

## **Notes from Bandwidth**

*In this release, note how the key recommendations of the report were placed up front, instead of being buried in the report. This is one reason that the release achieved the following with its critical audiences:*

- Health Affairs *included it in its "blog" with a current article "in press."*
- *The American Health Care Association published article for 17,000 nursing homes and policymakers, and posted the information to its web site.*
- *The American Journal of Nursing has an article in press.*
- *The American Medical Directors Association posted the release to its web site and notified members.*
- *The Herald Tribune (major gulf coast paper-FL) featured the story.*
- *The coalition is presenting the findings to AHCA membership at its annual conference in October.*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **National Coalition Releases Recommendations to Improve Disaster Response for the Elderly**

***The safety of elders is a community responsibility, says report issued on the  
second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina***

August 29, 2007 (St. Petersburg, FL) – In an unprecedented cooperative effort, disaster planning and nursing home leadership from eight Southeastern states and numerous state and federal organizations have agreed on ten key recommendations to improve how frail and elderly citizens are cared for during a major disaster. The recommendations are part of a newly issued report, *Caring for Vulnerable Elders During a Disaster: National Findings of the 2007 Nursing Home Hurricane Summit*.

The primary finding of the report is that nursing homes must be incorporated into disaster response systems at all levels – national, state and local. During Hurricane Katrina, most nursing homes were not designated by disaster response systems as healthcare facilities, and therefore did not receive early calls to evacuate, and often found contracted transportation commandeered for other uses.

The report, funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation, is a result of two years of research and two planning summits where state, federal, and local emergency planning teams, including representatives from FEMA, CMS, and HHS, shared information and ideas with nursing home leadership.

"We all agree that integrating the needs of the elderly into regional emergency planning processes can save lives." said LuMarie Polivka-West of the Florida Healthcare Association, which convened the Hurricane Summits of 2006 and 2007 that led to the development of the report. "Now, with a greater understanding of everyone's needs, we have developed better solutions to care for our most vulnerable citizens."

Other critical recommendations include ensuring that all Emergency Operations Centers designate nursing homes as "healthcare" facilities, to ensure that they receive priority status for restoration of utilities. The recommendations also hold long term care

providers accountable for knowing the capacity of their facility to withstand hurricane winds, knowing the storm surge/flood zone, and developing viable plans for evacuation or sheltering in place. Other recommendations address critical issues such as transportation and communications. To read the complete report, go to [www.fhca.org](http://www.fhca.org).

In the recent past, the elderly and disabled have often been the most negatively affected by the consequences of a major disaster. The CDC determined that the elderly accounted 70 percent of the deaths in New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina, with at least 139 storm-related fatalities having occurred in nursing homes.

“Through the summits and related work, all of us – nursing homes, emergency management agencies, and government entities – gained a much clearer understanding of our individual and shared responsibilities in a disaster,” said Joe Donchess, executive director of the Louisiana Nursing Home Association. “We have learned from the past, and feel strongly that enacting the recommendations in this report will help limit the consequences to the elderly in future disasters.”

As part of the report, Florida’s past success with integrating nursing homes into disaster planning is also being shared as a model for other states. In 2004-05, Florida successfully evacuated over 10,000 people from 50 facilities during and after eight major storms with no related deaths.

The two Hurricane Summits and the resulting report were made possible by a grant from the John A. Hartford Foundation. In response to the emergency planning and response problems revealed during the major storms that hit the southern U.S. in 2004 and 2005, the Hartford Foundation offered funding support to the Florida Health Care Association to bring issues in long term care emergency preparedness to the attention of policy makers and disaster response teams throughout the nation.

#### **About the John A. Hartford Foundation**

Founded in 1929, the John A. Hartford Foundation is a committed champion of training, research and service system innovations that promote the health and independence of America's older adults. Through its grantmaking, the Foundation seeks to strengthen the nation's capacity to provide effective, affordable care to this rapidly increasing older population by educating "aging-prepared" health professionals (physicians, nurses, social workers), and developing innovations that improve and better integrate health and supportive services. The Foundation was established by John A. Hartford. Mr. Hartford and his brother, George L. Hartford, both former chief executives of the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, left the bulk of their estates to the Foundation upon their deaths in the 1950s. Additional information is available at [www.jhartfound.org](http://www.jhartfound.org).

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