

BRSS TACS

Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER STRATEGY

TIP SHEET 1

Disaster Preparedness Tips for Individuals with Mental Illness or Substance Use Disorder and Their Families

Most of us don't like to think about the possibility of fires, floods, hurricanes, or other disasters damaging our communities or our homes. However, there are a few simple steps we can take to protect ourselves and our loved ones from disaster, and most of them are inexpensive or free. This tip sheet provides you with actions to take now—or at any time—to increase your disaster preparedness.

Just in Case: Steps You Can Take at Any Time to Increase Your Disaster Preparedness

Develop a plan

-  Develop a family communication plan that includes two meeting places and an out-of-town contact person. You and everyone in your family should practice this plan to become familiar with it. You may refer to the Family Communication Plan template included with these resources.
-  Map out your exit routes to several shelters, hotels, and the homes of family members and friends.
-  Choose a safe place in your home to find shelter in case you must stay at home. Good choices are a hallway or a room that has no windows or closets near load-bearing walls. If possible, choose a room with a water supply and a hard-wired telephone. If you have a generator, make sure several family members know how to use it.
-  Individuals with a history of mental illness, substance use disorder, or both can fill out a psychiatric advance directive (PAD) which is a legal document, accepted in most states, that allows people to indicate their preferences and instructions for mental health and substance use disorder treatment when they are unable to communicate their needs. [The National Resource Center on PADs](#) includes information and necessary forms related to drafting a PAD.
-  Know how to find support groups in different areas, in case you need to leave your community. To find support groups in different areas, visit [SAMHSA's treatment locator](#), the [National Alliance on Mental Illness'](#) listing of local affiliates or the [Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health's](#) listing of local affiliates.
-  Pet owners should find nearby hotels and motels that accept animals. For public health reasons, not all emergency shelters can accept pets.



The Facts

- Following a disaster there may be significant demand for mental illness and substance use disorder services.
- Individuals with a previous history of substance use or mental illness may be at an increased risk for relapse or a recurrence of symptoms due to the uncertainties, traumas, and losses that are often caused by a disaster.
- There are steps you and your family can take to minimize a chance of relapse, starting with developing a plan.

Communicate



Talk to your loved ones about the types of disasters that could occur in your area. Make sure that everyone in your family, including children, knows what to do in case a disaster strikes. Help your children or other sensitive family members by

- talking to them before the need arises to leave home or stay safe there—just like you talk to them about what to do in case of a fire; and
- taking their fears seriously and listening to their preconceived thoughts about disasters.



Practice a good way to quickly explain any of your family member's physical conditions or recovery support needs, along with medical equipment needs to someone who is helping you.



If you are receiving medication-assisted treatment, inform your family members that missed doses can precipitate withdrawal symptoms and increase the risk of relapse in the event that you do not have access to a clinic. Also contact local methadone or suboxone clinics to familiarize yourself with alternate ways to access treatment in the event of a disaster.



Coordinate evacuation and relocation plans with your family member's support network to ensure they are accompanied by someone during a disaster. You can fill out and sign release of information forms and necessary authorizations for people to be contacted in the event of an emergency.

Build an Emergency Supply Kit



Gather the emergency items you are most likely to need in an easy-to-carry container or bag. This is your emergency supply kit, and everybody in your family should know where you keep it. Use the checklist that accompanies this tip sheet to make sure you have everything you need for the kit.

Protect Documents and Information



Take time to organize and protect important documents. In addition to storing them on the Cloud, laminate them or store them in a sealed, watertight plastic bag. Store these with your emergency supply kit or in a place that you'll remember where you can grab them and go since you may not have cell phone or internet service after a disaster. Some people recommend storing them in the freezer.



Don't rely solely on your hard copies or electronic devices to store copies of your documents. Upload your documents to the Cloud. By using the Cloud, you are storing your documents safely on the internet, so you will always have easy access to them.

1. The easiest way to do this is to take photos of the documents on your phone or save them as attachments and email copies to yourself.
2. There are other ways to do this by using:
 - iCloud
 - OneDrive
 - Google Drive
 - Dropbox



Medication Tips

Always Have Your Medication Prepared

- If insurance allows, keep a two-week supply of medications on hand and put in your emergency supply kit.
- Store all medications in a waterproof container. For example, if you live in a flood-prone area, store medications above ground levels. If you live in an earthquake-prone area, store medications in cabinets that are secured to an interior wall.
- Review your options for obtaining medication replacements and refills under various circumstances, such as:
 1. if your clinic or pharmacy are closed,
 2. if your clinic or pharmacy had to relocate without notice because of a disaster
- Keep a cooler on hand to use when transferring medications that require refrigeration in the event you need to evacuate or relocate, even temporarily.

Include the following documents and information in your emergency supply kit:

- a list of emergency contacts, medical conditions, allergies, medication, providers, insurance information, and other important documents including psychiatric advance directives for each member of your household that has one. You may refer to the *Emergency Information Form* template included with these resources.
- a list of emergency numbers you may want for medical, mental health or substance use disorder needs, insurance questions, home repairs, and roadside help. Include numbers for the local fire department, police department, water company, power, company, poison control, nearby hospital, etc.
- contact information for friends and family including, release of information forms and authorizations for them to be contacted.
- detailed instructions for home emergency to-do's, including shutting off utilities
- records of credit card and bank account numbers and health benefits information
- the information needed to receive medication refills or treatment at an alternate site, including the name of the treatment program you are in (if applicable), your treating doctor, a photo id, medication and dosing information
- important documents related to medical, mental illness, and substance use disorder (WRAP, psychiatric advance directives, support plans, etc.)
- immunization records
- court papers
- insurance cards
- passports
- birth certificates
- Social Security cards
- individualized education programs (IEPs) /504 plans

This is one of a series of four tips sheets on disaster preparedness. The other titles in this series include:

- **Tip Sheet 2**—Planning: Steps You Can Take When a Disaster is Heading Toward Your Community or Home
- **Tip Sheet 3**—Taking Action: Steps You Can Take During or Following a Disaster
- **Tip Sheet 4**—Forms and Checklists to Guide You During a Disaster

C4 Innovations developed this resource with funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It was built under the Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS) project, contract number HHSS2832012000351/HHSS28342002T. CAPT Wanda Finch and Amy Smith served as the Contracting Officer Representatives. This resource was prepared by Connie Wells, Rich La Belle, Patti Derr, Juan Velez Court, Valerie Gold, and Jamie Bushell.

Please share your thoughts, feedback, and questions about this publication by emailing BRSSSTACS@c4innovates.com. Your feedback will help SAMHSA develop future products.