

U.S. health systems not ready for catastrophes: report

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Photo courtesy NOAA

Institute of Medicine says better coordination needed for effective response.

(HealthDay) -- In many parts of the United States, the infrastructure and systems to deliver health care during or after catastrophic disasters such as major earthquakes or widespread disease outbreaks are rudimentary at best, experts warn.

An Institute of Medicine (IOM) report released Wednesday provides a resource manual to help providers -- hospitals and outpatient clinics, public-health departments, emergency medical systems, public-safety agencies and government offices -- deliver health care as effectively as possible to the greatest number of people during a major disaster.

"When a truly catastrophic event occurs, the nation's health system will be under enormous stress," report committee chairman Lawrence

Gostin, associate dean and a professor of global health law at Georgetown University Law Center, said in an IOM news release.

The report recommends a systems-based approach to allocating resources and delivering care during catastrophic events. It also provides the organizations and agencies involved in [disaster planning](#) and response with tools and guidelines to help them identify their core functions during a [major disaster](#), the release said.

"Health professionals can bring the best care to the most people by using a systems approach that involves thoughtful coordination among all stakeholders and good planning and coordination among all levels of government," Gostin said. "This report provides an overarching framework for action in such events and provides detailed standards for each responsible group."

Only a few communities in the United States have the level of organization needed to provide oversight and care for a huge number of victims, according to the report.

"Crisis standards of care planning and implementation will significantly increase the likelihood of saved lives and reduced suffering when catastrophic disasters occur," [report](#) committee vice chairman Dan Hanfling, an [emergency physician](#) and special adviser on [emergency preparedness](#) and disaster response at Inova Health System in Falls Church, Va., said in the news release.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [emergency preparedness and response](#).

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