
Iowa Fiscal Partnership

www.iowafiscal.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2008
CONTACT: MIKE OWEN (319) 338-0773 or ipp@lcom.net

Low-Income Challenges After Iowa's Floods New Risks to Families Struggling in Already Soft Economy

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Aug. 19, 2008) — Iowa's flood-recovery planning must recognize challenges faced by low-income families, according to a new report that notes low-income flood victims were already at the margins in a sluggish Iowa economy before the floods.

"Experience shows that, in the best of circumstances, it is a long road to recovery for families with the fewest economic resources," said Lily French, a research associate for the Iowa Policy Project (IPP) and one of the authors of the report for the Iowa Fiscal Partnership, a joint policy analysis effort of IPP and the Child & Family Policy Center (CFPC) in Des Moines.

"The experiences of flooding in Grand Forks, N.D., and New Orleans tell us that low-income families can be devastated for years. In both cases, vulnerable residents struggled and many did not return to their home communities. This is more than a matter of economics, but also a concern about their self-identification and social stability."

The report is the fourth in a series by the Iowa Fiscal Partnership (IFP) examining issues for public policy responses as the Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission nears its recommendations to state leaders following devastating floods in mid-June.

IFP recommends three policy principles to most effectively help flood victims and most efficiently use public resources: Responses must be timely, targeted and transitional.

According to the report, experience of other disasters shows more affluent and moderate-income residents are better positioned to cope with major disruptions and crises in their lives following disasters.

"Low-income residents have a bigger challenge to regain stability in their lives — particularly in securing affordable housing, child care and employment. This is especially true for low-income elderly and single mothers," said Victor Elias, senior associate for CFPC.

The report covers issues of child care, affordable housing, transportation, job loss and food costs.

It notes an estimated 2,500 children may have been affected through the closing and relocation of 113 licensed preschools, child-care centers, Head Start sites and registered child-care homes.

— m o r e —

The Iowa Policy Project

318 2nd Ave. N
Mount Vernon, IA 52314
(319) 338-0773 • www.iowapolicyproject.org

CHILD & FAMILY POLICY CENTER

1021 Fleming Building • 218 Sixth Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50309
(515) 280-9027 • www.cfpciowa.org

“Rearranging child care is a strain for anybody in this situation, but low-income families have greater challenges due to cost, nontraditional work schedules and public transportation arrangements,” French said.

It also points out early reports indicated Cedar Rapids alone had 3,900 homes with flood damage, with a loss of one-quarter of its affordable housing.

“A housing shortage after a flood drives up rent, which makes it difficult for displaced families looking for a place to live,” French said. “Higher costs and a loss of rental units stress a need to focus on maintaining affordable housing options for displaced residents.”

French said state and federal services can provide “an initial safety net, but accessing these programs can be difficult and time-consuming for applicants.”

“State officials have worked with federal officials to make adjustments in guidelines, where appropriate, to get resources to people in need,” French said.

The report suggests using public assistance programs to provide information to displaced families about post-disaster services, which can help them decide whether, and how, to return to their home community. It also proposes funding to provide services to vulnerable families over an extended period.

It also recommends:

- Addressing the need for services critical to low-income families, such as affordable housing and child care.
- Helping displaced child-care providers get back in business, encouraging ways to assure space and replacement of lost equipment.
- Identifying opportunities for flood victims to be part of the cleanup and recovery effort.
- Involving low-income people and advocates in the planning process for recovery.

“We must recognize that challenges for low-income people are magnified after a disaster, and without an effective response, they can result in instability that will take years to correct, with many falling through the cracks in the meantime,” Elias said.

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint initiative of the Iowa Policy Project and the Child & Family Policy Center, two nonprofit, nonpartisan Iowa-based organizations that cooperate in analysis of tax policy and budget issues facing Iowans. IFP reports are available on the web at <http://www.iowafiscal.org>.

#