

Hidalgo County



Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services

April 2023

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Approval and Implementation

Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services

This appendix is hereby approved for implementation and supersedes all previous editions.

Eduardo Olivarez
Director, Health & Human Services

Date

Ricardo Saldaña
Emergency Management Coordinator

Date

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Authority

The Hidalgo County Commissioner’s Court has the authority to approve and implement the Public Health & Medical Services Plan. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan includes 12 appendices. The County Commissioner’s Court approved the Public Health & Medical Services Plan on [REDACTED], 2023. This plan aligns with the County’s Emergency Basic Plan, ESF-8: Public Health that was approved by the County Commissioner’s Court on September 7, 2021.

Purpose

The purpose of the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health (DBH) Services Plan is to manage communication and services with behavioral health agencies during local, state, or federal disasters and critical incidents. Each agency acts independently and performs its respective functions during a disaster. However, the DBH Services Plan serves as an information-sharing body to assist emergency management in utilizing available behavioral health resources.

This document defines the roles and responsibilities relating to the activation of Hidalgo County’s DBH Services Plan. In Hidalgo County, a “Crisis Intervention Team” is to be developed in conjunction with Tropical Texas Behavioral Health, a public provider of mental health services.

The activation of the Crisis Intervention Team will be authorized by the County Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC). Any member of the County EOC may request activation, however the request should be vetted by the Incident Commander, or Operation Section Chief for action. The Crisis Intervention Team’s activities are defined as part of the Emergency Support Function.

Explanation of Terms

Acronyms

ARC	American Red Cross
CCP	Crisis Counseling Program
CISM	Critical Incident Stress Management
CMHS	Center for Mental Health Services
CVC	Crime Victim’s Compensation
DAP	Disaster Assistance Program
DBH	Disaster Behavioral Health Consortium
DMHS	Disaster Mental Health Services
DPS	Texas Department of Public Safety

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DRC	Disaster Recovery Center
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
TDEM	Texas Department of Emergency Management
HCHHSD	Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department
HSO	Human Services Officer
ICS	Incident Command System
MHSA	Mental Health and Substance Abuse (Division of DSHS)
NPI	National Provider Identifier
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
PHEP	Public Health Emergency Preparedness
PHI	Personal Health Information
PIO	Public Information Officer
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SMHA	State Mental Health Authority
TDSHS	Texas Department of State Health Services
SA	Salvation Army – Texas Division
TTBH	Tropical Texas Behavioral Health

Definitions

Crime Victim’s Compensation: A state program to provide monetary assistance to victims of crime. Assistance may include payment for hospital care, traditional counseling, burial and/or other appropriate expenses. The Crime Victim’s Compensation Division of the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) coordinates this program.

Crisis Counseling: Short-term therapeutic intervention to reduce adverse emotional conditions or reactions often caused by sudden or prolonged stress. Crisis counseling is not traditional therapy and is often delivered in a non-clinical setting, such as at the victim’s home or in a disaster shelter. Crisis counseling is often made available to victims and volunteer responders who have been involved in emergency operations.

Crisis Counseling Program: These are short and long-term programs funded by FEMA and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). The programs utilize traditional and non-traditional mental health practices. The Mental Health and Substance Abuse Division

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(MHSA) of DSHS coordinates these programs through the local public mental health authority, Tropical Texas Behavioral Health.

Critical Incident Stress Management: CISM is a comprehensive, multi-component crisis intervention system primarily designed for first responders, such as law enforcement, fire and EMS personnel. CISM is normally conducted by peers with guidance from mental health professionals. DSHS is responsible for coordination of the Texas CISM network.

Disaster Mental Health Services: Disaster mental health services include crisis counseling, CISM and victim's services for assessing short and long term mental health needs, tracking ongoing support needs, providing disaster mental health training programs, and identifying disaster-worker stress issues and needs. It is the responsibility of Texas' MHSA to assess community needs during state and/or federal emergencies.

Disaster Recovery Center: A location established in a disaster area to house federal, state and local agencies that deal directly with the needs of individual victims. DRCs are usually established only after a major disaster or emergency declaration by the president.

Special Needs: For the purposes of Human Services, this category includes the elderly, medically fragile, mentally and/or physically handicapped, individuals with mental illness or are developmentally delayed. These individuals may need specially trained health care providers to care for them, special facilities equipped for their needs, or and specialized vehicles/equipment for transport in order to meet their daily needs and maintain their health during emergency situations.

Texas CISM Network: The Texas CISM network assists emergency service personnel who have experienced a critical incident. Teams composed of peers, volunteer clergy and mental health professionals are available 24 hours. TDSHS provides an information clearinghouse for the network.

State Crisis Consortium: The State Crisis Consortium (SCC) is a multi-agency state organization designed to ensure that all mental health resources are coordinated in an appropriate manner.

Situation & Assumptions

Situation

1. During emergencies, Hidalgo County may request counseling services for first responders or the community during or after an incident.
2. First responders, victims, and others affected by emergency situations often experience varying levels of stress and anxiety. Some may display physical and psychological symptoms that can adversely affect their daily lives at home or work.

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3. Incidents involving nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons usually create widespread panic and disorientation. Such events could quickly overwhelm the local mental health response system, thus requiring regional, state, or federal assistance.
4. Hidalgo County's Basic Plan, along with the Public Health and Medical Services Plan, details potential hazards most common to the region. These hazards may result in evacuation, property damage, disruption of business and life activities, plus adverse effects on the mental and physical health of county residents.
5. Emergency situations could result in the loss of communication, transportation, and normal social assembly, creating additional mental health stress.
6. Local mental health services may be lost or unavailable if hospitals, nursing homes, group homes, ambulatory care centers, churches, and other facilities are damaged or destroyed during a disaster. Mental health facilities that survive emergencies with little or no damage may still be unable to operate normally, due to lack of utilities, reduced staffing, or damaged communication and transportation systems.
7. Mental health facilities still operational may be called upon to provide both personnel and physical resources to the community. Additionally, the facilities may be needed as quarantine facilities.

Assumptions

1. The public will need information on how to recognize and cope with short or long-term stress caused by a disaster and its after-effects.
2. There is adequate local capability to meet most emergency situations, but only for a limited period.
3. Supplemental mental health resources from the state and possibly federal assistance will be available upon request or direction by the State Office of Homeland Security, or the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM).

Concept of Operations

General

An all-hazards preparedness plan should include behavioral health resources to help:

- a. mitigate short- and long-term effects of stress,
- b. prevent stress-related morbidity,
- c. implement a coordinated and sustained recovery operation.

DBH services provided in conjunction with this plan shall respect basic human rights and provide fair and equal treatment without regard to race, color, ethnic background, age, religion, gender, political affiliation, income level, disability condition, sexual orientation, marital or family status or any other personal characteristics.

DBH services shall consider the culture of the persons affected and be sensitive to gender appropriate communication.

DBH response is first, a local responsibility, but regional, state, and federal resources may be requested, as needed. All publicly funded agencies have a duty to respond when requested. If an agency cannot respond, the reasons shall be documented, and other resources requested to augment services.

When a federal Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) is activated, the counseling services will be free-of-charge, confidential and as convenient as possible to the persons in need, such as at their home or in their community.

DSHS is the State Mental Health Authority (SMHA). This includes direction over state hospitals.

Behavioral health resources mobilized by the State will build upon the response plans already initiated by local entities handling the emergency. The State will not replace local responses already in place. Behavioral health responders will work with other healthcare providers, emergency responders, public health officials, emergency managers and planners.

DBH services aim to restore individuals, families, and communities to normal function as quickly as possible, recognizing that it is normal for people to experience psychological reactions to traumatic events. Referral for other forms of assistance (i.e., educational assistance, financial aid) is also a component of DBH services.

Behavioral health services shall be provided in an evidence-based manner to the extent possible. All providers shall adhere to accepted professional standards and practices in the delivery of services.

Operations

As the designated local Mental Health Authority, Tropical Texas Behavioral Health (TTBH) will provide disaster victims emergency counseling services.

During local emergencies, pastoral, public and/or private mental health organizations may also respond in a coordinated effort to provide mental health or spiritual assistance.

The following steps will be used to tailor an appropriate DBH response for each situation:

- a. Describe and document the event,
- b. Conduct a disaster response needs assessment,
- c. Identify persons affected by the disaster and the services they need,
- d. Identify which agencies services are available at local, state, or regional levels,
- e. Request the federal Crisis Counseling Program response and recovery assistance, if needed.

Assessment Guidelines

Behavioral health response teams shall conduct psychological first aid, which may include the following:

1. Contact and Engagement
Contact persons who have requested help, or initiate contacts in a non-intrusive, compassionate, helpful manner.

2. Safety and Comfort
Address immediate and ongoing safety concerns and provide physical and emotional comfort.
3. Stabilization, if needed
Calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed/distraught survivors.
4. Information Gathering
Identify any immediate needs or concerns and tailor the psychological intervention to those needs.
5. Practical Assistance
Offer practical help to the survivor in addressing their most immediate needs.
6. Connection with Social Supports
Establish contact with primary support persons, such as family members, friends, or community resources to assist.
7. Information on Coping
Provide information about possible stress reactions and ways to reduce distress and cope with it in a way to continue daily functioning.

Organization & Assignment of Responsibilities

Organization

Hidalgo County Emergency Management has identified behavioral health resources available for emergency response, depending on the number of affected people. In coordination with HCHHSD, the EOC's initial response would activate local agencies.

HCHHSD will provide support for any DBH incident if requested by Hidalgo County's Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC). Through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), official and volunteer relief efforts will be coordinated to ensure basic human services, including mental and behavioral health services, are provided during and after an emergency.

The responsibility of public health staff is to coordinate directly with the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) to ensure that Mental and Behavioral Health services are provided in Hidalgo County in a public health emergency. As a supporting agency, HCHHSD will:

- a. Coordinate mental and behavioral health services at shelter or sites of mass care.
- b. Ensure mental and behavioral health services are available for public health staff and first responders.
- c. Ensure that the LMHA has sufficient staff to conduct interviews, to perform clerical duties, and to perform any other support functions to meet the LMHA's needs.
- d. Provide basic crisis management services and psychological first aid to displaced individuals in shelters and mass care sites.
- e. Integrate the LMHA into the EOC.

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The following will describe the collaboration between Hidalgo County and Community Partners in the assessment and planning process to provide necessary services to the citizens of Hidalgo County:

1. To establish, coordinate and provide operational disaster mental health preparedness, response, and recovery in the event of a disaster.
2. Establishment of a mental health component with HCHHSD.
3. Establishment of a mental health component at the Incident Command Post (ICP).
4. Conduct mental health assessment of, and support for, Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) mass vaccination/prophylaxis point of dispensing (POD) sites within Hidalgo County during a public health event.
5. Coordinate mental health response and recovery efforts during an all-hazards event.
6. Receive and participate in preparation and response training and exercises.
7. Hidalgo County provides Preparedness and Response training to TTBH.
8. TTBH participates in exercises, drills, and emergencies.

Assignment of Responsibilities

A. Local

1. Response

TTBH is the lead mental health agency for emergency response in Hidalgo County. TTBH and HCHHSD will coordinate psychological first aid and triage at designated sites.

Services will be provided, according to the following assessment priorities:

First Priority, Most Urgent

- Agitated, endangering the safety of self or others.
- Passive, endangering the safety of self or others.

Second Priority, Urgent

- Acutely distressed with either increased or decreased activity but capable of direction with verbal command and one-on-one support.

Third Priority, Non-urgent

- Acutely distressed with either increased or decreased activity but capable of direction with verbal command and does not require one-on-one support.

2. Pre- and Post-Planning

TTBH operates year-round as a mental health service facility, but in agreement with Hidalgo County, will assist with emergency planning processes, such as:

- a. Having a process for reviewing and updating the plan as clinically indicated, such as following a hospitalization, and for coordinating with the HCHHSD, when necessary.
- b. Developing with HCHHSD and other agencies educational materials for emergency behavioral health services, including care coordination policies and procedures.
- c. Scheduling local provider training, at least annually, to prepare more agencies to participate in an emergency response.

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B. State

Under the DSHS Mental Health and Substance Abuse Division (MHSA) and the Adult Mental Health Services Unit, the Behavioral Health Services Branch is responsible for providing and managing disaster behavioral health preparedness, response, and recovery efforts for Texas during and after a state or federally declared emergency.

1. Response:

- a. Activating and coordinating acute and ongoing stress management and crisis counseling services for disaster victims, survivors, and emergency responders.
- b. Providing and managing stress management and crisis counseling services at the local level through trained disaster behavioral health staff.
- c. Providing pre- and post-disaster behavioral health training and education for LMHA staff and other providers involved in the Texas P.R.I.D.E Crisis Counseling Program (CCP).
- d. Providing education, services, and intervention strategies through the Texas Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Network to emergency service personnel, including dispatchers, who often experience critical incidents (i.e., line-of-duty deaths, death of a child, multiple casualty/fatality scenes).
- e. Providing best practices tools and educational materials for contractors, victims, survivors, and responders.

2. Credentialing and Other Processes:

- a. Request any behavioral health agencies that assist in a disaster to provide verification of state professional licensure, the National Provider Identifier (NPI), or other information that verifies they are eligible providers certified to assess the community's needs.
- b. Require these agencies to follow Hidalgo County's Emergency Management procedures for requesting FEMA reimbursement of behavioral health expenses. All requests for assistance in a disaster must be approved by the Hidalgo County EOC during an emergency to qualify for possible FEMA reimbursement.
- c. Share all appropriate policies and procedures for identifying and tracking persons receiving behavioral health services; all data-tracking will be managed through the Hidalgo County Emergency Management EOC.

C. Faith-Based Organizations

Faith-based counseling on an individual or group basis may be requested or referred. When possible, such service provisions should be coordinated with the HCHHSD to prevent duplication or to provide more referral options.

1. Support Agencies:

- a. The Texas Salvation Army (TSA)
- b. Department of State Health Services (DSHS)

- c. CISM Network
- d. Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)
 - Victim Services
 - Office of the Attorney General

Direction & Control

General

Disaster mental health services should be available for disaster victims, survivors, bystanders, first responders, and other community caregivers during response and recovery operations.

HCHHSD will coordinate with Hidalgo County Emergency Management to deploy personnel to assist in mental health, calling upon psychologists, social workers, case managers and *promotoras* to provide services that:

- a. Assess short and long-term needs of responders and victims,
- b. Provide crisis counseling (short-term therapeutic intervention),
- c. Provide crisis counseling program (short- and long-term programs),
- d. Provide critical incident stress management,
- e. Provide disaster mental health services,
- f. Provide information and referral to other services,
- g. Provide education about predictable reactions to a disaster experience and how to cope with them,
- h. Orient survivors to the availability of services,
- i. Facilitate communication with family, friends, and community,
- j. Assist in locating loved ones,
- k. Keep families together and facilitate reunion with loved ones,
- l. Provide information and foster communication and education,
- m. Observe and listen supportively to those most affected.

Plan Development & Maintenance

1. The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director is responsible for maintaining and reviewing the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services Plan annually. Recommended changes to this plan should be forwarded as needs become apparent and may reflect any changes within our jurisdictional risks and/or community capabilities.
2. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services Plan and its attachments are living documents and require revision to account for changes in roles/responsibilities and resources within Hidalgo County such as the acquisition of new equipment, training of staff, and increased partnerships from the private sector.
3. Once the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services Plan has been updated, the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director will present to Commissioner's Court for final

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adoption and ratification. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services Plan is updated and presented to Commissioner's Court every five years with input from Emergency Management and various stakeholders. Departments and agencies assigned responsibilities in the Public Health & Medical Services Plan are responsible for developing and maintaining SOPs. Copies of the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 5: Disaster Behavioral Health Services Plan are kept at HCHHSD's main offices at **1304 S. 25th Avenue, Edinburg, TX 78542** in the following locations:

Office of Administration

Public Health Emergency Preparedness Division (PHEP)

Clinical Health Services

Information Technology Services

Safety Officer

Hidalgo County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator

Each HCHHSD division manager is responsible for informing and instructing public health personnel about the location of the plan copies, as well as each employee's emergency response role and responsibilities. The supervisors/managers are also responsible for ensuring that employees attend appropriate training, according to their assigned response tier.