

## *Enhancing Coordination of Behavioral Health Services after Superstorm Sandy: Planning for Future Disasters*

Victims of natural disasters are often at higher risk of acute or chronic behavioral health issues such as post-traumatic stress, depression, and suicide. While disaster-related issues subside over time, evidence shows that victims can experience a prolonged period of elevated risk, especially those with pre-existing chronic behavioral health issues. Elderly victims are at greater risk of deteriorating health, depression, and increased isolation.

### Project Overview

Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. (HQSI), the federally-designated quality improvement organization for New Jersey, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, is working on a project to help selected communities affected by Superstorm Sandy develop targeted, community-based approaches to future disasters.

This project aims to:

- Increase Medicare-covered depression screenings among at-risk beneficiaries residing in the 10 targeted communities
- Use [behavioral health profiles](#) based on Medicare data to enhance community capacity for coordination of behavioral health services during and after a disaster

### HQSI Actions

- Get subject matter expert (SME) feedback on profiles and project activities
- Help local champions, providers, and stakeholders use the profiles to:
  - Enhance community capacity (i.e., identify opportunities for improvement)
  - Facilitate self-direction
  - Implement disaster planning activities to enhance care continuity/services for those at risk



### Outcomes

HQSI expects the project to: (1) increase Medicare depression screening rates, (2) expand community capacity to address disaster-related behavioral health issues across the continuum of care, and (3) encourage communities to prepare for future disasters through action and sustainability plans.

For additional information, visit our website at [www.hqsi.org](http://www.hqsi.org).  
Click on the *Superstorm Sandy* tab at the top of the home page.