

DHHS provides adjustments for relief efforts - DHHS provides Medicaid, food stamp adjustments for hurricane relief efforts

October 9, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: A | 761 Words

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The state Department of Health and Human Services has issued several logistical updates on serving western North Carolina residents with food and Medicaid/Medicare benefits as they attempt to recover from Hurricane Helene.

The state Medicaid program has been granted additional temporary changes to help with continued care during recovery efforts. The changes will remain in effect until the end of the Hurricane Public Health Emergency declaration for North Carolina

The temporary changes are intended to support hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, critical access hospitals, cancer centers and long-term care facilities.

The changes allow hospitals, including psychiatric hospitals, to treat patients who need emergency care at locations other than the hospital where needed. It allows hospitals to use additional spaces in their building to provide patient care.

For critical access hospitals, they can temporarily exceed their maximum of 25 beds, as well as keep patients for more than 96 hours and establish surge locations outside of rural areas. Inpatient rehabilitation facilities can serve people who need care as a result of the emergency.

Hospitals can allow new doctors to practice before the credentialing and privileging process is completed.

In addition, out-of-state practitioners who are licensed in another state can provide care as long as they are enrolled in Medicare, have a valid license and are not excluded from practice in North Carolina.

Hospitals in affected counties that participate in Medicare and are approved to provide post-hospital skilled nursing facility care can do so for patients who no longer need acute care. They can provide this care for patients who are unable to find placement in a skilled nursing facility.

Nursing homes can admit new residents who have not completed typical preadmission screenings and instead can complete those screenings postadmission so that people can get the care they need more quickly.

Long-term care acute hospitals do not need to follow the 25-day average length of stay requirement for patients who need longer stays due to the emergency. This will help people who may no longer have a safe place to transition to due to the emergency.

Intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities can use additional spaces like activity rooms as resident rooms.

To replace damaged medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics and supplies more easily, people will not need a face-to-face appointment or a new physician's order. Lost or damaged drugs covered by Medicare Part B can be refilled.

Food stamp benefits

DHHS said that more than 200,000 residents in 23 counties that include Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes who

are enrolled in the federal Food and Nutrition Services assistance program have access to replacement benefits on their Electronic Benefit Transfer cards.

The U.S. Agriculture Department has approved residents in the 23 counties to receive 70% of their total monthly September benefit back on their EBT card. The benefit replacement totals more than \$24 million.

The funds were transferred into their accounts Sunday.

Food and Nutrition Services provides low-income families the food they need for a nutritionally adequate diet. Benefits are issued via Electronic Benefit Transfer cards. More than 1.6 million North Carolinians benefit from the program, also known as food stamps.

Kody Kinsley, the state's health secretary, said the replacement benefits are crucial "in light of the fact that due to power outages and worse, many families have lost their food."

"We will creatively use every tool we have to support folks impacted by Hurricane Helene now and for the longhaul."

Other counties included are Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania and Yancey counties.

The replacement benefits comes after DHHS gained USDA permission for FNS participants to use their benefits through Nov. 3 to purchase hot food, including food prepared for immediate consumption, from authorized EBT retailers using their EBT card.

WIC benefits

A third DHHS update involves working with USDA to receive federal authority to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. D-SNAP allows more people impacted by Hurricane Helene to qualify for food assistance benefits who are not already FNS recipients.

DHHS said the more than 250,000 N.C. participants in the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children who can't live in their homes currently can go to any NC WIC agency to have a new eWIC card issued, or to request replacement of breastfeeding supplies, breast pumps and food purchased with current WIC benefits.

WIC provides access to healthy food, breastfeeding support, nutrition education and referrals for health care and community services.

For households participating in WIC outside of NC and who have relocated to NC as a result of the hurricane, they are asked to go to any NC WIC agency to transfer benefits through a Verification of Certification.

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People flee Tampa area - People flee Tampa area

October 9, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: TERRY SPENCER and HAVEN DALEY Associated Press | Section: A | 407 Words Page: 8 OpenURL Link

SEVERE WEATHER

TAMPA, Fla. - Florida work crews hustled to remove lingering wreckage from one hurricane ahead of another Tuesday, while thousands of people fearing a once-in-a-century direct hit from Milton streamed out of the populous Tampa Bay region to seek safety inland.

Though slightly weakened, Milton was still a powerful Category 4 storm and was expected to plow ashore late Wednesday or early Thursday, then remain fairly strong as it crosses Florida. The system could bring towering storm surges and the power to turn debris from Hurricane Helene into dangerous projectiles.

Gov. Ron DeSantis said the state has deployed more than 300 dump trucks that removed 1,200 loads of debris and continue to work around the clock.

After dawn Tuesday, trash trucks trundled up a nearly deserted street in normally bustling Indian Rocks Beach to gather mounds of debris. Sheriff's deputies used a loudspeaker to urge anyone left to escape as soon as possible.

Milton could make landfall Wednesday night in the Tampa Bay area, which has a population of more than 3.3 million people. The county that's home to Tampa ordered areas adjacent to the bay and all mobile and manufactured homes to be evacuated by Tuesday night.

"You do not have to get on the interstate and go far away," DeSantis told a news conference, assuring residents there would be enough gasoline to fuel their cars for the trip. "You can evacuate tens of miles. You do not have to evacuate hundreds of miles away. You do have options."

Most of Florida's west coast was under a hurricane or tropical storm warning as the system spun just off Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, creeping toward shore and sucking energy from the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters. Hurricane warnings were extended early Tuesday to parts of the state's east coast.

The National Hurricane Center downgraded Milton early Tuesday to a Category 4 hurricane, but forecasters said it still posed "an extremely serious threat to Florida." Milton intensified quickly Monday, becoming a Category 5 storm for a time.

Forecasters warned that the sea could surge as high as 15 feet at Tampa Bay, leading to evacuation orders for beach communities all along the coast. In Florida, that means anyone who stays is on their own and first responders are not expected to risk their lives to rescue them at the height of the storm.

Milton is forecast to cross central Florida and to dump as much as 18 inches of rain while heading toward the Atlantic Ocean.

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Blaming immigrants isn't policy. It's racist. - LZ Granderson: Blaming immigrants isn't a policy. It's just racist

October 9, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Section: A| 770 Words Page: 11 OpenURL Link

On Friday, we learned that the U.S. added 254,000 jobs in September, bringing the unemployment rate down to 4.1%. When President Barack Obama was elected, the Great Recession had pushed the rate to 7.8%. President Donald Trump inherited a rate of 3.6%, and he gave President Joe Biden a mishandled pandemic and 6.4% unemployment.

The next president is likely going to inherit an economy that is strong, even if many Americans aren't feeling that way. The next president will also bring with them a narrative about the economy. In the case of Trump, it's a story we've heard far too many times: Blame the minorities.

Over the eight years of the Obama administration, wages went up and unemployment reached historic lows, but the subprime mortgage crisis that began in 2007 left a lasting mark on housing. How could it not, when home ownership fell to its lowest point since 1965? Construction slowed, but demand for housing did not, and that's how we ended up with the affordability crisis we have now.

Trump wants voters to blame desperate migrants for the shortage of affordable housing, but it was his friends on Wall Street who began this cycle.

Just as it was his intentional downplaying of the pandemic during the first few months - something he said he did to prevent panic - that left Americans misinformed and sent the economy into a tailspin. Instead of preparing us, Trump told us to blame China. That rhetoric sparked a wave of anti-Asian hate crimes.

During the Obama administration, more than 2.5 million immigrants were deported. That's more than any other administration had forced out before, and Americans were still losing their homes - because that housing crisis was caused by corporate greed, not by illegal immigration.

Trump fared well in 2016 by blaming desperate Black and brown people as the root cause of housing problems and any other economic issue, neatly avoiding any context about Wall Street's role. And because this helped get him to the White House the first time, I understand why there's a temptation for his campaign now to couch this rhetoric as policy - to claim, for instance, that deporting people will ease the housing shortage or that disaster relief money for victims of Hurricane Helene was diverted to migrants at the border.

But it's not policy.

It's just racist.

And we need to just call it out for what it is.

Last week, the Trump campaign sent out a press release that read "Kamala's Open Border Jeopardizes FEMA's Hurricane Response." It was in response to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas reiterating that the Federal Emergency Management Agency may not have enough funds to make it to the end of hurricane season in November. The agency initially raised concerns at the beginning of the season in June, and the Biden administration overhauled aspects of FEMA relief to get funds out quicker. From Hurricane Katrina in 2005 through 2021, FEMA has spent more than \$12 billion a year. From 1992 to 2004, it was \$5 billion.

It was weather, not immigrants, that forced more than 3.3 million Americans out of their homes in 2022, nearly half that number for more than a month. However, the Trump campaign didn't mention climate change, perhaps because the former president still thinks it's a hoax. But the data show more funds were needed in response to the sweeping damage caused by natural disasters, not because of any trend in immigration.

And yet, the Trump campaign's press secretary said: "FEMA has run out of money for the rest of hurricane season because Kamala Harris used the funds for free giveaways to illegal immigrants."

That's not true.

During the vice-presidential debate, Sen. JD Vance took every opportunity he could to fault migrants and immigration for economic issues, echoing his boss. For his part, Trump's comments about immigrants "poisoning the blood of our country" echoed Adolf Hitler. No wonder Vance compared Trump to Hitler in 2016 before switching allegiances.

Now the two of them are floating "mass deportation" as a solution ... to problems caused by corporate greed. Never mind that deportations would aggravate many problems, including food costs and housing shortages.

In 2019, more than half the farmworkers in the country - 450,000 - were immigrants. In addition to the billions it would cost for the Trump-Vance deportation plan, what do you think would happen to food prices? And to housing availability if a huge percentage of construction workers were deported? In Texas, half of the industry's laborers undocumented.

Blaming Black and brown people might be red meat on the campaign trail, but it just isn't sound economic policy.

It's just racism.

LZ Granderson is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

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Board hears of Surry County's Helene response efforts

October 9, 2024 | Yadkin Ripple, The (Yadkinville, NC) Author: Ryan Kelly ryan.kelly@mtairynews.com| Section: Mtairy| 989 Words OpenURL Link

Surry County Emergency Services Director Eric Southern provided an update last Monday evening to the Board of Commissioners on efforts in the storm ravaged parts of the state. He said that Surry County has supplied nearly everything that has been requested but that the needs will soon be evolving as the weather changes.

"As everybody knows, the devastation in Western North Carolina is still ongoing. There's a lot of pictures that are starting to come out now on social media. There's also a lot of untruths and rhetoric that are out there on social media as well," Southern said.

"There are still areas that they haven't got into yet, the search efforts are still ongoing. They technically have not switched over to a recovery, so there are still active searches are going on," he said.

He said that as of Monday there were 17 Urban Search and Rescue teams and 40 swift water teams that are still out working. "Those USR teams go in between structural collapse to water, wilderness, you name it and they can pretty much search anything that's out there. There are also around 500 firefighters and 328 ambulances that are up there and two field hospitals that are in operation," he said.

Surry County has been able to provide support in the form of equipment and personnel to Helene cleanup and recovery. Southern said the county, "Has actually been able to provide several roles, everything from sending resources to moving equipment."

"We've sent a communications specialist up there, he just returned on Saturday. Our emergency manager for the county, Byron Isaacs, he deployed Sunday before last and he is actually in Ashe County as of today. He went to Buncombe County and spent a week up there. I'll be going somewhere up there after he returns," he explained.

Brent Robertson, assistant communications director for Surry County 911, told the board that he made a supply run to Beech Mountain and arrived after dark. "The only thing you could see was headlights, but there was a lot of infrastructure damage. You could see the evidence of the flooding in Boone but going up NC Highway194 to Beech Mountain, that was the worst thing we saw — a lot of roads and a lot of power line damage. "

Nick Brown, communications director for Surry County 911, added, "We delivered to Beech Mountain's Town Hall a generator from Randolph County. We picked up in Morganton and we delivered it and just dropped it off up there and come straight back to Surry County that night that we went up there."

Chairman Van Tucker asked Southern if there had been anything asked of the county that they had been unable to deliver. "We've pretty much responded and we've sent generators, AM radio stations, personnel, communications staff, and I know you've coordinated with sheriff's departments, and they've made some deployments up there. I also know we have extended out to Alleghany County the ability to use one of our sites over at the old Elkin landfill to bring their waste down."

"I have been extremely happy to see the response, but do you know of anything that else that we can do for them?"

Southern said the county was doing everything possible to help official responses and to help aid civilians and nonprofits get their donated supplies to areas in need. "There is nothing that has been asked of Surry County that has not been provided so far. Anything they have asked we've been able to provide and have had a lot of resources on standby that have not been used."

He said a request to send firefighters to Buncombe County got a very quick response from firefighters locally who volunteered, but it was fulfilled by another community before they could ship out.

He added, "A few minutes ago I was talking to Byron Isaacs, and he was trying to get another request in Ashe County filled and before we could get our guys on it, they had already had somebody else that had come up there. So, we're getting ready to fill another request in Buncombe County now."

Southern directed the commissioners and the public to the North Carolina State Emergency Management's website where there are officials links to requested needs for counties and donation sites.

He added, "There's also a page on there about rumor control that kind of talks about some of the things that's rumors versus what's actually true. There's also a lot of links on there about other agencies, contact information for them, roads that are out, and information like that on that page as well."

Tucker asked if the needs for assistance were likely to change. "As time goes on, will it shift more from water and food, for example, to clothing and winter type stuff and protection, that kind of stuff?"

"They're already seeing the change in the weather up there," Southern replied. "They had a search and rescue team that had went out, I believe from Hickory, Saturday morning and the area that they were getting deployed into it was around 30 degrees between the mountains. So yeah, it's definitely going to change."

Commissioner Eddie Harris offered thanks to State Sen. Eddie Settle and House Speaker Pro Tempore Sarah Stevens for financial responsibility. "You hear the term rainy day fund. Not too many years ago, I can remember when there was no rainy day fund, there was no fund balance. We owed the federal government several billion dollars. The rainy day fund in North Carolina, I think now it exceeds \$4 billion, something like that. Well, guess what? The rainy day is here."

Vice Chair Mark Marion said to Southern, "Thank you for the job you're doing and keep up the good work. All that I can do is say I'm here to support you and to let us know what you need, and we'll do our best to get it for you and other than that, I'll get out of your way, let the experts handle it."

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NCHSAA announces schedule modifications for Fall Sports

October 9, 2024 | Yadkin Ripple, The (Yadkinville, NC) Author: Cory Smith csmith@mtairynews.com| Section: Mtairy | 559 Words OpenURL Link

CHAPEL HILL — The North Carolina High School Athletic Association's Board of Directors met to discuss options for concluding the Fall Sports Season including the postseason calendar. These discussions were necessitated by the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina.

"Changes to the fall calendar are difficult as well as complex but necessary," said NCHSAA President Dr. Stephen Gainey and NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker in a joint statement. "Keeping our student-athletes safe as we try to minimize risk of injury was central to any decisions made. We commend the work of the NCHSAA staff in its research, the Board of Directors in making time to consider these changes and the willingness of our host partners to accommodate any changes and make their venues available."

The Board approved changes and modifications to the schedule. Sunday practices and competitions are still prohibited. The calendar below encompasses the changes made by the Board. Playoff dates in bold reflect a change.

Women's Tennis

Individual

Reporting deadline: October 14, 11:59 p.m. (revised from 3 p.m. to allow for an extra day of competition)

Regionals: October 18-19

State Championships: October 25-26

Dual Team

Reporting deadline: October 17, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 10)

Seeding: October 18

First Round: October 21

Second Round: October 23

Third Round: October 28

Fourth Round: October 30

Regionals: November 5

State Championships: November 9

Volleyball

Effective immediately, the weekly limitation is modified to allow affected schools to make up multiple postponed matches, not to exceed eight in a week. No change was made to the daily limitation.

Reporting deadline: October 19, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 16)

Seeding: October 20 (Sunday, after 1 p.m.)

First Round: October 22

Second Round: October 24

Third Round: October 26

Fourth Round: October 29

Regionals: October 31

State Championships: November 2

Cross Country

Reporting deadline: October 22, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 19)

Regionals: October 26

State Championships: November 2

Men's Soccer

Effective immediately, the weekly limitation is modified to allow affected schools to make up multiple postponed matches, not to exceed four in a week. No change was made to the daily limitation.

Reporting deadline: November 6, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 31)

Seeding: November 7

First round: November 9

Second Round: November 12

Third Round: November 14

Fourth Round: November 16

Regionals: November 19

State Championships: November 22-23

Women's Golf

The minimum number of nine-hole scores required to qualify for the Regional Championships was revised from five to three.

No calendar changes

Cheerleading

No calendar changes

Football

Effective immediately, a minimum of three calendar days (72 hours) must occur in between contests.

Reporting deadline: November 9, 11:59 p.m. (revised from November 1)

Seeding: November 10 (Sunday, after 1 p.m.)

First round: November 15

Second round: November 22

Third round: November 29

Fourth round: December 6

Regionals: December 13

State Championships: December 20-21

Special Provision

The Board approved one (1) additional contest for all sports with a season limit. To exceed the season limit of contests, the following conditions must be met:

Prior approval from NCHSAA

The contest cannot exceed the daily or weekly limitations

The contest must exceed the season limit for both schools

The contest MUST NOT be entered into MaxPreps

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