

Disaster Equity Checklist

This checklist is for those involved in disaster planning, response, and recovery, both within and outside of government. It includes strategies, action steps, and key questions to advance disaster equity. It is not an exhaustive list, and each agency or office should customize their plans to fit their needs.

Background

- Staff from various HHS agencies convened in a series of facilitated discussions to construct a shared definition of disaster equity and implementation tools, including in an infographic and checklist (see below).
- This checklist is also informed by the [2023 Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity](#): Sec. 10. Definitions, which states, “For purposes of this order:
 - a. The term “equity” means the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including individuals who belong to communities that often have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander persons and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women and girls; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; persons who live in United States Territories; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality; and individuals who belong to multiple such communities.
 - b. The term “underserved communities” refers to those populations as well as geographic communities that have been systematically denied the opportunity to participate fully in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as defined in Executive Orders 13985 and 14020.

What is the definition of disaster equity? Disaster equity is the provision of community-specific services and resources for disaster survivors that are accessible, and culturally and linguistically tailored to mitigate disparities in health and well-being and support resilience.

To achieve disaster equity, providers should:

Attend to structural, historic, and systemic factors

- Recognize historic social, economic, and racial inequities that may exist prior to disasters and could be exacerbated following disasters.
- Recognize unique needs of people, households, and communities.

Seek out and provide resources to people most adversely affected by disasters

- Attend to people experiencing mental illness, substance abuse disorders, re-traumatization, and homelessness and housing instability, and those living in isolated or rural geographic locations.

Learn from people directly impacted

- Understand the local community's unique needs and promote a culturally appropriate, [trauma-informed](#) strategy for resilience, to include preparedness, response, and recovery.

Provide communication in [plain language](#) and deliver in ways that are accessible

- Establish accessibility for all people, including the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, non-English speaking individuals, and older adults.
- Provide in a manner that people and communities can access despite challenges in a disaster context, including accessing the Internet, television, or radio; charging cell phones or powering communication devices; or accessing recovery sites.

Strategies and action steps to advance disaster equity



Priority Strategy #1: Prompt disaster and government leaders to understand and prioritize disaster equity

Action steps	Key questions to consider during implementation
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus federal disaster response on equitable treatment rather than equal treatment , understanding that communities have different needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does the government's disaster response focus on distributing equal treatment, services, or information, rather than considering the differing needs of groups and communities?

Action steps	Key questions to consider during implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure disaster leaders are well-informed by sharing key resources (for example, this checklist and its associated infographic; CDC’s resources on Using a Health Equity Lens). <input type="checkbox"/> During and after an emergency, ensure people receive necessary services and resources in an equitable and timely manner. <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize shared understanding of responsibility among disaster and government leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Which groups in your community might not be receiving or may have difficulty receiving disaster resources? Do any of these people fall into the category of an underserved community? <input type="checkbox"/> What strategies can support readily and timely access to necessary services and resources during and after an emergency to underserved communities identified above? <input type="checkbox"/> How do you differentiate the responsibility among disaster and government leaders? <input type="checkbox"/> What are the key root causes of inequities associated with this community? <input type="checkbox"/> Which factors exacerbate inequities in this community?



Priority Strategy #2: Conduct community engagement before, during, and after disasters

Action steps	Key questions to consider during implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify local leaders to engage, such as leaders of community-based organizations, government, or community members. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a community engagement plan that incorporates key action items based on input from local leaders. <input type="checkbox"/> Include organizations led by people with lived experience rather than centralizing “service providers.” <input type="checkbox"/> Create a collaborative body of representatives where work groups can assemble to develop solutions and share their work across agencies or organizations, and provide a space where they can convene. <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct culturally responsive community needs assessments on a regular basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Which local organizations are led by or assist people most adversely impacted by disasters, including people with reduced access to services? <input type="checkbox"/> Which local leaders and organizations should be involved? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the best way to assess community needs? <input type="checkbox"/> How can you communicate in plain and culturally relevant language that resonates with the community? <input type="checkbox"/> Are you using trauma-informed approaches when engaging with the community during and after a disaster? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this community have tribal sovereignty that you should consider?

Action steps	Key questions to consider during implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use plain language that is both culturally relevant and available in the languages spoken in the affected community. <input type="checkbox"/> Create space, through collaborative bodies, work groups, or advisory boards, for ongoing dialogue with communities where decision makers can ask communities about their needs on a regular basis. <input type="checkbox"/> Use trauma-informed approaches when engaging with individuals and communities. <input type="checkbox"/> Respect tribal sovereignty and work collaboratively with tribes to address the needs of their communities. 	



Priority Strategy #3: Focus on promoting and delivering services, including human services and physical and mental health

Action steps	Key questions to consider during implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify a staff member or group of staff to own the work and ensure available funding to build the infrastructure for health promotion. <input type="checkbox"/> Invest in primary prevention for mental health and treatment of mental illness to promote positive mental health. <input type="checkbox"/> Promote trauma-informed curricula across communities, not just in clinical care and public health. <input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize mental health, along with physical health, during and after disasters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Who is responsible for managing physical and mental health during and after a disaster (for example, identifying available funding to build the infrastructure, determining whether mental health services after a disaster are billable and covered under state and private health plans)? <input type="checkbox"/> What strategies can you use to destigmatize mental health assessments and services to support primary prevention? <input type="checkbox"/> Which state agencies can you partner with to address health promotion more equitably (for example, addiction and recovery centers)? <input type="checkbox"/> What are strategies to promote trauma-informed curricula across the community?



Priority Strategy #4: Acknowledge and address historical, structural, and systemic causes and consequences of disaster inequities

Action steps	Key questions to consider during implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Recognize and acknowledge key root causes of disaster inequities, including but not limited to, historical housing discrimination (for example, redlining), structural and social determinants of health, and the relationship between the federal government and affected communities.<input type="checkbox"/> Engage with staff on ongoing equity assessment activities to delineate the ways in which agencies' specific policies or practices are connected to disaster inequities.<input type="checkbox"/> Work with staff to address current factors that exacerbate inequities in communities, such as ineligibility for post-disaster resources, persistent poverty, and lack of home ownership or missing homeowner documentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> What are key root causes of disaster inequities (for a specific disaster, community, or context)?<input type="checkbox"/> What equity assessment activities are relevant for these individuals and communities?<input type="checkbox"/> What specific policies and practices are connected to disaster inequities?<input type="checkbox"/> Which staff are helpful in addressing factors that exacerbate inequities?<input type="checkbox"/> What resources are available to individuals and communities to help address factors that exacerbate inequities?



Other strategies to consider

- Communicate in clear and plain language in multiple formats and languages, particularly in electronic, spoken, and hard copy communications.
- Incorporate [social vulnerability indices](#) to target resources or interventions.
- Track population trends, paying specific attention to marginalized people and communities. Use data to hold agencies and providers accountable for delivering resources to those most in need, particularly for those who are marginalized for multiple reasons.