
Development of the Disaster Psychosocial Assessment and Surveillance Toolkit (Disaster-PAST)

A major activity during the no-cost extension was the development of the Disaster Psychosocial Assessment and Surveillance Toolkit. The Disaster-PAST was designed for surveillance of community mental health and psychosocial functioning following disasters for the purpose of informing distribution of services by public or private entities and better understanding the ongoing need in recovering communities.

The toolkit provides information needed to conduct community assessment and surveillance in order to better understand the psychosocial and mental health needs in a community. The information obtained from psychosocial assessment and surveillance using the Disaster-PAST can yield a more complete and accurate understanding of the psychosocial and mental health needs of communities recovering from a disaster. This can ultimately result in efficient distribution of mental health services and resources to those communities that are most in need. Knowledge gained from psychosocial assessment and surveillance can also aid in the understanding of the psychosocial effects of disasters and help guide future disaster preparedness. The Disaster-PAST toolkit was designed to be adapted to varying types of disasters, including Natural Disasters (e.g., hurricane, tornado, tsunami, flooding, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, wildfire or forest fire); Technological Disasters (e.g., oil spill, nuclear disaster); and Mass Violence (e.g., terrorism, community violence, school shooting). Recommendations for constructing a screening tool that addresses issues specific to different types of disaster are also included in the toolkit.

The Disaster-PAST was distributed by linking it to the LSU HSC Psychiatry Department website at: <http://www.medschool.lsuhsu.edu/psychiatry/disasterpast.aspx>, and the Department of Health and Hospitals Office of Behavioral Health/Louisiana Spirit website at: <http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/201>. Additionally, copies for the toolkit were distributed during the Collaborative Efforts toward Understanding Disasters and Future Preparedness in the Gulf Coast: Knowledge Dissemination, Planning, and Readiness two-day conference on June 13 and 14, 2012 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Following this conference, the Department of Psychiatry has been collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding their interest in distributing the Disaster-PAST to a broader audience.

As afore mentioned, the Disaster-PAST was distributed online by uploading it to the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine website on pages linked from the Psychiatry Department Research Section during May 2012. The number of views and downloads of the toolkit was measured using Webtrends analytics software, which LSUHSC uses to monitor the web pages. During the month following the upload, the Disaster-PAST homepage was viewed 122 times. The downloadable version of the toolkit was accessed and downloaded 85 times during June 2012. Additionally, Figures, Tables, and Appendices to the toolkit were downloaded up to twenty-five times each.

(See Appendix B for Toolkit)