

# NURSES AND VOLUNTEER DISASTER RESPONSE:

# 6 THINGS TO KNOW Before You Go



As a nurse and compassionate caregiver, your heart will always go out to victims of natural or man-made disasters. Your skills will be needed in the aftermath, and you might want to rush to the scene to help. But serving in disaster response – anywhere in the U.S. and beyond – is a big decision.

Prepare yourself with information before you decide that you're truly ready, willing, and able to go. To get you started, here are six things to explore.



# 1

## DO A SELF-ASSESSMENT

Take a hard, honest look at your personal circumstances. Ask yourself: Is there anything in my health history that might limit my ability to work potentially grueling hours with few, if any, resources? Would my absence present a hardship for my family and/or pets? Is taking time away from work financially feasible? Will my employer support my volunteer service?

# 2

## SEEK OUT LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS

Find out whether your state, or any state that you're headed to, participate in the Nurse Licensure Compact, which affords licensure reciprocity (i.e., no additional nursing licensure needed). In the alternative, some states allow reciprocity of valid nursing licenses on a temporary basis during disasters. Visit the applicable state nursing association's website for info.

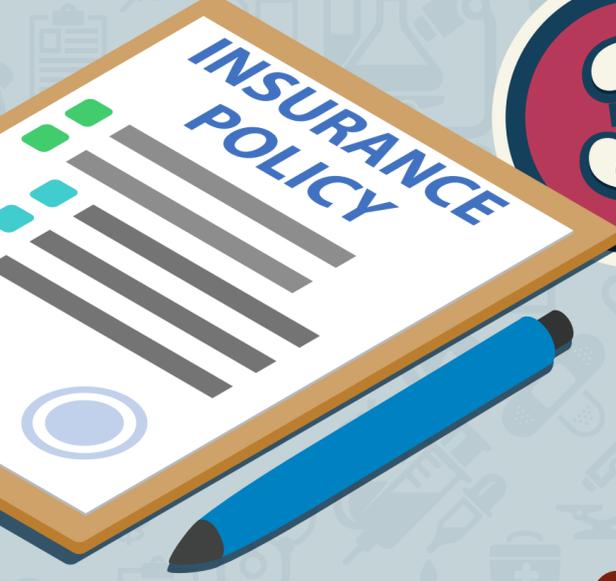
Never practice in a state without a valid reciprocal or temporary license, even in a catastrophe. You could face criminal or civil charges.



# 3

## REVIEW YOUR MALPRACTICE INSURANCE

Determine whether your malpractice insurance covers practicing nursing during a disaster. Even in emergency situations, nurses might be held liable for negligent care. Most state laws offer protection against malpractice claims only to volunteer nurses who participate as part of a recognized disaster response system.



# 4

## KNOW THE LAW

Each state has enacted laws and created regulations that govern volunteer service. Before you volunteer, be fully aware of your rights and responsibilities under the laws of your state. In California, the relevant legislation/regulations include (but are not limited to):

Disaster Service Worker Volunteer Program Regulations, California Code of Regulations

California Health and Safety Code, Medical Disasters

Good Samaritan Act, California Health and Safety Code

The Volunteer Protection Act of 1997



# 5

## NEVER GO AT IT ALONE

Experts advise nurses to always work through an emergency response organization or system. You'll be in a disaster zone to help, not become a victim yourself. Working through an organization makes you known to command and control professionals who will direct you to sites where you're most needed.

Leading emergency response organizations, through which many state and local charitable organizations coordinate, include:



# 6

## REGISTER AS A VOLUNTEER AHEAD OF TIME

The Federal Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Professionals permits pre-registering and pre-credentialing of nurses and other healthcare professionals who anticipate serving in disaster response. Each state coordinates with the federal program through its own registry. In California, the registry is called "Disaster Healthcare Volunteers," or DHV. Pre-registration as a volunteer ensures ahead of time that your license and credentials are valid and that you've received training in disaster response. It helps programs like DHV deploy emergency resources quickly and efficiently. Learn more in this [detailed guide](#) for California volunteers.

