

## Texas Medical Association Response to Hurricane Harvey As of Aug. 31, 2017



Six days after Harvey first roared ashore in South Texas, the storm damage continues to mount and spread. TMA is in regular, two-way communication with physicians on the ground; with county medical societies; and with national, state, and local officials to determine how we can best respond to the short-, medium-, and long-range health care needs stemming from the disaster. The association has received an outpouring of support and offers to help from physicians and medical societies around the country.

Gov. Greg Abbott has declared 54 Texas counties as disaster areas. The situation on the ground in many of those counties is still dangerous and uncertain. While most portions of the state no longer face new threats, we still face years of recovery work. Meanwhile, large cities outside of the disaster zone – primarily San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Austin – have opened shelters and are preparing to accept waves of storm refugees with various health care needs.

The Texas Medical Association is sending daily email updates with useful information and practical solutions to Harvey-related health care problems and issues to physicians

in the disaster zone. The following summarizes the additional steps TMA has taken and will take to help physicians respond to their communities' immediate Harvey-related medical needs and then to begin to rebuild their practices:

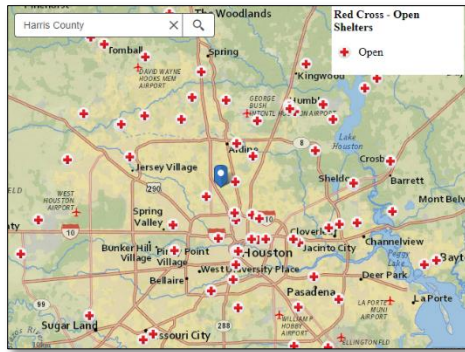
### **Donate Now to Help Rebuild**

Following Hurricane Rita in 2005, TMA established the TMA Family of Medicine Disaster Relief Program to provide grants to physicians to rebuild their practices. The program includes specific ways for physicians to apply for grants, established review criteria, and donation solicitation mechanisms. Donate now at [www.texmed.org/Harvey](http://www.texmed.org/Harvey).

#### **Direct Patient Care**

Physicians in the affected communities who are still able to see patients in their offices or their hospitals have very unique needs. These include shortages of supplies; inability of physicians, staff, and patients to move around their cities; and uncertain availability of pharmacies and referable specialists. TMA is in direct communication with physicians and county medical societies in the disaster zone, providing [lists and maps of open pharmacies](#) and basic [public health tips and information](#).

## Shelters



More than 30,000 people are now in 230 shelters, mostly in or near their home communities. Many more still could be forced from their homes in Texas and surrounding states. As local shelters fill up and roads open up, storm victims will be transported to shelters in other cities. The shelters are operated by local governments and charity organizations. Medical needs at shelters include triage, acute injury and illness, and chronic illness. In the Houston area, TMA is working with Harris County Medical Society leadership to map the open shelters and determine their medical

capabilities and the need for physicians. As that work is completed, TMA will provide help as needed to send calls for physician volunteers to staff those shelters. Outside of Houston, the county societies in San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Austin are working with local public health officials to assess and meet those needs. We continue to direct potential volunteers to the [Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry](#). (Out-of-state physicians may obtain temporary Texas medical licenses through the [Texas Medical Board](#).) TMA also is working with a consortium of health information exchanges (HIEs) to [make patient data available](#) to treating physicians in shelters and emergency clinics.

## Insurance, coverage, liability

The governor's disaster declaration and Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price's declaration of a public health emergency have allowed for relaxation or waiver of rules and regulations related to issues such as Medicare documentation, insurance preauthorization, and emergency licensure of out-of-state physicians. Physician volunteers in such emergencies also have special liability protection. TMA is conveying the appropriate information to physicians on the ground and other interested parties.

## Recovery

TMA is responding to physicians' requests for practical information, such as how to recover patient data from flooded computers and the impact of a new state law regarding insurance claims for property damage. As rebuilding and recovery needs become more apparent, TMA will work with county societies and other organizations to provide physicians with the necessary education and resources.

## Evaluating the response

A session at the [TMA 2017 Fall Conference](#), Sept. 16 at the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines, will be devoted to reviewing the state and federal health-care-related response to Hurricane Harvey. Speakers will address the depths of planning and coordination undertaken to respond to Harvey and discuss recommendations for improving disaster planning in Texas.

For more details and updates, see the  
TMA Disaster Preparedness & Response Resource center at  
[www.texmed.org/Disaster](http://www.texmed.org/Disaster).