



*Downed trees and damaged buildings in Lowndes County, Georgia.*

- ### FAST FACTS
- **Hurricane Helene** made landfall in Florida on September 26 as a Category 4 hurricane.
  - Helene then plowed through Georgia, the Carolinas and Tennessee, and is responsible for more than 165 confirmed deaths across six states, many thousands of injuries and power outages for millions of customers.
  - In 2024, there have been **10 named Atlantic storms**, including **five hurricanes** that have made landfall in the United States and Territories. These storms have caused more than **260 deaths** in the US and Territories alone.

- ### OUR RESPONSE
- In response to **Hurricane Helene**, International Medical Corps has deployed teams to Florida, Georgia and North Carolina, and is coordinating closely with partners in Tennessee to support response efforts there.
  - International Medical Corps has begun distributing urgently needed medical equipment and supplies to shelters, health clinics and other organizations to enable continuity of care across the region.

Hurricane Helene is responsible for at least 166 deaths across six states after making landfall on the Florida coast as a Category 4 hurricane on September 26.<sup>1</sup> This storm is one of the deadliest hurricanes to hit the US mainland in the last 50 years, second only to Hurricane Katrina. Hundreds of people remain unaccounted for, as search-and-rescue efforts continue.

Helene tore through unprepared communities in Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and as far north as Ohio with record-breaking winds, rainfall and landslides. Millions of customers remain without power or cell service, hundreds of thousands lack access to clean water, towns and communities are completely isolated as roads have been destroyed or closed, and entire regions are without shelter and supplies of medication.

Across almost all affected areas, there are major road closures—isolating individuals and communities, and leaving them without essential supplies such as water, food, medication and means of sanitation. The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency for Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee on September 30.<sup>2</sup>

In Georgia, the storm cut a straight line across the state. The National Guard has been deployed to the northern Georgia and to metropolitan Atlanta to support the response. Shelters are reportedly filled beyond capacity and are unable to maintain adequate hygiene and sanitation levels—119 boil-water notices have been initiated and nine wastewater systems are non-operational due to flooding, power loss or contamination, leaving communities, health clinics and homes at risk of health complications.

In eastern Tennessee, where more than 80 people are still reported missing, search efforts have been hampered because local roads remain closed due to debris, flooding or downed power lines, and 10 bridges have been deemed compromised due to flooding. Large regions within the state remain without running water. In South Carolina, more than 130 main roads remain closed. The lack of road access in all affected regions has halted and slowed supply for basic necessities and has impeded access to essential healthcare and medications.

<sup>1</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/helene-asheville-north-carolina-3f812f70c4d2649e2198362e9ae42b06>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2024/09/30/hhs-secretary-xavier-becerra-declares-public-health-emergency-south-carolina-tennessee-hurricane-helene.html>

Western North Carolina was the hardest-hit, with at least 57 deaths and hundreds of people still missing around the Asheville area alone. Nearly all roads in western North Carolina are closed, significantly affecting the movement of necessary food, water, supplies and services—particularly to rural communities that are now cut off. Many emergency shelters and health clinics across the state have reported depleted resources, and the situation remains dire as homes, businesses and health clinics are without running water. One North Carolina hospital has reported they are utilizing boxed water, as they are without pressurized water.

Health facilities as a whole are experiencing sanitation issues due to the lack of water and are running low on supplies, including medicines. As facilities are at capacity, and staffing and supplies limited, some patients are being discharged earlier than anticipated and advised to report to their primary-care physicians—however, most physician offices are not open, leaving patients without access to care.

Across the Southeast region, health clinics are experiencing staff shortages and are many still have not been in touch with their staff—a reflection of connectivity challenges and unknown conditions across the area. Some health staff who are available and at work say they are living at the health facilities to be able to take care of themselves and continue to provide care for people in their community.

As the full impact of Hurricane Helene unfolds, another tropical disturbance is building in the western Caribbean Sea, following a path very similar to Helene—raising significant concern for affected communities, as many may not have the capacity needed to withstand another storm.<sup>3</sup>

## International Medical Corps' Response

International Medical Corps is responding to Hurricane Helene across four states: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

We deployed a team to **Florida** on September 26 to liaise with the Florida Department of Health and the Department of Emergency Management, and support their response. The team has since met with Palms Medical Group, a federally qualified health center (FQHC) network, in Horseshoe and High Springs, and traveled to Perry, Keaton Beach and Steinhatchee (where the storm made landfall). The team assessed needs and distributed individual hygiene and wound care kits to the central distribution center in the area. Local organizations and residents have expressed significant need for healthcare services as they work to recover what is left of their belongings.



*An International Medical Corps team member distributes individual hygiene and wound-care kits to partners in Taylor County, Florida.*

We deployed a team to **Georgia** on September 29 to support response efforts and coordinate with the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency and local FQHCs. The team traveled to Augusta and then south to Valdosta in Lowndes County—the hardest-hit part of the state, where entire houses have been completely crushed by downed trees. Eighty-five percent of the county is still without power, with no clear indication of when it will be restored. For this county of 200,000 residents, the only functioning health facilities are two hospitals; all other health centers have been closed due to power outages, damage and lack of staff. The team distributed hygiene items—including hygiene kits, adult diapers and feminine hygiene supplies—to a Red Cross shelter, and are coordinating closely with several FQHCs in the county to identify their needs. Lowndes County has established four distribution centers and will open a fifth, as the centers are receiving nearly 300 people per hour looking for any useful items, such as tarps, hygiene kits or food. The functioning hospitals and offline health centers have expressed needs for hygiene and wound-care supplies, portable showers and washing machines, and other medical equipment and supplies. We will continue to coordinate with the county and local FQHCs to facilitate urgent care to residents.

International Medical Corps deployed a team to **North Carolina** on October 1 to coordinate with responders, assess the impact of the storm and support response efforts in the state. The team is in close coordination with the North Carolina Primary Care Association and other health clinic networks, and is participating in regular coordination calls to understand needs and provide support. Almost all health centers report similar conditions. Vast regions of communities have been completely cut off, due to impassable roads, making access in or out impossible. There is little to no cell service; little to no electricity, leading hospitals and health centers to rely on generators that require significant amounts of fuel; significant sanitation needs; increased need for behavioral health services; and a dwindling supply of oxygen and medication, leading to rationing by hospitals and health centers. In all affected areas, there is no running water, with early indications suggesting that it could be a month or more before water is restored. International Medical Corps is coordinating with local FQHCs that serve some of the hardest-hit areas of Buncombe, Hot Springs, Laurel, Mashburn and Transylvania, in

<sup>3</sup> <https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/2024-09-28-tropical-interest-area-caribbean-helene>

Jackson and Polk Counties, to identify ways to provide medical and mental health care, water and sanitation solutions, and other critical services. Health clinics in the affected areas have expressed an urgent need for portable oxygen tanks, baby formula, medications, adult diapers, hygiene materials, childcare services, patient/staff transport vehicles and water.

In **Tennessee**, International Medical Corps is partnering with two local FQHC networks to procure and distribute emergency and recovery supplies. Partners expressed that they were completely unprepared for Hurricane Helene, as this region has never experienced an emergency of this scale. With almost all of its clinic locations rendered non-operational after the storm, FQHC partner Cherokee Health System is looking to establish mobile clinics to reach isolated individuals and communities—including elderly patients. International Medical Corps is procuring response and relief supplies for each FQHC partner, including supplies for patients with chronic conditions and the elderly, and 300-gallon water bladders to facilitate water transport to mobile medical clinics.

In all impacted regions, community needs will continue to be significant, particularly for the elderly, bedridden and those with chronic disease or dependent on powered medical devices. Across the response, we are offering medical and behavioral-health surge staffing and support, as well as urgently needed supplies. We are facilitating procurements of emergency and recovery supplies for staff and patients of healthcare centers, working with FQHC partners. Other urgent needs across the Southeast region include emergency medical bags, blood pressure cuffs, respiratory therapy machines, adult diapers, small ice packs and coolers for medication, and glucometers. Additional needs include battery-operated fans, solar powered lanterns, cots, outdoor showers, mosquito repellent and hand sanitizers, among others.

### International Medical Corps in the US and Territories

International Medical Corps has been an emergency responder in the United States and Caribbean since 2005, when we partnered with local community clinics overwhelmed by Hurricane Katrina. In the US, International Medical Corps works with national, state and local partners in the healthcare system to address the significant challenges that face domestic healthcare services and deploys emergency response teams in response to disasters.

