

# FEMA's Commitment Remains Strong One Year After the Earthquakes

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*To date, the agency has awarded over \$313 million*

**GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico** — One year after several earthquakes shook municipalities in central, southern and western Puerto Rico, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved nearly \$313.5 million for emergency measures, rebuilding public facilities and to provide assistance to thousands of survivors.

This includes nearly \$71.5 million in Individual Assistance approved for over 14,000 survivors across 34 municipalities who lost their homes or whose homes suffered structural damage and needed immediate repairs. This also includes \$10.2 million for rental assistance to relocate families.

“Our team has worked tirelessly during this challenging year to help those in greatest need. The earthquakes defined the history of all Puerto Ricans and our efforts in this recovery will be just as significant,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, José Baquero Tirado.

Part of the funds allocated under the Individual Assistance program include over \$3 million earmarked to help survivors in Yauco. The mayor of this municipality, Angel L. Torres Ortiz, said these funds were allocated to the communities in most need. “It was a process of cooperation, a job that entailed over six months of recovery work. The experience of living through Hurricane María helped us to be more effective in our coordinated work with FEMA and all other agencies,” said the mayor.

Some families were able to keep their homes, but they required repairs to make them suitable to live in. This is the case of Rubén Sánchez Lugo and Ada Rodríguez Caraballo, residents of the Alturas del Cafetal neighborhood in Yauco. The couple, married for 48 years and with three children, received a grant that allowed them to repair their home after living at the temporary shelter that housed



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them after the earthquakes.

“Structurally, the house practically collapsed. If this tremor lasted two more seconds, the whole house would have fallen. FEMA's contribution was the most important thing because without that our situation wouldn't have changed,” said Sanchez Lugo, who received \$26,000 in assistance which enabled them to reinforce and repair the columns of his house.

On the other hand, Ottmar Chávez, Executive Director for COR3, said that one year after the earthquakes in Puerto Rico, FEMA is committed to helping the island continue its path to recovery. “Knowing that there is still work to be completed, we remain focused on helping applicants so that reimbursements are handled in a fast and responsible manner. We are grateful to the team that has been with us and has contributed to the goals we have accomplished,” he said.

The earthquakes caused unprecedented damage to public buildings in the municipalities. More than \$242 million in Public Assistance was approved for municipalities, government agencies and nonprofit organizations for emergency and restoration measures, such as demolishing unsafe structures and for the architectural and engineering design phase of several facilities, respectively. For example, reconstruction already began at the Agripina Seda Middle School, in Guánica, which will benefit over 400 students.

Also, part of these funds was awarded to the initial design phase, as in Ponce Municipality, which was obligated nearly \$73,000 for the architectural and engineering design costs of several facilities. Among these are the Juan "Pachín" Vicens auditorium, the official home of the Leones de Ponce basketball team; Villa Pesquera in the Playa neighborhood; Carlos Garay public transportation terminal, which provides SITRAS bus service throughout the city for the benefit of 91,000 residents; and the Moscoso Building, a historically valuable structure in the city of Ponce that is part of the City Hall.

Similarly, over 1,800 people who live in Barrio Caña in Guánica will benefit from repairs to the potable water distribution system, thanks to an obligation to the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority.

“We understand the stress and anxiety that a disaster of this magnitude may cause. This is why, in addition to the aforementioned assistance, our grant



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programs include funding for crisis counseling until May 2021. This assistance is available through the Pas Hotline (*Línea Pas*) at 1-800-981-0023. The assistance is free, confidential and is available 24 hours a day,” concluded Baquero Tirado.

For more information on Puerto Rico's recovery from the earthquakes, visit [fema.gov/disaster/4473](https://fema.gov/disaster/4473) and [recuperacion.pr](https://recuperacion.pr). Follow us on social networks at [Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico](https://Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico), [Facebook.com/COR3pr](https://Facebook.com/COR3pr) and on [Twitter @COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).

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