



Senate Committee on Transportation & Homeland Security
Medical Sheltering and Hospital Alternate Care Capacity During Catastrophic Incidents

BCFS, a not-for-profit health and human service organization, headquartered in San Antonio, has been the primary medical sheltering provider for the State of Texas since Hurricane Katrina. BCFS has cared for thousands of Texas citizens with medical conditions that prevent placement in general population shelters. Currently BCFS privately funds preparedness to maintain a medical shelter bed capacity of 5,000 in the San Antonio area, one of the largest capacities for medical shelters and alternate care facilities in the nation. Without our sheltering response in the San Antonio area during hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the surge on the Hospital Emergency Departments would have closed down services to the citizens of San Antonio.

Our efforts have resulted in setting the industry standards for medical sheltering. BCFS has cared for more medically fragile individuals than any single jurisdiction nationwide. Jurisdictions and private industry from Washington State, to Maine and the Caribbean have turned to us seeking best practices and subject matter experts for training and consultation services to help develop their own plans. In 2009 FEMA awarded a sole source contract to BCFS to develop the national guidance on caring for persons with functional needs in all general population shelters operated in the United States and US territories.

Recently, DSHS allocated funds from the CDC pandemic preparedness initiative to increase Hospital Alternate Care Facility and Medical Shelter bed capacity statewide. Using the successful model established by BCFS, we will work to increase capacity in 20 major cities across the State. However, while this endeavor is a step in the right direction, Texas will remain grossly underprepared to shelter persons with medical needs during large scale catastrophic events. The initiative for identifying 20,000 beds will fall short of maintaining this capacity as it will not provide the necessary resources and personnel for operating these facilities. This will require an ongoing effort.

Funding must be increased to support preparedness efforts to care for vulnerable, medically fragile and aging populations that continue to grow at an exceptional rate.

- Over 2.7 million Texans are age 60 or older
- Texans 60-plus are projected to total 8.1 million by 2040; a 193% increase from 2000
- By 2040, the 60-plus population is projected to comprise 23% of the total Texas population
- In 2000, the 85-plus population totaled over 237,000; by 2040, this population is projected to reach about 831,000, a 249.4% increase

http://www.dads.state.tx.us/news_info/publications/studies/NewDemoProfileHi-Rez-4-03.pdf

Recommendations:

Preparedness dollars must be allocated to support local planning efforts to address gaps such as:

- Building and maintaining medical shelter capacity
- Procurement of resources and personnel to support medical shelters
- Increasing appropriate evacuation transportation resources
- Building caches of durable medical equipment and consumable medical supplies
- Hardening facilities closer to, but outside impact areas to lessen the burden that long transport puts on this fragile population
- Training shelter managers and medical staff to care for this population under emergency conditions