

How California RNs Can Prepare for Disaster Relief

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The following is designed to provide RNs with accurate and current information about agencies that need their volunteer assistance in times of disaster. It also provides resources for information on emergency preparedness and bioterrorism. The best ways to prepare to help during a disaster are to *get involved before* disaster strikes, and to prepare yourself and your family for disaster.

Getting Involved

The best way to get involved in a disaster response is to register with the State of California's **Disaster Healthcare Volunteers program**. Hosted by the state's Emergency Medical Services Authority, this program is a system for the registration and license verification of volunteer health professionals.

RNs can register at www.healthcarevolunteers.ca.gov. Registration is secure, confidential, and greatly improves the chances that your help will be called upon during a disaster response. By registering in advance, it allows you to provide key information about your specialty and volunteer preferences, while allowing the State to verify your license. Registering does not commit you to volunteering – it simply puts your name on a confidential list that disaster managers will use during an emergency. If you are requested to serve during a time of emergency, you will be contacted using the information you entered on this Web site. If you agree to deploy, your information will be forwarded to the appropriate officials.

California Medical Assistance Teams (CALMATs) also need volunteers. These State-sponsored teams are composed of nurses and other emergency care providers who can provide rapid response to disasters, in missions ranging from shelter assessment teams and field triage to full-scale in-patient departmental staffing. The CALMATs represent a bigger commitment to disaster response, as team members train, exercise, and deploy more frequently than non-team-based volunteers. *You can get more information about joining a CALMAT when you register as a volunteer at Disaster Healthcare Volunteers* (www.healthcarevolunteers.ca.gov).

You can also find additional opportunities to serve during a disaster by joining a **Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT)**. DMATs are locally based, federally supported rapid-response teams designed to supplement local medical care when needed throughout the United States. DMATs are part of the National Disaster Medical System. RNs can obtain more information about DMATs and training that is available at www.emsa.ca.gov (this website also connects you to local emergency medical services agencies) and <https://www.phe.gov/about/pages/default.aspx>.

Finally, RNs can contact their local chapter of the American Red Cross to enroll in training sessions to become eligible to serve as Red Cross volunteers. You can reach the Red Cross at www.redcross.org.

Being Prepared

Being prepared for a disaster decreases the chance that you and your family will be adversely affected by a disaster while increasing the chance that you'll be able to help others after disaster strikes. RNs are referred to the following resources for current information about bioterrorism and emergency preparedness:

- **State of California website**
Information about anthrax prevention and treatment, California's response to terrorism, and the narrative on biological threat safety produced by the California Highway Patrol at www.chp.ca.gov.
- **Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov)**
Information about emergency preparedness and response including links to videos and satellite broadcasts on bioterrorism.

- **UCLA Public Health Division** (www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/bioter/bioterrorism.html)
Detailed, clinical information about epidemiology.
- **National Institutes of Health** (<https://envirotoxinfo.nlm.nih.gov/>)
Information concerning various toxic chemicals.

RN Practice During Declared State of Emergency

RNs that are currently licensed in another state, but not in California, may provide health care in California **only if** a declared emergency overwhelms the response capability of California's practitioners, and the Director of Emergency Medical Services Authority requests the out-of-state assistance. (Business and Professions Code section 900). If such a need arises, the Board of Registered Nursing would post information on its website to advise whether EMSA is requesting out-of-state RNs to assist.