

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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November 9, 2017

The Honorable Robert P. Kadlec, MD  
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 639-D  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Dr. Kadlec:

Thank you for appearing before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations on Tuesday, October 24, 2017, to testify at the hearing entitled "Examining HHS's Public Health Preparedness for and Response to the 2017 Hurricane Season."

Pursuant to the Rules of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, the hearing record remains open for ten business days to permit Members to submit additional questions for the record, which are attached. The format of your responses to these questions should be as follows: (1) the name of the Member whose question you are addressing, (2) the complete text of the question you are addressing in bold, and (3) your answer to that question in plain text.

To facilitate the printing of the hearing record, please respond to these questions with a transmittal letter by the close of business on Tuesday, November 28, 2017. Your responses should be mailed to Ali Fulling, Legislative Clerk, Committee on Energy and Commerce, 2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515 and e-mailed in Word format to [Ali.Fulling@mail.house.gov](mailto:Ali.Fulling@mail.house.gov).

Thank you again for your time and effort preparing and delivering testimony before the Subcommittee.

Sincerely,



Greg Walden  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Diana DeGette, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Attachments

**Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record**

**The Honorable Greg Walden**

1. Does the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have access to real-time information about the status of hospitals and other health care providers in the affected regions?
  - a. How does HHS obtain information about the status of health care providers in the affected regions?
  - b. Can you provide information about: (a) whether the health care system in Texas is stabilized; and (b) the percentage of hospitals in Texas that are fully operational.
  - c. Can you provide information about: (a) whether the health care system in Florida is stabilized; and (b) the percentage of hospitals in Florida that are fully operational.
  - d. During the hearing, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) testified that 60 percent of hospitals in Puerto Rico were connected to the grid as of that date. Can you provide information about: (a) the percentage of hospitals in Puerto Rico that are now connected to the grid; and (b) the percentage of health care providers in Puerto Rico that still do not have power.
  - e. During the hearing, ASPR testified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was assessing the hospitals in the U.S. Virgin Islands that were destroyed by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Can you provide information about: (a) whether the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has completed this assessment and, if so, the findings of the assessment; and (b) how long it will take to restore the health care system in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
2. HHS, in coordination with federal partners including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), pre-deployed a significant amount of federal assets in response to the recent hurricanes. According to ASPR's testimony, HHS sent 439 tons of medical equipment and supplies to the affected areas. How does HHS decide the type and amount of medical equipment and supplies to send to an affected region?
  - a. Did HHS send similar types and amounts of medical equipment and supplies to each of the affected regions following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria?
  - b. Once the assets have been sent to the affected regions, what, if anything, needs to be done for the affected regions to use the assets?
  - c. How long on average did it take HHS to get the medical equipment and supplies to the affected regions?
  - d. Did HHS encounter any delays in using federal assets to respond to the hurricanes because of paperwork or other administrative issues? If so, are there any areas where the federal government could streamline the processes associated with asset deployment?

3. What are some of the biggest challenges HHS faced in executing the Agency's public health and medical preparedness and response functions following the recent hurricanes?
  - a. What plans does HHS have to address these challenges?
  - b. What can we do to improve health care provider preparedness for these types of emergencies?
4. In the past few months, we have seen three major hurricanes devastate multiple regions of the United States and its territories. How have these experiences impacted staffing at ASPR?
  - a. Does HHS, and ASPR more specifically, have sufficient resources available to handle future responses?
5. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the primary agency for ESF#8 related to public health and medical services, including all-hazard public health consultation, technical assistance, and support and potable drinking water, solid waste disposal, and other environmental issues related to public health.
  - a. Please detail all activities HHS engaged in under this function regarding potable drinking water, solid waste disposal, and other environmental issues related to public health, and other environmental issues related to public health, and other environmental issues related to public health, and other environmental issues related to public health under this authority for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.
  - b. Please detail the interactions between HHS and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or State/Territorial agencies with primary enforcement authority for Federal environmental laws in support of ESF#8 for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.
  - c. Please detail any funding requests or technical recommendations made to or denied by the Federal Emergency Management Act for addressing water, waste water, solid waste, or other environmental issues related to public health under this function.

**The Honorable Gus Bilirakis**

1. Would you discuss the current DMAT staffing shortage – has this been ongoing or a new development?
  - a. What is driving this shortage?
  - b. How can we address these problems?
2. How is priority evacuation status determined?
  - a. When authorities are deciding which health care facilities to evacuate, do they currently take into consideration locations with a history of violations and ensuring these residents are not sheltering in place with bad actors placing them at a high-risk of sustaining injury or death?
  - b. If not, should they?

3. Are there disaster Memorandum of Understanding between agencies like the US Postal Service and ASPR to deliver important health information following a crisis?
4. Would you discuss how we can best streamline agency coordination to prevent bureaucratic overlap and redundancies which can lead to waste and unnecessary delays and hamper the effectiveness of response?
  - a. With a coordinated, interagency response, are there interagency goals that drive response and preparedness strategies?
  - b. If so, what are these goals?

**The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.**

1. As the committee considers preparedness issues in light of hurricanes and other recent mass casualty events, can ASPR please confirm whether the Agency believes that existing competitive grant funds for trauma care are sufficient to allow us to adequately respond to these events or should the Committee consider reimbursement through CMS to provide these critical resources?
2. What has HHS done to ensure that rural communities and the islands of Culebra and Vieques have access to proper medical attention?
3. The widespread devastation in Puerto Rico caused by Hurricane Maria had a direct effect on pharmaceuticals and medical device manufacturing facilities located on the Island. Has HHS partnered with the suppliers of life-saving medicines to treat Puerto Rico's residents? What has the agency done to ensure facilities are well-equipped to ensure consistent production for residents in Puerto Rico and the rest of the nation?
4. There are varying reports on the total amount of hospitals in Puerto Rico. For instance, FEMA has reported a total of 67 hospitals. DOD has indicated there are 69. Can you confirm the total number? How many of those are fully operational? How many hospitals, dialysis centers and civilian health facilities have power fully restored and how many are relying on generators? a. Follow-up: Are there sufficient health care personnel in each of these hospitals and facilities to treat patients?
5. The amount of patients being treated by the USNS Comfort as compared to its capacity is dismal. The USNS Comfort can receive up to 1,000 patients. How many patients has the ship served on a daily basis since arriving on Puerto Rico? Why is one of the largest medical facilities in the United States fleet being underutilized?
  - a. When did the USNS Comfort arrive in Puerto Rico?
  - b. When did the USNS Comfort begin accepting patients?
  - c. Follow-up: What is the process for patients in need of medical care to be treated there? How has FEMA communicated this information to Puerto Rico's Department of Health, hospitals, and other health facilities?

6. What are HHS, CDC, and other involved federal agencies doing to ensure local Puerto Rico government employees have the necessary health and safety equipment to protect themselves during their ongoing relief and recovery work?
  - a. Which federal government agencies are responsible for providing needed Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to relief and recovery workers?
7. If power is still out in January, how would this impact the following areas?
  - a. Hospital Services
  - b. Health Clinics
  - c. Water Filtration / Drinking Water Systems
  - d. Wastewater treatment
8. What is the current status of the following services in Vieques, Culebra, St. Croix, St. Thomas, and geographically remote parts of Puerto Rico in each of the following areas:
  - a. Hospital Services
  - b. Health Clinics
  - c. Water Filtration / Drinking Water Systems
    - i. When will these areas have reliable access to safe drinking water?
  - d. Wastewater treatment
9. If roads and transportation infrastructure remains disrupted through next year, how would that impact the supply of products in the following areas to geographically remote areas in Puerto Rico as well as Vieques and Culebra:
  - a. Pharmacy services
  - b. Medical supplies
10. When do you expect all medical services to be fully and readily available on St. Thomas and St. Croix?
  - a. How long will HHS staff be on the ground in these areas, providing medical services?
  - b. What medical services are currently available? What medical services available before the hurricanes are not available, and when will those services be restored?

11. Mental and behavioral health impacts of the storm:

- a. What actions have been taken to address the mental and behavioral health impacts of the storm?
- b. What have these assessments concluded?
- c. What mental health services is HHS currently providing in affected areas, and how long will these services be available?
- d. What current actions is HHS taking to address long-term mental health issues stemming from this storm?

**The Honorable Jan Schakowsky**

1. Following up, in the aftermath of disasters like these devastating Hurricanes, government should provide relief and recovery workers with required health and safety protections and Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to ensure workers' health is not compromised during current and ongoing clean-up and future rebuilding. Unfortunately, we have heard that this is causing problems in Puerto Rico.

We know Puerto Ricans in both the private and public sector want to do the work needed to help rebuild their lives, homes, communities, and their Commonwealth. Government workers are willing and eager to help address short-term needs—even when working as assigned by the Puerto Rico government is outside their long-standing employee responsibilities and expertise. Nonetheless, workers simultaneously want to protect their own health and safety and avoid unnecessary health problems. The long-term medical problems flowing from the tragic events on September 11, 2001 and the resulting cleanup efforts at Ground Zero and on the Pile taught us the vital importance of providing appropriate health and safety equipment and training to workers in conditions that are dangerous or uncertain.

- a. What is HHS, CDC, and other federal agencies doing to ensure local Puerto Rico government employees have the necessary health and safety equipment to protect themselves during their ongoing relief and recovery work?
- b. Have these issues been addressed in Puerto Rico?
- c. Which federal government agencies are responsible for providing needed PPEs to recovery workers?

**The Honorable Kathy Castor**

1. I also heard from these health professionals that water sanitation is one of the biggest issues in Puerto Rico right now, which is leading to gastrointestinal issues as well as systemic infections. How is the Administration helping get clean water to Puerto Rico, especially to remote areas? Additionally, how is HHS working with health professionals on the ground to treat illnesses stemming from the lack of clean water?

2. Physicians have told me they are seeing other health issues such as asthma, COPD, conjunctivitis, scabies, diabetes, and hypertension being exacerbated due to lack of medications, power, transportation and supplies, increased air pollution from generators and unsanitary living conditions. Is HHS monitoring this situation, and what steps are being taken to address these additional health issues?

**The Honorable Pete Olson**

1. After tackling 3 Hurricanes in a short period of time, what strains have you seen on your current resources. Also, what additional resources do you need to provide these communities the help that they need?

## **Attachment 2—Member Requests for the Record**

*During the hearing, Members asked you to provide additional information for the record, and you indicated that you would provide that information. For your convenience, descriptions of the requested information are provided below.*

### **The Honorable Gus Bilirakis**

1. Does the Hospital Preparedness Program currently allow States to use grant funds to help defray costs associated with procurement and maintenance of generators for assisted living facilities and skilled nursing facilities to support the development and sustainment of regional healthcare coalitions?