division, and the CMHS project officer. DAP-9, Crisis Counseling Program: A Handbook for Grant Applicants, describes the components of each report.

References

a. Section 416 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Assistance Act, Public Law 93-288
b. 44 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 206.171, Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training
c. FEMA Workbook for Developing an Application for Crisis Counseling Services for Disaster Victims
d. DAP-9, Crisis Counseling Program: A Handbook for Grant Applicants

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Disaster Unemployment Assistance

The Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) program provides unemployment benefits and re-employment services to individuals who have become unemployed because of a Presidentially declared major disaster. The Department of Labor has been delegated the authority to administer the program, for which FEMA is responsible, under Section 410 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 93-288 as amended).

The 30-day application period begins with the first day following the date of the public announcement of DUA availability, which the State Employment Security Agency (SESA) is required to advertise (in coordination with FEMA’s Public Information Officer) soon after the President has declared a major disaster in a State.

The DUA benefit period begins with the week (as defined in State law) following the disaster incident or date thereafter that the individual became unemployed and can extend up to 26 weeks after the date of declaration or until the individual becomes re-employed, whichever is earlier. The DUA benefit amount may not exceed the maximum weekly amount authorized under the unemployment compensation law of the State in which the disaster occurred. DUA shall not be paid to an individual who receives regular unemployment compensation, or private income protection insurance compensation, unless that person’s other program eligibility expires and weeks of unemployment continue in the disaster assistance period. DUA will then be paid those individuals at the same weekly benefit rate they were receiving under the other compensation program.

All unemployed individuals must register with the State’s SESA before they can receive DUA benefits. However, although most States have a provision that an individual must be able and available to accept employment opportunities comparable to the employment the individual held before the disaster, not all States require an individual to search for work.

Re-employment services are provided by the State under other laws. If other laws do not meet the needs of victims, FEMA may authorize and reimburse DOL or other organization to provide re-employment assistance as necessary.

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