



Florida Behavioral Health Association

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Hurricane Ian Could Leave Mental Health Issues in its Wake

Tallahassee, FL—As Hurricane Ian travels out of the state, millions of Floridians are struggling with no power, no water, no food and possibly with no homes or neighborhoods to return to. According to the Florida Behavioral Health Association (FBHA), scores of Floridians will also be struggling with emotional effects of having to deal with such an overwhelming and catastrophic incident.

“While many Floridians will soon be focused on cleaning up in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian – clearing fallen trees, repairing power lines and rebuilding homes – some residents will be silently trying to deal with the mental health issues that tend to follow natural disasters,” said Melanie Brown-Woofter, President and CEO of the Florida Behavioral Health Association. “It has been documented that hurricanes can open the floodgates for anxiety, stress, fear, PTSD triggers and other mental health issues. We know that local mental health providers are still working with families in the Panhandle who were impacted by Hurricane Michael in 2018.”

In November 2020, a [study](#) conducted by the University of Delaware examined the impact of 281 natural disasters on suicide rates during a 12-year span. It found that overall suicide rates increased by 23% when compared to rates before a natural disaster. After Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, nearly half of the survivors suffered from some form of mental distress, according to a 2012 [study](#) in the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry.

“I encourage all residents, especially those people who struggle with PTSD and anxiety, to take advantage of the resources and [helplines](#) provided by the Florida Behavioral Health Association to help them process the trauma and recover,” added Brown-Woofter. “It may take weeks, months or even years to grasp the severity of what has happened. Now is the time to seek help.”

The FBHA is a statewide trade association that represents over 70 community mental health and substance use treatment providers throughout the state. FBHA’s members span from Pensacola all the way down to Key West, treat over 545,000 individuals each year, and provide services in every county in

Florida. The community providers who make up the FBHA membership predominantly serve the uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid eligible individuals.

The American Psychological Association [encourages](#) Floridians who are struggling after a disaster to...

- Take a news break
- Acknowledge your feelings and seek professional help
- Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced
- Find productive ways to help your friends, family and neighbors
- Establish or reestablish routines

There are many additional resources Floridians can take advantage of if they need assistance.

The [Centers for Disease Control](#) offers tips for self-care following a traumatic event. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's [disaster distress helpline](#) is 1-800-985-5990.

To respond to the effects of this storm, through a donation or by volunteering, please visit <https://www.volunteerflorida.org/donatefdf/>.

The state of Florida emergency information line is 1-800-342-3557. And, for the most up-to-date information and for resources related to Hurricane Ian, Floridians can visit the Florida Division of Emergency Management's [website](#) at www.floridadisaster.org.

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The Florida Behavioral Health Association is a non-profit organization that provides statewide leadership on behavioral health policy and practice. FBHA supports member agencies offering services to those in need of mental health and substance use disorder assistance and support. Its members include a broad range of provider types, ranging from small specialty organizations to comprehensive treatment organizations with multiple locations within a geographic region. For more information, please visit www.floridabha.org.