
Expansion of Eligibility for Disaster Mental Health Workers

Since it became a formal component of American Red Cross Disaster Services in 1992, the Disaster Mental Health (DMH) team has relied upon the efforts of licensed mental health professionals drawn from the fields of social work, counseling, psychiatry, psychology, psychiatric nursing and marital family therapy. The DMH Eligibility Advisory Group has recently developed consensus recommendations for expanding the eligibility criteria for joining the DMH activity. This recommendation was to include state-licensed or stated-certified school counselors and state-licensed or state-certified school psychologists.

Q Why expand the DMH eligibility standards?

A The expansion is part of the American Red Cross's continued preparedness planning efforts. Our core of DMH workers must be large enough and strong enough to meet our current needs and future challenges that we will face in years to come that will include natural disasters, transportation accidents, public health emergencies, and potential terrorist activities.

Q Why include state-licensed or state-certified school counselors and state-licensed or state-certified school psychologists?

A The Advisory Group reached this decision for several reasons. First, children and teens are a highly vulnerable population for developing longer-term difficulties following disaster. Their recovery is closely tied to the support they receive from their family. School counselors and school psychologists are accustomed to working as part of a team within their districts and their communities to provide information, assessment, and support to children and families. They are accustomed to working with community agencies to provide continuity of care when outside resources are needed. School counselors and school psychologists are also licensed or certified by their state in all states, and this will make it easy for chapters to verify that they are in good standing with their state licensure/certification status, as is currently done with all other DMH workers.

Q What if a school counselor or school psychologist does not have a state license or state certification?

A They will not be able to join the DMH activity. You are welcome to work with them locally, as you may already be doing through your partnerships with state and local behavioral health organizations.

Q Why were these two groups not already a part of DMH?

A When the original DMH volunteers were recruited, some school counselors and school psychologists joined the ranks. Later on, when the standards were reviewed, school psychologists and school counselors were no longer accepted into the DMH activity unless they also were licensed as "mental health" professionals (rather than "school" professionals). School psychologists and school counselors who joined the DMH activity prior to that standards review, were "grandfathered" into the DMH activity. The new eligibility expansion will allow *all* state-licensed or state-certified school psychologists and state-licensed or state-certified school counselors to now join the

DMH activity.

Q Where can I get answers to my questions about this DMH eligibility expansion?

A For answers to questions about this eligibility expansion, please contact the DMH leadership team at national headquarters at the following email address:

DMHtemp@usa.redcross.org