

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: DISASTER HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR HURRICANE MARIA SURVIVORS

In response to the mischaracterizations in FEMA's [Fact Sheet: Myths vs. Facts – Disaster Housing Assistance Program for Maria Survivors](#) issued on June 8, 2018, the Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition is setting the record straight.

Since the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires, FEMA has refused to activate the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) to help the lowest income survivors get back on their feet through direct rental assistance and case management services. On May 14, 2018, [FEMA rejected a formal request for DHAP](#) made by the Governor of Puerto Rico in December 2017.

FEMA MYTH: Disaster survivors do not need DHAP because they can access HUD programs.

FACT: Referring disaster survivors to apply for HUD programs in their local communities is not adequate. While HUD programs are proven effective at providing vulnerable families with stable, affordable homes, they have been chronically underfunded, resulting in years-long waitlists for assistance. Disaster survivors need assistance now. Without DHAP, families have resorted to precarious housing situations, including doubling or tripling up with other low income families, returning to uninhabitable homes, or paying at least half of their income on rent. As a result, disaster survivors are at increased risk of evictions and, in worst cases, have been pushed into homelessness.

FEMA MYTH: DHAP is too bureaucratic compared to state-administered housing programs.

FACT: FEMA's experiment of relying on state-administered disaster housing programs has been a failure. Because states did not have similar housing programs in place prior to the disaster, each state has been tasked with designing and implementing new housing programs in the months following the disasters. As a result, state-run disaster housing programs have faced significant delays and have been unable to address the full scale of housing needs. According to FEMA, only a few hundred families are anywhere in the pipeline to be served under state-administered housing programs. Moreover, state-run programs are not adequate to address the housing needs caused by disasters with a regional or national impact. After Hurricane Maria, for example, Puerto Rican families have been displaced to nearly 40 states. Instead of activating DHAP, which utilizes HUD's network of nearly 4,000 public housing agencies and long-established relationships with local housing providers, FEMA has required Puerto Rico to reach separate agreements with each host state on how to administer disaster housing assistance.

FEMA MYTH: FEMA housing programs are available to Puerto Rican families displaced from the storm.

FACT: FEMA and state-administered rental housing programs, including Direct Lease and Multi-Family Lease and Repair, are not available to Puerto Rican families who have been displaced to nearly 40 states. For these families, DHAP is the best option.



Seaside scene in Rincon, Puerto Rico after Hurricane

FEMA MYTH: The Inspector General found DHAP to be ineffective and costly.

FACT: The Inspector General did not find DHAP to be ineffective or costly. Rather, its [report](#) makes clear that the IG was unable to determine the cost-effectiveness of DHAP because FEMA failed to ask HUD to track this data. A simple solution is to require HUD to track this data going forward and make it publicly available. Moreover, while DHAP-specific data is not available, there is data on the cost-effectiveness of HUD's Housing Choice Voucher program, on which DHAP is modeled. The average annual cost to provide direct rental assistance through HUD's Housing Choice Voucher program is \$8,223 per household, or \$685 per month. In contrast, the cost to provide hotel accommodations, similar to FEMA's TSA hotel program, is \$43,800¹ annually, or \$3,650 a month. The federal government could have saved an estimated \$142 million by providing DHAP to the more than 6,000 families who lived in TSA hotels for eight months. These savings could have been used to provide DHAP to an additional 3,200 survivors in need of a stable homes could have saved an estimated \$142 million by providing DHAP to the more than 6,000 families who lived in TSA hotels for eight months. These savings could have been used to provide DHAP to an additional 3,200 survivors in need of a stable homes.

¹ This assumes a daily hotel cost of \$120 per night. In 2017, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) hotel per diem was \$114 in Orlando, Florida and \$135 in Houston, Texas.