

# Biden-Harris Administration Provides More Than \$20 Million to Hurricane Helene Survivors, Ongoing Search and Rescue Operations Continue in North Carolina

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Today, President Biden will travel to Georgia and Florida to survey damage, meet with local officials, community leaders and first responders

As search and rescue, power restoration and communication capabilities remain top priorities throughout the Southeast, FEMA has already helped thousands of Hurricane Helene survivors jumpstart their recoveries with more than \$20 million in flexible, upfront funding.

More than 5,000 personnel from across the federal workforce are deployed, including more than 1,500 from FEMA. To date, FEMA has shipped over 9.3 million meals, more than 11.2 million liters of water, 150 generators and more than 260,000 tarps to the region.

President Biden has approved a Major Disaster declaration for eight counties in [Tennessee](#). This major declaration comes in addition to areas in [Georgia](#), [Florida](#), [North Carolina](#), [South Carolina](#) and [Virginia](#).

Disaster survivors in declared areas can begin their recovery process by applying for federal assistance through FEMA. People with damage to their homes or personal property who live in the designated counties or independent cities should apply for assistance, which may include upfront funds to help with essential items like food, water, baby formula and other emergency supplies. Funds may also be available to repair storm-related damage to homes and personal property, as well as assistance to find a temporary place to stay.

## There are three ways apply for FEMA assistance:

- Calling FEMA's Helpline at 1-800-621-3362.
- Online by visiting [disasterassistance.gov](https://disasterassistance.gov).
- Downloading and applying on the [FEMA App](#).

Homeowners and renters with damage to their home or personal property from previous disasters, whether they received FEMA funds or not, are still eligible to apply for and receive assistance for Hurricane Helene.



# FEMA

Voluntary organizations are also providing personnel and resources to the hardest hit areas. The American Red Cross has more than 850 trained disaster workers providing comfort and operating shelters. Additionally, they are helping find loved ones through their helpline **1-800-RED-CROSS** (1-800-733-2767) or by visiting the [Red Cross Hurricane Helene Reunification page](#), where you can enter pertinent information about the person you're looking for. If someone is missing a child related to this disaster or any other incident, they need to call **9-1-1** and then **1-800-THE-LOST** to receive assistance from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

People can receive free services like cutting fallen trees, tarping roofs and mold mitigation with the help of Crisis Cleanup by calling **844-965-1386**. The hotline is open through October 11 and can connect people with volunteers from local relief organizations, community groups and the faith-based community who may be able to assist.

Connectivity is crucial for disaster response and lifesaving operations. With areas still experiencing mass communications outages, it's critical that local, state and federal first responders can communicate with each other to conduct lifesaving operations like search and rescue. Fortunately, FEMA has resources that can ensure communications support in even the most remote areas affected by Helene.

One of FEMA's tools for emergency communications is Starlink, a mobile unit that allows customers high-speed internet by connecting to satellites. FEMA has successfully deployed Starlink in previous disasters including Guam, Hawaii and Alaska. Because the unit is portable and weighs less than 15 pounds, FEMA can deliver it to the areas that need it most, bringing connectivity to over 100 users.

Over 60 Starlink units have been sent to multiple states in support of Hurricane Helene response efforts, including 40 units to North Carolina with more on the way. FEMA is in the process of purchasing additional units for use in other areas affected by the storm.

## North Carolina

In North Carolina, more than 500 FEMA staff are on the ground in North Carolina, with more arriving daily. Over 30 Disaster Survivor Assistance staff are on the ground in affected areas to help survivors to apply for FEMA assistance and connect them with additional state, local, federal and voluntary agency resources.

Over 38 state and federal Urban Search and Rescue teams are in North Carolina helping people. As of today, these have rescued or supported over 2,100 survivors. Additional federal search and rescue teams have arrived to support the mission.

On Wednesday, President Biden visited the state to survey damage and meet with community leaders and state officials. Administrator Criswell remains in North Carolina and will be on the ground until the situation has stabilized.

FEMA has activated [Transitional Sheltering Assistance](#) for North Carolinians displaced by Tropical Storm Helene. Residents in declared counties who have applied for disaster assistance may be eligible to stay temporarily in a hotel or motel paid for by FEMA while they work on their long-term housing plan. People do not need to request this assistance. FEMA will notify them of their eligibility through an automated phone call, text message and/or email, depending upon the method of communication they selected at the time of application for disaster assistance.

As of today, more than 70% of originally reported power outages have been restored. Nearly 8,000 crews continue to assist with remaining power restoration efforts.

To date, over 40,000 people have applied for disaster assistance and FEMA has paid out more than \$6.2 million in Individual Assistance directly to survivors.

Cellular restoration continues to improve, with less than 38% of cellular sites down as of today. Ten counties have 50% or more cell sites down. Two Federal Communications Commission surveillance teams are conducting inspection operations on equipment in targeted counties. FEMA is boosting response coordination by providing 40 Starlink units to ensure first responders can communicate with each other.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has full mobile cellular service.

Commodity distribution, mass feeding and hydration operations are underway in areas of western North Carolina. FEMA commodity shipments are enroute to support operations.

Voluntary organizations are supporting mass feeding operations with bulk food and water deliveries coming via truck and aircraft.

The American Red Cross is engaging in targeted distribution of emergency supplies in low-income communities with high levels of minor or affected residential damage.

Twenty-six shelters are housing over 1,000 occupants. Mobile feeding operations continue to help survivors in heavily impacted areas, including 3 mass feeding sites in Buncombe, McDowell and Watauga counties.

The North Carolina National Guard has delivered 12 aircraft pallets, totaling more than 100,000lbs of food and over 38,000lbs of water to Asheville.

#### **Information for Residents:**

- Residents can visit: [ncdps.gov/helene](https://ncdps.gov/helene) to get information and additional assistance.
- Residents should not travel to western North Carolina to keep the roadways clear for search and rescue teams and utility crews.
- Residents can get in touch with loved ones by **calling 2-1-1** or **visiting [unitedwaync.org](https://unitedwaync.org)** to add them to search and rescue efforts.

#### **Florida**

Today, President Biden will visit the state to survey damage and meet with state and local leaders.

On Wednesday, five counties were added to the disaster declaration, bringing the total eligible for Individual Assistance to 22 counties. Survivors in Columbia, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Leon and Suwannee counties may now apply for FEMA disaster assistance. FEMA specialists are canvassing Florida communities impacted by Hurricane Helene to help survivors apply for assistance. Additionally, FEMA inspectors have begun visiting applicants' homes to verify disaster-caused damage.

FEMA has received over 85,000 applications for assistance and has provided more than \$7.5 million to survivors.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is conducting either debris assessments or water/wastewater assessments across seven counties.

The American Red Cross is engaging in targeted distribution of emergency supplies in low-income communities with high levels of minor or affected residential damage. More than 450 volunteers continue conducting direct emergency feeding and working with feeding partners to provide distribution in support of partner production. Sixteen shelters remain open with less than 475 occupants.

The Salvation Army has active mobile feeding units serving meals and distributing supplies in 13 counties.

Residents in need of information or resources should call the State Assistance Information Line (SAIL) at **1-800-342-3557**. English, Spanish and Creole speakers are available to answer questions.

## Georgia

Today, President Biden will visit to survey damage in various affected areas of Georgia. Yesterday, Vice President Harris visited Richmond County to meet with community leaders. On Wednesday, Vice President Harris was in Augusta to survey damage and meet with local officials.

FEMA has received nearly 100,000 applications for assistance. FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams are on the ground in neighborhoods across the affected counties helping survivors apply for FEMA assistance and connecting them with additional state, local, federal and voluntary agency resources.

The Salvation Army has 26 active mobile feeding units providing meals and support to 10 counties in the affected areas.

The American Red Cross is engaging in targeted distribution of emergency supplies in low-income communities with high levels of minor or affected residential damage. The organization continues to conduct direct emergency feeding and working with feeding partners to provide distribution in support of partner production. Two new shelters opened yesterday, totaling 10 shelters with over 500 occupants.

Residents can find resources like shelters and feeding sites at [gema.georgia.gov/hurricane-helene](https://gema.georgia.gov/hurricane-helene).

## South Carolina

Today, FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams are on the ground in neighborhoods across the affected counties helping survivors apply for FEMA assistance and connecting them with additional state, local, federal and voluntary agency resources.

Region 10 Regional Administrator Willie Nunn is on the ground to help oversee response and recovery operations in the state.

In South Carolina, FEMA has received over 88,000 applications and distributed more than \$4.4 million to survivors.

The American Red Cross is engaging in targeted distribution of emergency supplies in low-income communities with high levels of minor or affected residential damage. One shelter closed yesterday. Nine shelters remain open with less than 175 occupants.

Team Rubicon is continuing to route clearance operations in Spartanburg County and continues planning for clearing other areas.

The state has established a Mass Feeding Task Force to include multiple voluntary agencies. Three Salvation Army mobile feeding units are in hard hit areas. FEMA is supporting the state's feeding mission with Meals Ready to Eat and drinking water.

#### **Information for Residents:**

- Residents with questions on Hurricane Helene can call the state's toll-free hotline, open 24 hours a day, at **1-866-246-0133**.
- Residents who are dependent on medical equipment at home and who are without power due to Helene may be eligible for a medical needs shelter. Call the state's **Department of Public Health Care Line** at **1-855-472-3432** for more information.

### **Virginia**

Several federal agencies, including FEMA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Energy and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, are already in Virginia and working hard with their counterparts with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and other state agencies. Priorities include coordinating the removal of debris and restoration of critical infrastructure.

Today, the first Disaster Survivor Assistance staff will start working on the ground in neighborhoods across the affected counties. These teams help survivors apply for FEMA assistance and connect them with additional state, local, federal and voluntary agency resources.

Residents of Giles, Grayson, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington and Wythe counties, as well as residents of the city of Galax, are eligible to apply for assistance from FEMA to help with costs from damage and losses due to Tropical Storm Helene.

### **Tennessee**

On Wednesday, President Biden approved a major disaster declaration for the state. This includes Individual Assistance for Carter, Cocke, Greene, Hamblen, Hawkins, Johnson, Unicoi and Washington counties.

Individual Assistance provides money to survivors for serious needs, including food, gas and medication. It also provides money for the repair and/or replacement of personal property and repairs to a disaster-damaged home.

Shelter and mass feeding operations have expanded with support from National Guard, delivering food to Unicoi, Washington and Carter counties via aircraft.

Ten shelters remain open with decreasing populations, as people are able to safely return home.

Power and cellular restoration continues to improve. Power has been restored to nearly all customers and less than 13% of cellular sites are down across the affected area.

#### Information for Residents:

- Residents can call **1-800-824-3463 to report a missing person**. Callers should be prepared to provide as much information as possible including names, phone numbers, vehicle identification and last known whereabouts.
- Counties have started establishing donation centers. For the evolving list, visit [FEMA's website](#).

## Contact Us

If you have any questions, please contact FEMA Office of External Affairs:

- Congressional Affairs at (202) 646-4500 or at [FEMA-Congressional-Affairs@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-Congressional-Affairs@fema.dhs.gov)
- Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 646-3444 or at [FEMA-IGA@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-IGA@fema.dhs.gov)
- Tribal Affairs at (202) 646-3444 or at [FEMA-Tribal@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-Tribal@fema.dhs.gov)
- Private Sector Engagement at (202) 646-3444 or at [FEMA-Private-Sector@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-Private-Sector@fema.dhs.gov)

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Also, follow Administrator Deanne Criswell on X [@FEMA\\_Deanne](#).

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Helping people before, during and after disasters.