



FAST FACTS

- Large (5+ magnitude) aftershocks continue to plague the southwest part of the island's coast, further extending recovery time and increasing emotional distress
- 43 formal shelters are now open—an increase of 13 since yesterday
- Shelters are now housing nearly 8,000 people—an increase of close to 3,200 from yesterday—with an additional estimated 4,000 in non-traditional shelters
- Highways and roadway closures continue to increase, as bridge damage and rockslides occur with aftershocks

SITUATION UPDATE

Following the 6.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Puerto Rico's southwest coast on January 7, aftershocks have continued to plague the region, with a 5.9 magnitude aftershock occurring on Saturday, January 11, and a 5.2 aftershock occurring before dawn on Wednesday, January 15. In the last seven days there have been 44 aftershocks above a 4.0, with four being over 5.0—many of which have occurred at night, greatly increasing the levels of anxiety and restlessness being experienced by both residents and responders. To make matters worse, many of the municipal workers tasked with managing the response are also survivors of the quakes, trying to juggle childcare, work obligations and home repairs.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and local municipalities increasingly are focusing on providing mass-care support to affected populations. FEMA is now in the process of establishing five base camps for survivors, and local municipalities are continuing to expand the number of shelters they are running, which are operating well beyond capacity and are struggling to maintain acceptable standards of public health.

Power generation has nearly been restored across Puerto Rico; however, temporary disruptions are frequent, especially following larger aftershocks. Wednesday, January 15, marked the first day that government offices and services reopened since the January 7 quake. Many of the buildings that house social services—including child-development programs like Head Start—are no longer standing or have been deemed unsafe for occupancy. As local governments try to return services to normal, municipal workers and first responders find themselves both survivors and recovery managers.

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS RESPONSE

International Medical Corps' team is deployed in the southwest, where it continues to provide crisis and psychological first aid (PFA) interventions. To increase coverage, staff has divided into two teams, and have reached the areas of Lajas and Las Arenas (in Guanica), and Comunidad Pierdras and Blancas (in Guayanilla). In addition to providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, the team has been distributing food items and canopies to support shelters as well as families who are in need of shelter.

The MHPSS teams, which have been on the ground conducting PFA interventions since Monday, January 13, have helped more than 150 people in official government shelters in Sabana Grande, Peñuelas, Lajas and Ponce, as well as people in non-traditional housing in unregistered camps in Guayanilla and Guanica. The teams also have provided interventions to public employees after municipal officials requested help for their employees, who had started showing symptoms of burnout, including crying and shaking.

Overcrowding in shelters is starting to raise concerns about communicable diseases. For example, the team received report today of a confirmed case of scabies in a shelter.

The Head of Nutrition for the Department of Health has requested International Medical Corps support for shelters in Guanica, due to reports of overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, domestic violence and the fact that many breastfeeding women are struggling to access sanitary locations to prepare food for their infants. International Medical Corps is sending a team of three nutrition specialists to the area tomorrow to conduct a needs assessment, provide education and develop an intervention plan.

Our staff continues to remain in close contact with national and municipal authorities, and International Medical Corps will expand our response and provide additional support if requested.



International Medical Corps MHPSS staff speak with displaced persons in the municipal shelter of Ponce, Puerto Rico.