

SANDY CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH (S-CAFH) STUDY

Community Stakeholder Meetings: Status Update I July 21, 2014

This Status Update is the first in what will become a series of memoranda from the Sandy Child and Family Health (S-CAFH) Study Team. The purpose of this and future updates is to offer brief summaries to community stakeholders, survey participants, and other interested individuals on the progress of the study.

Background

Catastrophic storms of the magnitude of Superstorm Sandy can lead to significant and enduring health, economic, and social impacts on exposed populations. In recognition of the potential long-term effects of Sandy on the health and well-being of New Jersey residents exposed to the storm, and also to understand what has helped or hindered people in the recovery process, the New Jersey State Department of Health funded a joint research team from Rutgers University and Columbia University to conduct the Sandy Child and Family Health (S-CAFH) Study.

Summary of Recent Activities

On May 30, 2014, the S-CAFH Study Team met with community stakeholders and leaders in two Town Hall meetings. The central goal of these meetings was to learn from these stakeholders about past and emergent issues in the post-Sandy recovery process. The insights gained from these meetings will inform the survey that will be developed as part of S-CAFH. There were 29 participants at a two-hour morning meeting held at Brookdale Community College in Monmouth, NJ. An additional 22 participants attended a two-hour afternoon meeting held at Bergen County Community College in Hackensack, NJ. Participants represented a variety of groups and organizations, including long-term recovery committees, healthcare service providers, family advocacy and resource organizations, municipal governments, and more.

The meetings began with a brief orientation to the study objectives and design. Then the community stakeholders engaged in a brainstorming session followed by open roundtable discussions focused on six topic areas: (1) children and family issues, (2) health and healthcare, (3) vulnerable populations, (4) economic and legal issues, (5) community and social issues, and (6) housing. Some (although certainly not all) of the key issues that emerged during the meetings are enumerated below:

ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Children and Family Issues:

- Behavioral issues and challenges among children and youth;
- Lack of social and economic support for parents resulting in additional parental challenges and familial conflicts;
- Increased reports of domestic violence;
- Some schools have been unable to adequately support affected children and youth (due to lack of resources, lack of knowledge regarding post-disaster curriculum; etc.).

Health and Healthcare:

- Emergent mental health issues, even almost two years after the storm;
- Perceived rise in drug use and/or alcohol abuse post-storm.

Vulnerable Populations:

- Particularly vulnerable groups in the response and recovery: the elderly; children and adults with disabilities or special health care needs; undocumented persons; methadone users; the poor; renters; single mothers; and others.
- Amplified vulnerability among these groups was often attributed to stigma, pre-existing marginalization; and lack of awareness of or access to necessary services.

Economic and Legal Issues:

- Job loss due to the hurricane;
- Lack of access (in some areas) to legal aid.

Community and Social Issues:

- Buy-back programs, including those from previous hurricanes, may change the character of communities in multiple ways;
- Uneven recovery rates in neighborhoods.

Housing:

- Lack of affordable housing, a challenge exacerbated after the storm;
- Need for more short- and long-term rentals.

Next Steps

In mid-July, the S-CAFH Study Team will train dozens of local field interviewers who will ultimately conduct the surveys. During this period, the team will also begin randomly sampling 1,000 New Jersey households from the nine most affected counties in the state. Interviewers will conduct surveys with one adult per household. In addition to inquiring about the adult or adults in the household, the team will also ask supplemental questions, where relevant, about children living in the house, so as to learn of any long-term impacts of the storm on young people. The survey instrument has been developed with input from the participants at the Town Hall meetings as well as a Public Partnership Group composed of representatives from the New Jersey State Departments of Health, Children and Families, and Human Services.

Additional Information

For more information on S-CAFH, please contact us at info@scafh.org or see our website: www.scafh.org