

Houston's low-income neighborhoods hit hardest when disaster strikes, study shows

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Houston's low-income neighborhoods bear the biggest burdens during

catastrophic events—from damage to older homes during natural disasters such as Hurricane Harvey and last year's winter storm to economic hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic—according to a Harris County Community Services Department analysis prepared by Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

The report found that the 13 Houston-area ZIP codes most affected by Hurricane Harvey, the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 freeze all have high social vulnerability, or negative effects on health and resources due to outside stressors. These areas include the neighborhoods of East Little York, Old Spanish Trail/South Union, Kashmere Gardens, Trinity Gardens and Sharpstown.

Even several months after the winter storm, the researchers said the greatest needs for these communities were not building materials or repairs but rather basic necessities such as food, utilities and assistance with rent or mortgage payments.

"This finding mirrors the Kinder Institute's research after Hurricane Harvey in 2017," said William Fulton, director of the institute. "Housing and home repairs are often not the highest priority after a disaster, especially for [low-income residents](#)."

The report said adding more multilingual and [transportation services](#) in low-income neighborhoods could help residents submit damage reports and access emergency shelters. Other must-haves for [disaster recovery](#) include cash assistance and programs that can help low-income communities with "preventive weatherization."

The researchers also wrote that grassroots organizations must play a deeper role in connecting residents to preparedness, response and recovery services.

"This study, coupled with the 'My Home is Here' housing survey, serve as vehicles for Harris County to determine and identify areas that habitually suffer from long-standing inequities after [natural disasters](#)," said Harris County Community Services Executive Director Adrienne Holloway. "The results of the combined research and input we gathered from over 17,000 county residents present us with a unique opportunity to put a plan in place that proactively and equitably protects residents and their homes."

The report was prepared for the Harris County Community Services Department. It utilized data from claims for individual assistance to the Federal Emergency Management Agency after Hurricane Harvey and the winter storm and unemployment insurance claims during the COVID-19 pandemic. The [report](#) also analyzed results from ReadyHarris and Connective surveys and focus groups with organizations serving the affected population.

More information: Report: kinder.rice.edu/research/harris-county-community-services-esilience-assessment

Provided by Rice University

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