

# **Texas Child Care Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response Plan**

## **Background**

Maintaining the safety of children in child care programs necessitates planning by state and local agencies and child care providers. Child care services are essential in restoring the economic well-being of a community after a disaster because the ability for parents to go back to work depends on the availability of child care services.

This statewide plan addresses emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts related to child care in the state of Texas. The plan specifically addresses children's needs, including the need for safe child care, before, during, and after an emergency or major disaster.

## **Coordination and Collaboration with Key Partners**

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the lead state agency responsible for administering the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which provides child care subsidies for children whose families are eligible under federal and state statutes and guidance. TWC administers these funds by contracting with each of the state's 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) for local planning, management, and oversight. Boards procure child care contractors, who in turn establish agreements with child care providers for placement of TWC-subsidized children.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Child Care Licensing (CCL) division regulates all child care operations in Texas. CCL is responsible for ensuring that providers meet minimum standards as defined by the state and the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), including requirements for providers to have emergency and evacuation plans in place. CCL is the primary contact and point of coordination for child care providers in the event of an emergency or major disaster.

A state-level child care and early learning consultation team consults with TWC on the development of the Texas CCDF state plan, including development of the disaster plan. As described in the state plan, the consultation team includes representatives from a cross section of agencies and groups that serve children in Texas.

## **Continuation of Child Care Services and Subsidies**

In the event of a disaster, CCL has primary responsibility for direct communication with affected child care providers. Communication may include the following:

- Alerts to providers and partners before an impending disaster
- Requests for information on the status of providers affected by a disaster or emergency
- Information about resources and special provisions for affected families and providers

CCL tracks provider closures and reports the information to TWC and other partners. TWC coordinates with Boards, which are responsible for ensuring communication with and continuing services for affected families receiving child care subsidies.

As the lead agency for CCDF in Texas, TWC is responsible for approving any waivers to TWC's Child Care Services rules for CCDF-funded care. TWC's three-member Commission also may approve special provisions for children in CCDF-funded care as well as for providers affected by a disaster.

In the event of a disaster, TWC may approve waivers and special provisions for families, including the following:

- Extension of CCDF eligibility recertification periods for affected families
- Extension of the period of continued child care for parents who are displaced from employment or education/training
- Exceptions to requirements to report attendance for instances in which the failure to report attendance was beyond the control of the parent
- Exceptions to absence policies when absences occur in the aftermath of a disaster
- Targeting of CCDF and other funds to child care services for parents participating in disaster recovery efforts or to children directly impacted by a disaster

TWC also may approve waivers and special provisions for CCDF-funded providers, including the following:

- Continued reimbursements to affected providers in the immediate aftermath of a disaster
- Short-term assistance to affected Texas Rising Star (TRS) providers during recovery
- Exceptions to quarterly screening requirements for affected TRS providers
- Extension of scheduled assessments for affected TRS providers
- Temporary suspension of unannounced monitoring visits for affected TRS providers

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, providers may not have access to their facilities, and phone lines may be down. Depending on the nature of the emergency or disaster, CCL offers a variety of communication methods for affected providers, such as web-based emergency response surveys. Flexible communication methods allow for timely assessment of the damage to and status of child care providers within an impacted area.

In the aftermath of an emergency or disaster, CCL and TWC coordinate closely with local, state, and federal authorities to identify and address the disaster-related needs of children, families, and providers. Boards serve local communities affected by disasters by providing information, referrals, and access to resources for affected families and businesses. Workforce Solutions Offices connect parents and businesses with programs that provide direct assistance, including the following:

- Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) individual and public assistance, including shelter, relocation, emergency child care, and small business aid
- TWC Disaster Unemployment Assistance
- Small Business Administration
- Local, private organizations providing financial assistance or loans
- HHSC programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Additionally, to ensure continuity of care for children, CCL provides a process for the provision of emergency and temporary child care services during and immediately after a disaster.

## Coordination of Post-Disaster Child Care Services Recovery

As allowed by TWC's Child Care Services rule §809.16(b)(1)(B), CCDF funds designated for quality activities may be expended for minor remodeling, and for updating child care facilities to ensure that providers meet state and local child care standards, including applicable health and safety requirements. In the event of a disaster, CCDF funds may be used to help providers restore or remediate facilities.

CCL, TWC, and Boards also provide ongoing technical assistance, training, resources, and support to providers to help them better prepare for emergencies and disasters.

Providers are encouraged to take advantage of the following free trainings, which are accessible via HHSC's website:

- [Save the Children: Do the Prep Steps!](#) – 30-minute lessons and curricula on emergency preparedness for families, schools, and child care providers
- [Texas A& M AgriLife Extension: "Keeping Kids Safe – Emergency Planning for Child-Care Facilities"](#) – Free two-hour webinar on emergency planning
- [CCDBG Rule Changes: Emergency Preparedness](#) – Interactive presentation about emergency preparedness requirements for child care providers

Additionally, the following technical assistance resources also are accessible via HHSC's website:

- [Hurricane Preparedness Plans for Child Care Providers](#) – Printable checklist
- [www.TexasPrepares.org](http://www.TexasPrepares.org) – Step-by-step guide to building an emergency preparedness plan

## Requirements for Child Care Providers

As described in CCL's Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers rules at §746.5202, providers are required to have emergency preparedness plans that include written procedures for:

- evacuation, relocation, and sheltering or lockdown of children, including specific procedures for evacuating and relocating children who are under 24 months of age, who have limited mobility, or who otherwise may need assistance in an emergency, such as children who have mental, visual, or hearing impairments;
- communication plans, including how the provider will communicate with local authorities (such as fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and health department), parents, and CCL;
- how provider staff will evacuate and relocate with the essential documentation including:
  - parent and emergency contact telephone numbers for each child in care;
  - authorization for emergency care for each child in care; and
  - the child tracking system information for children in care;
- how provider staff will continue to care for the children until each child has been released; and
- how the provider will reunify the children with their parents after evacuation, relocation, sheltering, or lockdown is lifted.

As set forth in §746.5205, providers are required to conduct practice drills of their evacuation, sheltering, and lockdown plans.