

Continuity of Care: Sheltering, Standing Up, and Repopulating Healthcare Facilities after Disasters



the E **CHANGE**

ASPR
ADMINISTRATION FOR STRATEGIC
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

10TH
ANNIVERSARY
TRACIE
HEALTHCARE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
INFORMATION GATEWAY

FOREWORD

In my career in emergency operations and disaster planning, I have witnessed firsthand the resilience, innovation, and collaboration required to protect patients and communities when healthcare systems are tested by crisis. Whether responding to hurricanes, wildfires, or infrastructure failures, I have seen the importance of planning that is both rigorous and flexible — planning that not only prepares us to evacuate, shelter, or establish temporary facilities, but also sustains recovery and long-term continuity of care.

[This issue of *The Exchange*](#) reflects those lessons. From hospitals that sheltered in place during Hurricane Helene, to statewide teams that established emergency medical facilities, to healthcare systems navigating long-term recovery after catastrophic fires, the articles included here highlight the lived realities of disaster response and recovery. Each story underscores what I have come to know throughout my career: effective preparedness depends on collaboration across healthcare, emergency management, and first responders, and the work of recovery is as vital as the initial response.

I encourage readers to reflect on these accounts not only as case studies of resilience, but also as reminders that the challenges of today's disasters demand constant adaptation and foresight. Our collective efforts — grounded in planning, partnership, and perseverance — will determine how well we can continue to provide care when it is needed most.

[ASPR TRACIE](#) develops resources in conjunction with partners, stakeholders, and other subject matter experts who have direct experience in the field. [Please share](#) your own promising practices, experiences, or requests for technical assistance so that others may learn from you. As always, we welcome your feedback.

In service,



John Knox

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Administration for Strategic Preparedness and
Response
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

WELCOME TO ISSUE 21!

The [last issue of *The Exchange*](#) focused on preparing for and responding to mass casualty burn incidents (MCBI) and contained articles on lessons learned since the 2003 Rhode Island Station nightclub fire, ASPR's National Disaster Medical System's Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team's response to the wildfires that ravaged Maui in 2023, how the national Burn Watch Board tracks burn bed availability across the U.S., and how ASPR's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority is working to research and develop treatments for injuries sustained in an MCBI. In this issue, we shift our focus to the many ways healthcare has provided continuity of care after Hurricane Helene from the local, state, and healthcare system perspectives. We also cover the hospital recovery and reopening process after a fire decimated Signature Health in Brockton, Massachusetts.

[ASPR TRACIE](#) has had the honor of working with healthcare workers and other subject matter experts (SMEs) to gather and share timely information for 10 years. Our team has witnessed the impact of countless disasters and mass casualty incidents on our stakeholders across the nation, and we hope that the lessons learned and various strategies highlighted in these articles can help our readers prepare for future incidents.

Please also refer to our [Hurricanes Resource Page](#), our new [Data Sources for Hazard Vulnerability Assessments Resource Page](#), our recently updated [Tips for Retaining and Caring for Staff after a Disaster](#) and [Healthcare Facility Evacuation/Sheltering](#) and [Hazard Vulnerability/Risk Assessment](#) Topic Collections; and our [Utility Failures in Health Care Toolkit](#). Your feedback is what makes us successful—please [contact us](#) with your comments, questions, technical assistance needs, and resources to share. We look forward to our continued collaboration.

Wishing you a safe, healthy fall season!

Rachel Lehman, Acting Director, ASPR TRACIE

Dr. John L. Hick, Senior Editor

The ICF ASPR TRACIE Team:

- Audrey Mazurek, Project Director
- Corina Solé Brito, Deputy Project Director and Communications Manager
- Bridget Kanawati, Assistance Center Lead
- Jennifer Nieratko, Special Projects Manager
- Claire Nyquist, Communications Analyst

AT A GLANCE

4 [Mission Accomplished: How a Hospital Sheltered in Place, Kept Patients and Staff Safe, and Maintained Operations After Hurricane Helene](#)

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene made landfall as a Category 4 storm, bringing historic inland flooding, tornadoes, and other damage to the southeastern U.S. and southern Appalachian Mountains. ASPR TRACIE met with Wyatt Chocklett, one of Mission Hospital's Chief Operating Officers, who shared how the "hub hospital" in Asheville, North Carolina sheltered in place and then overcame total utility failures, road closures, supply shortages, and other challenges.

5 [State of Response: Collaboration and Communication in the Aftermath of Hurricane Helene](#)

While most hurricanes that affect North Carolina make landfall on the state's Atlantic shores, Hurricane Helene devastated mountainous areas of Appalachia, causing unprecedented flooding, widespread damage to roadways (including the Blue Ridge Parkway), and necessitating the evacuation of numerous residents and isolating many more. Many of these individuals needed emergency medical assistance or support for chronic medical needs. This article highlights how the North Carolina State Emergency Response Team stood up temporary medical facilities to treat and serve evacuees and those that could not reach healthcare, many of whom had lost everything.

6 [Mission Critical: Leading a Healthcare System through Concurrent Disasters](#)

Hurricanes Helene and Milton challenged healthcare facilities managed by HCA Healthcare in several states. This article details the responses and how the system ensured patients and staff were cared for and protected in the midst of significant, long-term infrastructure outages.

7 [Rising From the Ashes: Signature Healthcare's Recovery and Reopening Experience After the 2023 Fire](#)

In February 2023, a 10-alarm fire broke out at Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital in an electrical room. The hospital safely evacuated 162 patients in coordination with the fire department and was subsequently closed for an extended recovery period. This article provides an overview of how hospital staff overcame challenges during the recovery period and what healthcare emergency planners can do now to ensure robust recovery plans.





Mission Accomplished: How a Hospital Sheltered in Place, Kept Patients and Staff Safe, and Maintained Operations After Hurricane Helene

SUMMARY

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene made landfall as a Category 4 storm, bringing historic inland flooding, tornadoes, and other damage to the southeastern U.S. and southern Appalachian Mountains. ASPR TRACIE met with Wyatt Chocklett, one of Mission Hospital's Chief Operating Officers, who shared how the "hub hospital" in Asheville, North Carolina sheltered in place and overcame total utility failures, road closures, supply shortages, and other challenges.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Meet basic needs (e.g., water, power, fuel, food) before focusing on resuming operations*
- *Test communications repeatedly to ensure they are dependable*
- *Establish plans to endure prolonged outages*
- *A staff redeployment plan can maintain continuity of care and ensure needs are being met within a certain region*
- *Give yourself and your team grace*

RELATED ASPR TRACIE RESOURCES

- [Healthcare Facility Evacuation/ Sheltering Topic Collection](#)
- [Hurricanes Resource Page](#)
- [Mission Critical: Leading a Healthcare System Through Concurrent Disasters](#)
- [Tips for Retaining and Caring for Staff after a Disaster](#)
- [Utility Failures in Health Care Toolkit](#)

OTHER RELATED RESOURCES

- [Hurricane Helene Recap: Catastrophic Surge, Inland Flooding From Florida To The Appalachians](#)
- [National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Helene](#)



State of Response: Collaboration and Communication in the Aftermath of Hurricane Helene

SUMMARY

While most hurricanes that affect North Carolina make landfall on the state's Atlantic shores, Hurricane Helene devastated mountainous areas of Appalachia, causing unprecedented flooding, widespread damage to roadways (including the Blue Ridge Parkway), and necessitating the evacuation of numerous residents, many of whom needed medical assistance. ASPR TRACIE met with members of the North Carolina State Emergency Response Team to learn how and where they stood up temporary medical facilities to treat and serve evacuees, many of whom had lost everything.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Full-scale exercises can prepare teams for real-world incidents
- Fostering partnerships before an incident can increase the depth and breadth of disaster communications and response
- Try to balance the number of providers being deployed from local facilities to disaster sites
- Ensure staff have the training and supplies needed to switch seamlessly to paper record keeping

RELATED ASPR TRACIE RESOURCES

- [Hurricanes Resource Page](#)
- [Rural Disaster Health Topic Collection](#)
- [Tips for Retaining and Caring for Staff after a Disaster](#)
- [Utility Failures Topic Collection](#)

OTHER RELATED RESOURCES

- [Helene Response - Sheltering and Business Recovery Operations](#)
- [Hurricane Helene Recovery](#)



Mission Critical: Leading a Healthcare System through Concurrent Disasters

SUMMARY

In late September 2024, Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida (FL), then moved inland and north, bringing with it record-breaking rainfall and damage to areas of North Carolina (NC), many of them rural and mountainous. Just two weeks later, Hurricane Milton also made landfall in FL, accompanied by tornadoes that contributed to significant power outages in FL and other states and compounding damage caused by Helene. We met with members from HCA Healthcare to learn more about promising practices and lessons learned from the system response to simultaneous disasters.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Anticipate post-disaster patient surge and outages and station equipment/prepare to support the community as is practical.*
- *Pre-deploying emergency response teams and supplies can help local staff ensure their loved ones are safe before reporting for duty and can mitigate damage.*
- *Backup generators can provide additional coverage in humid, post-storm conditions where hospitals need it most (e.g., operating rooms).*
- *Temporarily providing staff and first responders with fuel can maintain staffing and continuity of care.*
- *De-risking vulnerable patients before a storm hits can keep them safe and save time not spent evacuating them in an emergent fashion.*
- *Decentralizing incident command allows teams to manage separate events and report out during one larger coordination call, provides an understanding across the board of what needed to be done, by whom, and when.*

RELATED ASPR TRACIE RESOURCES

- [Mission Critical-How One Hospital Maintained Operations and Protected Patients and Staff After Hurricane Helene](#) (Webinar)
- [Hurricanes Resource Page](#)
- [Mission Accomplished: How a Hospital Sheltered in Place, Kept Patients and Staff Safe, and Maintained Operations After Hurricane Helene](#)
- [Healthcare Facility Evacuation/Sheltering](#) Topic Collection



Rising from the Ashes—The Signature Healthcare Response to the Unimaginable

SUMMARY

In late 2023, a 10-alarm electrical fire led to the evacuation of 162 patients and an extended closure, recovery, and rebuilding/repopulating process of Signature Healthcare in Brockton, Massachusetts. ASPR TRACIE met with Kimberly Walsh, MSN, RN, the hospital's Sr. VP and Chief Operating Officer, who shared how the hospital overcame numerous challenges to recover, rebuild a 125-year-old "beacon of the community," and eventually reopen to serve the community in 2024.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Do not provide a specific reopening date too quickly.*
- *Leverage crisis into an opportunity to build relationships; expect to work with local agencies, vendors, and others for the duration of the recovery period.*
- *Ensure business interruption is covered by your insurance policy and hire a business interruption expert if practical.*
- *Be prepared to negotiate to help reduce the cost of business interruption.*
- *Plan to redeploy staff while simultaneously retaining them.*
- *Incorporate training new staff into the reopening timeline.*

RELATED ASPR TRACIE RESOURCES

- [Experiences from the Field: The Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital Fire](#)
- [Healthcare Facility Evacuation/Sheltering](#) Topic Collection
- [Lessons Learned from the Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital Fire](#) (Webinar)
- [Rising from the Ashes—The Signature Healthcare Response to the Unimaginable](#) (Speaker Series Recording)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



Since the last issue of *The Exchange* was published, ASPR TRACIE released the following new resources (listed alphabetically):

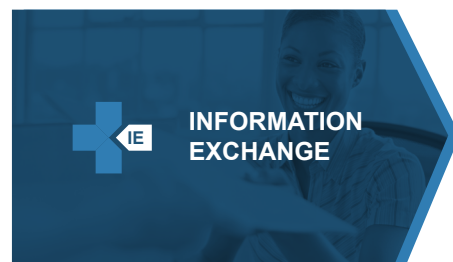
- [Data Sources for Hazard Vulnerability Assessments](#) (Resource Page)
- [Hospital Wildfire Evacuation Considerations](#)
- [Hospital Readiness and Response: An Online Guidebook](#)
 - [Biological Incidents](#)
 - [Chemical Hazardous Material Decontamination](#)
 - [Crisis Care and Scarce Resource Decision-Making](#)
 - [Mass Casualty Incident Planning](#)
 - [Radiation](#)
 - [Sheltering, Relocation, and Evacuation](#)
 - [Surge Concepts](#)
- [Ophthalmology in Disaster Planning and Public Health Emergencies](#) (Speaker Series Recording)
- [Threat Assessment and Management in Healthcare](#) (Speaker Series Recording)

We also updated the following resources:

- [Considerations for the Use of Temporary Surge Sites for All-Hazards Incidents](#)
- [Crisis Standards of Care Topic Collection](#)
- [Cybersecurity Topic Collection](#)
- [Hazard Vulnerability Assessment/ Risk Assessment Topic Collection](#)
- [Healthcare Facility Evacuation/ Sheltering Topic Collection](#)
- [Major Hurricanes: Potential Health and Medical Implications](#)
- [Mass Gatherings/Special Events Topic Collection](#)
- [Pre-Hospital Mass Casualty Triage and Trauma Care Topic Collection](#)



We encourage you to review our recent requests for technical assistance on [Hospital Water Storage Tanks](#), [Radiology Downtime Procedures](#), and [Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Preparedness](#). Check out our [summary of responses to select TA requests](#) and [this tutorial](#) for assistance navigating the Assistance Center.



Did you know you can create a private group in our [Information Exchange domain](#)? Groups can share files and information in a password protected area in near real-time. [Reach out](#) to learn more!

ASPR TRACIE

Your Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Information Gateway

The Exchange is produced by the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange (TRACIE). Through the pages of *The Exchange*, emergency health professionals share firsthand experiences, information, and resources while examining the disaster medicine, healthcare system preparedness, and public health emergency preparedness issues that are important to the field. To receive *The Exchange*, visit <https://asprtracie.hhs.gov/register> and enter your email address.

ASPR TRACIE was created to meet the information and technical assistance needs of ASPR staff, healthcare coalitions, healthcare entities, healthcare providers, emergency managers, public health practitioners, and others working in disaster medicine, healthcare system preparedness, and public health emergency preparedness. The infographic illustrates ASPR TRACIE's reach since launching in September 2015.



CONTACT US ASPR TRACIE

 Toll-Free: 1-844-587-2243

 askASPRtracie@hhs.gov

 <https://asprtracie.hhs.gov>

The Exchange is not responsible for the information provided by any webpages, materials, or organizations referenced in this publication. Although *The Exchange* includes valuable articles and collections of information, ASPR does not necessarily endorse any specific products or services provided by public or private organizations unless expressly stated. In addition, ASPR does not necessarily endorse the views expressed by such sites or organizations, nor does ASPR warrant the validity of any information or its fitness for any particular purpose.