

# ICYMI -- FEMA Administrator Announces Sweeping Changes to Disaster Assistance Program to Make it Easier for Survivors to Receive Assistance

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WASHINGTON -- Last week, FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell announced the most comprehensive updates to FEMA's Individual Assistance Program in the past 20 years. After seeing how the limitations of federal assistance have delayed disaster recovery for too many, especially for those who are disproportionately affected by disasters, the Biden-Harris Administration was determined to make changes to help reach more people.

“By making it easier for people to apply for and receive assistance, we are going to help them become more prepared and more resilient for the next threat that may come their way while removing barriers for their long-term recovery,” said Administrator Criswell. “It truly fills me with great pride to know that we continue to look for ways to prioritize disaster survivors in everything that we do.”

These planned updates to reform the Individual Assistance program will:

- establish new benefits that provide flexible funding directly to survivors when they need it most.
- cut red tape and expand eligibility to reach more people and help them recover faster, while building back stronger.
- simplify the application process to meet survivors' individual needs and meet people where they are.

With the increase of extreme weather events fueled by climate change, these updates will provide survivors with faster and easier access to resources they need after disasters. Find the full details on the new changes [here](#).



These new changes will go into effect for disasters declared on or after March 22, 2024.

*Read more below.*

**Washington Post:** [‘We can do better’: FEMA makes sweeping changes to speed up disaster aid](#) [Brianna Sacks, Brady Dennis, 1/19/24]

Responding to frustrations from impacted communities across the United States, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced Friday that it is making sweeping changes so that more disaster victims get financial assistance faster and with fewer rules, red tape and delays.

“We can do better. Survivors deserve better,” FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said in a call with reporters. “We are breaking records year after year with these disasters and we need to be better prepared and informed to recover faster and more effectively.”

**Associated Press:** [Recovering from natural disasters is slow and bureaucratic. New FEMA rules aim to cut the red tape](#) [Rebecca Santana, 1/19/24]

Anyone who has lived through a natural disaster and then applied to the federal government for assistance knows that it can be a lengthy, frustrating and bureaucratic process. New rules announced Friday by the federal agency in charge of emergency management aim to simplify and speed up the process. [...] “Mother Nature is not letting up,” Criswell said to reporters on a call announcing the changes. “We need to be better prepared and better informed to recover from natural disasters faster and more effectively.”

**The New York Times:** [As Climate Shocks Worsen, FEMA Tries a New Approach to Aid](#) [Christopher Flavelle, 1/19/24]

Changes include immediate cash for more evacuees, and more money for temporary housing and for repairing damaged homes.

The Biden administration is overhauling the country’s disaster assistance programs, expanding aid for survivors of hurricanes, wildfires and other



catastrophes and making it easier to access. The shift, announced on Friday by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, comes amid a growing number of climate-related disasters. It follows years of criticism surrounding the agency's aid programs, which experts have said are insufficient, too hard to access and disproportionately benefit wealthier and white Americans.

"Survivors deserve better," said Deanne Criswell, the FEMA administrator. "We're connecting people with the help that they need on their worst day."

**CNN:** [FEMA overhauls disaster assistance program as climate crisis fuels more destructive extreme weather](#) [Ella Nielsen, 1/19/24]

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is changing the way it responds to natural disasters, it announced Friday, as the climate crisis fuels more extreme weather events and causes more destruction to people's homes.

The measures include giving wider access to an immediate \$750 per person impacted by extreme weather, which can include storms, hurricanes, fires and tornadoes. The rules will take effect on March 22.

The overhaul of FEMA's system comes after years of criticism that disaster survivors have to jump through hoops to access assistance that's needed immediately. Other criticisms include inequity of who can access help, and inadequate payouts to help people rebuild damaged homes.

**E&E News (hosted by POLITICO):** [FEMA overhauls disaster aid to give people more money](#) [Tom Frank, 1/19/24]

People uprooted by natural disasters will be eligible for tens of thousands of additional dollars from the federal government through sweeping changes announced Friday morning by the Biden administration.

The revisions amount to an unprecedented and costly overhaul of federal disaster aid for households and individuals, who typically receive only a few thousand dollars and often struggle to pay for emergency housing or home repairs.



“This is going to be a transformative change for these disaster survivors,” said Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The changes involve FEMA disaster aid that’s given out in the immediate aftermath of highly damaging hurricanes, wildfires and other events.

**Reuters:** [US launches disaster relief reforms as climate-driven events rise](#)

[Valerie Volcovici, 1/19/24]

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Friday said it was launching the most major reforms to disaster management relief in two decades as climate change-driven extreme weather events, such as floods and fires, increase.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reforms of its federal assistance policies and expanded benefits for disaster survivors aim to cut red tape that victims have said makes it difficult for them to access resources after a disaster.

**Univision:** [FEMA anuncia cambios en su forma de ayudar a los damnificados tras desastres naturales](#) | [Shows Noticiero Univision](#) | [Univision](#)

[Lourdes Del Rio, 1/21/24]

La Agencia Federal de Gestión de Emergencias (FEMA) anunció que está cambiando la forma en que responde al impacto devastador de algunos fenómenos naturales. Estos ajustes llegan tras varios años de críticas por las trabas burocráticas que debían enfrentar los damnificados para acceder a las ayudas. Un portavoz de la agencia nos explica sobre los cambios.

**Houston Chronicle:** [FEMA is changing the way it assists people after disasters. Here's how.](#) [R.A. Schuetz, 1/19/24]

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is poised to make what it calls the biggest overhaul to its individual assistance program in 20 years. The changes aim to help more people more quickly in the wake of a disaster.

[...]“We are eliminating red tape, expanding eligibility and adding new benefits,” Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said on a media call



Thursday afternoon.

Criswell said the changes were inspired by many conversations with survivors in the wake of disasters. A FEMA news release also said that the changes were “in response to threats the nation faces due to our changing climate.”

**Miami Herald:** [FEMA changes promise faster help — and more up-front cash — for hurricane survivors](#) [Alex Harris, 1/19/24]

The next time a hurricane rakes across Florida, storm victims will likely get more help, faster.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration announced Friday that it’s slashing red tape and speeding up the post-disaster aid process starting on March 22.

[...] “We are taking critical steps to remove the barriers and make it easier for survivors to apply for and receive the benefits they are entitled to,” FEMA Administrator [Deanne Criswell](#) said during a Thursday press conference. “We can do better. Survivors deserve better.”

**El Nuevo Día:** [FEMA propone agilizar la entrega de asistencia por desastres y otorgar fondos por desplazamientos temporales - El Nuevo Día \(elnuevodia.com\)](#) [José A. Delgado, 1/19/24]

La Agencia Federal para el Manejo de Emergencias (FEMA) anunció hoy que impulsará una reforma en su programa de asistencia a individuos para desastres para permitir el acceso inmediato a \$750 para gastos de alojamiento y necesidades básicas de emergencia, sin esperar por una solicitud del gobierno de la jurisdicción impactada.

**Houma Courier-Thibodaux Daily Comet (Louisiana):** [FEMA announces overhaul of disaster aid, streamlines and expands relief programs](#) [Colin Campo, 1/19/24]



FEMA is publishing changes Monday that will make aid easier to access and offer more ways to assist survivors.

FEMA is changing its Individual and Households Program in numerous ways that are intended to provide aid faster, require less paperwork and extend the time to apply for help. These changes will be published Monday and affect any disaster declared after March 22, so it won't affect those still recovering from Hurricane Ida.

The changes will cost \$671 million a year, officials said, and are a result of feedback from survivors.

**WEKU (Kentucky): [FEMA says survivor assistance program reforms are biggest improvements in 20 years after talking with Kentucky flood survivors](#) [John McGary, 1/21/24]**

Tornadoes struck Bowling Green in 2020 and Mayfield in 2021. The following year, historic floods left portions of eastern Kentucky uninhabitable. Friday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency unveiled what officials call the biggest improvements to its survivor assistance program in two decades. Jaclyn Rothenberg is FEMA's Director of Public Affairs.

"They will establish new benefits and provide flexible funding to help survivors when they need it the most. It's going to cut red tape and expand eligibility to reach more people and help them recover faster and build back even stronger than before."

**Milwaukee Courier: [Biden-Harris Administration Reforms Disaster Assistance Program to Help Survivors Recover Faster - Milwaukee Courier Weekly Newspaper \(milwaukeecourieronline.com\)](#) [Karen Stokes, 1/20/24]**

On Friday, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell announced that FEMA is revamping its federal assistance policies.

[...] FEMA developed these measures by directly considering survivor feedback and addressing climate-related threats, ultimately striving for more equitable



outcomes across communities through increased accessibility and eligibility for post-disaster support.

“We went big and bold so we could break down barriers and help people recover faster. This is the most comprehensive update to our Individual Assistance Program in 20 years,” said Criswell.

