

NC Department of Health and Human Services

*Information is also provided in [Spanish](#) below.
(Information in [Spanish](#) below.)*

Recap from the December 11th NCDHHS WNC Hurricane Helene Recovery Update Webinar and Tele-town Hall:

Long-term Recovery

Thank you for your continued support in the ongoing response to Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina during this critical time. Your input and questions throughout the webinar series have helped to enhance the response to better serve the needs of our communities. We encourage you to stay connected to the many collaborative opportunities to support our friends and neighbors.

Please [share your overall feedback](#) with us to ensure we continue to best support Western North Carolina.

Share Your Feedback

The following are updates and resources shared during our conversation last week:

Take a Moment for Mental Health

In a disaster, it's essential that first responders and volunteers have the resources they need—when and where they need them. The [Hope4NC Helpline](#) offers free, confidential support 24/7, particularly for hurricane recovery workers and first responders. Call [1-855-587-3463](tel:1-855-587-3463) for immediate assistance.

To support this effort, crisis counseling programs have been launched and are scaling up, including door-to-door trauma counseling. A \$25 million investment in behavioral health support for Western North Carolina was enabled by the General Assembly. For urgent mental health needs, [call 988](#) for confidential assistance, including services in Spanish.

Resources for Mental Health Support:

- [988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline](#)
- [Hope for NC Helpline – support for first responders and volunteers](#)
- [Mobile Crisis Teams and Behavioral Health Centers](#)
- [Somethings - Mental Health Services for Teens](#)
- [Weathering the Storm - Mental Health and Disability-related Resources](#)
- [NC's Peer Warmline \(1-855-PEERS NC\)](#)
- [Resources for Resilience](#)

Collaborating with NCDHHS

[Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry \(ABCCM\)](#) joined our conversation to share a bit more about their longstanding partnership with NCDHHS to support Western North Carolinians. Supported by over 300 churches and 6,000 trained volunteers, ABCCM provides emergency assistance to anyone in need, regardless of background.

ABCCM highlighted a key opportunity for the countless community-based organizations who want to support those recovering from Hurricane Helene: fill the gaps. In particular, they were able to position care coordinators in shelters to address urgent needs and coordinate services. ABCCM also used space they had available to support storage and distributions of critical supplies (food, water, generators, heaters, etc.). ABCCM worked closely with NCDHHS and other partners to ensure supplies reached underserved or overlooked communities.

In short, community organizations are encouraged to [connect with NCDHHS](#) , larger nonprofits and local governments to participate in recovery planning. ABCCM is available to facilitate involvement for groups looking to contribute to recovery efforts.

Housing Support

The North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR) has partnered with FEMA to support disaster recovery efforts across the region. FEMA provides immediate disaster aid, while the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds long-term recovery efforts. HUD funds are intended to supplement FEMA aid by covering needs like reconstruction, elevation, relocation, and buyouts that are not covered by other sources. These funds may also support affordable housing and water infrastructure projects.

Western North Carolinians who have experienced storm damage are urged to [register for FEMA individual](#)

[assistance](#) . This registration benefits both individuals and their communities. Registrations help North Carolina demonstrate disaster impact, which influences future HUD funding allocations.

To support the recovery efforts, local community members are being hired as [disaster case managers](#) for their local knowledge and expertise. A team of 75 case managers is being hired to serve the affected areas. Disaster case management positions are open to community health workers and others with relevant certifications, emphasizing long-term survivor support. These roles are designed as multi-year positions, offering opportunities for professional growth.

FEMA Individual Assistance

Over \$269 million in aid has been distributed to 139,000 applicants for disaster recovery in North Carolina. While FEMA assistance can reach up to \$85,000, most recipients receive between \$10,000 and \$12,000 for minor to moderate repairs. Aid is based on individual needs. FEMA assistance does not replace insurance or duplicate other aid sources. There are no income barriers to receiving individual assistance.

Ways to apply for Individual Assistance:

- Online at DisasterAssistance.gov or via the FEMA app.
- In person at [Disaster Recovery Centers \(DRCs\)](#) or through disaster survivor teams.
- By calling the [FEMA Helpline](#) at 1-800-621-3362 .

Deadline: Applications must be received by January 7, 2025.

Individual Assistance Applicants are encouraged to:

- **Monitor application status and update documentation** through their online accounts. (Document submission and appeals must be sent within 60 days from the FEMA letter date.)

- **Contact FEMA if no response is received** within 10 days of registration.

Resources for Housing and Shelter Support:

- [FEMA Individual Assistance](#)
- [FEMA Disaster Recovery Center \(DRC\) Locator](#)
- [TSA Outreach and Transition Team \(Transition, Shelter Assistance\)](#)
- [Request data or FEMA presence at events](#)
- [Back@Home](#)

Food Assistance

Individuals who currently receive [Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\)](#) benefits received initial “automatic replacements” in early October and another “supplement” in early November. Individuals and families can apply for regular Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) year-round for help buying food. Applications can be submitted in person at their county department of social services, via telephone or online at ePASS.nc.gov .

The amount of FNS benefits each household receives is based on several eligibility factors, such as the number of people in the household, total income, and allowable deductions. In some cases FNS benefits can be expedited.

Those who are pregnant or have children under the age of five can also [apply for WIC](#) for help buying healthy food and formula, access to breastfeeding

support, and nutrition education through their local WIC agency.

Individuals seeking food assistance can always call 211 or visit [NC211.org](https://www.nc211.org) to locate food pantries and additional resources at any time.

Resources for Food Support:

- [North Carolina ePASS](#)
- [NC Food and Nutrition Services](#)
- [NC WIC Program](#)
- [NC WIC Flexibilities in Response to Hurricane Helene](#)
- [Local Food Resources \(2-1-1\)](#)

Utility Assistance

The [Crisis Intervention Program](#) helps households at risk of losing their heating source, including gas, electricity, or wood. It provides up to \$600 annually, paid directly to energy providers.

In addition, the [Low-Income Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#) offers a one-time winter heating payment of \$300–\$500, depending on income, fuel type, and household size. Priority is given to households with seniors or individuals with disabilities. Benefits are available to those earning 130% or less of the poverty level and are paid directly to the utility provider. LIHEAP registration will open to all eligible households on January 2 and stay open through March 31, 2025, or until funds are exhausted.

The [Weatherization Assistance Program](#), federally funded and managed locally, improves home energy efficiency with materials like insulation and weather-stripping. The [Duke Energy Partnership](#) supports customers in six Western NC counties. Through it, Duke Energy customers may receive up to \$2,500 in assistance through programs like "Light Funds" and NC Settlement Rate Funds while funding lasts.

Health Coverage and Access to Care

Medicaid Expansion recently celebrated its one-year anniversary with 597,000 new enrollees. This program provides critical health care access to North Carolinians, especially those affected by Hurricane Helene. Individuals should visit [Medicaid.NC.gov](https://www.Medicaid.NC.gov) to learn more or to apply for benefits. **People may be able to get health care coverage even if they did not qualify before.**

Medicaid coverage supports both immediate and long-term health needs, including treatment for injuries, chronic condition management, mental health support, and access to medications and preventive care. By reducing barriers to care, Medicaid Expansion strengthens disaster response and enables healthcare providers to reach more affected communities.

With the respiratory virus season in full force, health officials also **encourage all those six months and older to get their seasonal COVID-19 and flu vaccinations**. RSV protection is also available for older adults and infants, who are most likely to get really sick. Individuals should reach out to their local health departments or federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) for services if they are uninsured or underinsured. Visit [MySpot.NC.gov](https://www.MySpot.NC.gov) for additional information or to find a local vaccine location.

Resources for Health Care Access:

- [NC Medicaid](#)
- [NC Navigator](#)
- [COVID-19 and Flu Vaccinations](#)

Ongoing Recovery Coordination Meetings

NC Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster Long-Term Recovery Groups

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9:00 am

[Join on Zoom](#)

Meeting ID: 160 098 4167

Passcode: 604572

Helene Response Coordination Call

Wednesdays at 12:30 pm

[Join on Zoom](#)

Meeting ID: 969 5477 4349

Passcode: 744752

Disaster Case Management

Wednesdays and Fridays at 9:00 am

[Join on Zoom](#)

Emotional and Spiritual Care/Child Wellbeing

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:30 pm

[Join on Zoom](#)

Meeting ID: 160 139 5145

Passcode: 054460

Dial in number: 415-449-4000

Volunteer Management

Fridays at 2:00 pm

[Join on Zoom](#)

Meeting ID: 945 9619 1471

Passcode: 461008

Together WNC: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30 am

[Join on Zoom](#)

Meeting ID: 963 214 6210

The NC Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network (NCIDR)

Monthly on 4th Tuesdays 2:00 – 3:30 pm

[Sign up for invites](#)

Thank you for your trust and transparency as we have navigated recovery and response from Hurricane Helene and worked together throughout this difficult time. Again, **we invite you to [share your overall feedback](#) to ensure we continue to best support Western North Carolina** . Please complete the survey at your earliest convenience.

We are dedicated to supporting you in the ways that you need now and through the next phases of recovery. As always, please visit ncdhhs.gov/helene for general hurricane recovery information, access to resources or answers to frequently asked questions.

[SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK HERE](#)

Summary of the December 11th Cafecito organized by NCDHHS:

Long-term recovery

Thank you for continuing to support the response to Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina during this critical time. The things you shared with us and the questions you asked during the Cafecitos series have helped improve

the response to better meet the needs of our community. of our communities. We invite you to stay connected with the many opportunities to collaborate and support our friends and neighbors.

[Please share your general feedback with us](#) to ensure we continue to best support Western North Carolina.

Below are the updates and resources we shared during last week's Cafecito:

Take a moment for your mental health

In an emergency, it is critical that first responders and volunteers have the resources they need, when and where they need them. The [Hope4NC Helpline](#) offers free and confidential support 24/7, especially for hurricane recovery workers and rescue teams immediately. Call [1-855-587-3463](#) for immediate assistance.

To support this effort, crisis counseling programs, including door-to-door counseling services, have been launched and are expanding. The General Assembly has made a \$25 million investment available for mental health support in Western Carolina. North. For urgent mental health needs, call [988](#) for confidential assistance, including support in Spanish.

Mental Health Resources:

- [Suicide and Crisis Prevention Line 988](#)
- [Hope4NC Helpline: Support for immediate rescue team members and volunteers](#)
- [Mobile teams and crisis response centres](#)
- [Somethings: Mental health services for adolescents](#)
- [Weathering the Storm: Mental Health and Disability Resources](#)
- [North Carolina Peer Warmline for People with Shared Experiences \(Support available in English by calling 1-855-PEERS NC\)](#)
- [Resources for Resilience](#)

Collaborating with NCDHHS

[Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry \(ABCCM\)](#) joined our conversation to share more about their strong partnership with NCDHHS to support residents of Western North Carolina. With the support of over 300 churches and 6,000 trained volunteers, ABCCM provides emergency assistance to anyone in need, regardless of their background.

ABCCM highlighted a key opportunity for the countless community organizations that want to support those recovering from Hurricane Helene: filling the gaps. In particular, they were able to position care coordinators in shelters to address urgent needs and coordinate services. They also took advantage of the available space to Support the storage and distribution of essential supplies (food, water, generators, heaters, etc.). ABCCM worked closely with NCDHHS and other partners to ensure supplies reached underserved or overlooked communities.

In short, we encourage community organizations to [connect with NCDHHS](#) , larger nonprofits, and local governments to engage in recovery planning. ABCCM is available to facilitate engagement for groups interested in contributing to recovery efforts. .

Housing support

The North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR) has partnered with FEMA to support disaster recovery efforts in the region. FEMA provides immediate disaster relief, while the Department of Health and Human Services provides emergency response. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds long-term recovery efforts. HUD funds are intended to supplement FEMA assistance, covering needs such as reconstruction, elevation, relocation, and acquisitions that are not covered by federal funding. other sources. These funds can also support affordable housing and water infrastructure projects.

Western North Carolinians who have suffered storm damage are urged to [register for individual assistance from FEMA](#) . This registration benefits both individuals and their communities by helping North Carolina demonstrate the impact of the storm. disaster, which influences future allocation of funds by HUD.

To support recovery efforts, local community members are being hired as [disaster case managers](#) leveraging their knowledge and experience in the area. A team of 75 case managers will be hired to serve the affected areas. These positions are open to community health workers and others with relevant certifications, with an emphasis on long-term support for survivors. These roles are designed as multi-year positions, offering opportunities for professional growth.

FEMA Individual Assistance

More than \$269 million in aid has been distributed to 139,000 applicants for disaster recovery in North Carolina. Although FEMA assistance can reach up to \$85,000, most recipients receive between \$10,000 and \$12,000 for minor repairs. moderate. Assistance is based on individual need. FEMA assistance does not replace insurance or duplicate other sources of aid. There are no income restrictions for individual assistance.

Ways to request individual assistance:

- Online through [DisasterAssistance.gov](#) or through the FEMA app.
- In person at [Disaster Recovery Centers](#) (DRCs) or through disaster survivor support teams.
- Calling the [FEMA helpline](#) at 1-800-621-3362 .

Deadline: Applications must be received by January 7, 2025.

Applicants for individual assistance are encouraged to:

- Monitor the status of your application and update documentation through your online accounts. (Document submissions and appeals must be submitted within 60 days of the date on the FEMA letter.)
- Contact FEMA if you do not receive a response within 10 days of registering.

Additional resources for housing and shelter support:

- [FEMA Individual Assistance](#)
- [FEMA Disaster Recovery Center \(DRC\) Locator](#)
- [Transitional Housing Assistance Team](#)
- [Request information or FEMA presence at events](#)
- [Back@Home](#)

Food assistance

People currently receiving [Food and Nutrition Services](#) (FNS) benefits received initial “automatic replacements” in early October and another “supplement” in early November. Individuals and families can apply for regular FNS benefits throughout the year. for assistance with food shopping. Applications can be submitted in person at your county social services department, by phone, or online at ePASS.nc.gov .

The amount of FNS benefits each household receives is based on several eligibility factors, such as the number of people in the household, total income, and allowable deductions. In some cases, FNS benefits may be processed on an expedited basis.

Those who are pregnant or have children under the age of five can also [apply for WIC](#) to receive assistance with purchasing healthy foods and formula, access to breastfeeding support, and nutrition education through their local WIC agency.

People seeking food assistance can always call 211 or visit NC211.org to locate food pantries and additional resources at any time.

Resources for food support:

- [North Carolina ePASS](#)
- [North Carolina Food and Nutrition Services](#)
- [NC WIC - special nutrition program](#)
- [NC WIC Program Adaptations in Response to Hurricane Helene](#)
- [Local food resources \(2-1-1\)](#)

Utility Assistance

The [Crisis Intervention Program](#) helps households at risk of losing their heating source, including gas, electricity or wood. It offers up to \$600 annually, paid directly to energy providers.

Additionally, the [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program](#) provides a one-time winter heating payment of between \$300 and \$500, depending on income, fuel type, and household size. Priority is given to households with older adults. or individuals with disabilities. Benefits are available to those earning 130% or less of the poverty level and are paid directly to the utility provider. LIHEAP registration will be available to all eligible households from January 2 through March 31, 2025, or until funds are exhausted.

The federally funded and locally administered [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) improves home energy efficiency with materials such as insulation and weather stripping for doors and windows that prevent air leaks. [The Duke Energy Alliance](#) supports customers in six ways: counties in Western North Carolina. Through this program, Duke Energy customers can receive up to \$2,500 in assistance through programs such as Light Funds and North Carolina rate-based funds, while resources are available.

Health coverage and access to health care

Medicaid Expansion recently celebrated its first anniversary with 597,000 new enrollees. This program provides essential access to health care for North Carolinians, especially those affected by Hurricane Helene. Individuals can visit [MasMedicaid.nc.gov](https://www.MasMedicaid.nc.gov) to learn more. more information or to apply for benefits. They may be able to get health coverage even if they didn't qualify before.

Medicaid coverage supports both immediate and long-term health needs, including injury treatment, chronic condition management, mental health support, access to medications, and preventive care. By reducing barriers to care, Medicaid expansion strengthens disaster response and enables healthcare providers to reach more affected communities.

With respiratory virus season in full swing, health officials are also recommending that everyone over the age of six months get vaccinated against COVID-19 and the flu. Additionally, RSV protection is available for older adults and infants, who are at higher risk for severe illness. Uninsured and underinsured people can go to their local health departments or federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) for services. Visit [Vacunate.nc.gov](https://www.Vacunate.nc.gov) for more information. information or find a vaccination site near you.

Resources for accessing medical care:

- [NC Medicaid](#)
- [NC Navigator](#)
- [COVID-19 and flu vaccines](#)

Ongoing coordination meetings for recovery

North Carolina Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD)

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9:00 am

[Zoom meeting link](#)

Meeting ID: 160 098 4167

Access code: 604572

Response coordination call to Helene

Wednesday at 12:30 pm

[Zoom meeting link](#)

Meeting ID: 969 5477 4349

Access code: 744752

Disaster case management

Wednesdays and Fridays at 9:00 am

[Zoom meeting link](#)

Emotional and Spiritual Care/Child Well-Being

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:30 pm

[Zoom meeting link](#)

Meeting ID: 160 139 5145

Access code: 054460

Phone to join: 415-449-4000

Volunteer Management

Friday at 2:00 pm

[Zoom meeting link](#)

Meeting ID: 945 9619 1471

Access code: 461008

Together WNC: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30 am

[Zoom meeting link](#)

Meeting ID: 963 214 6210

North Carolina Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network (NCIDR)

Every month, the fourth Tuesday from 2:00 to 3:30 pm

[Sign up to receive invitations](#)

Thank you for your trust and transparency as we have navigated the recovery and response to Hurricane Helene, and worked collectively during this very difficult time. Again, we invite you to [share your general feedback](#) to ensure we continue to provide the best possible support to the West Coast, North Carolina. Please complete the survey at your convenience.

We are dedicated to supporting you in the ways you need now and in the next phases of recovery. As always, please visit ncdhhs.gov/helene for general information about hurricane recovery, access to resources, or answers to frequently asked questions.

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS WITH US