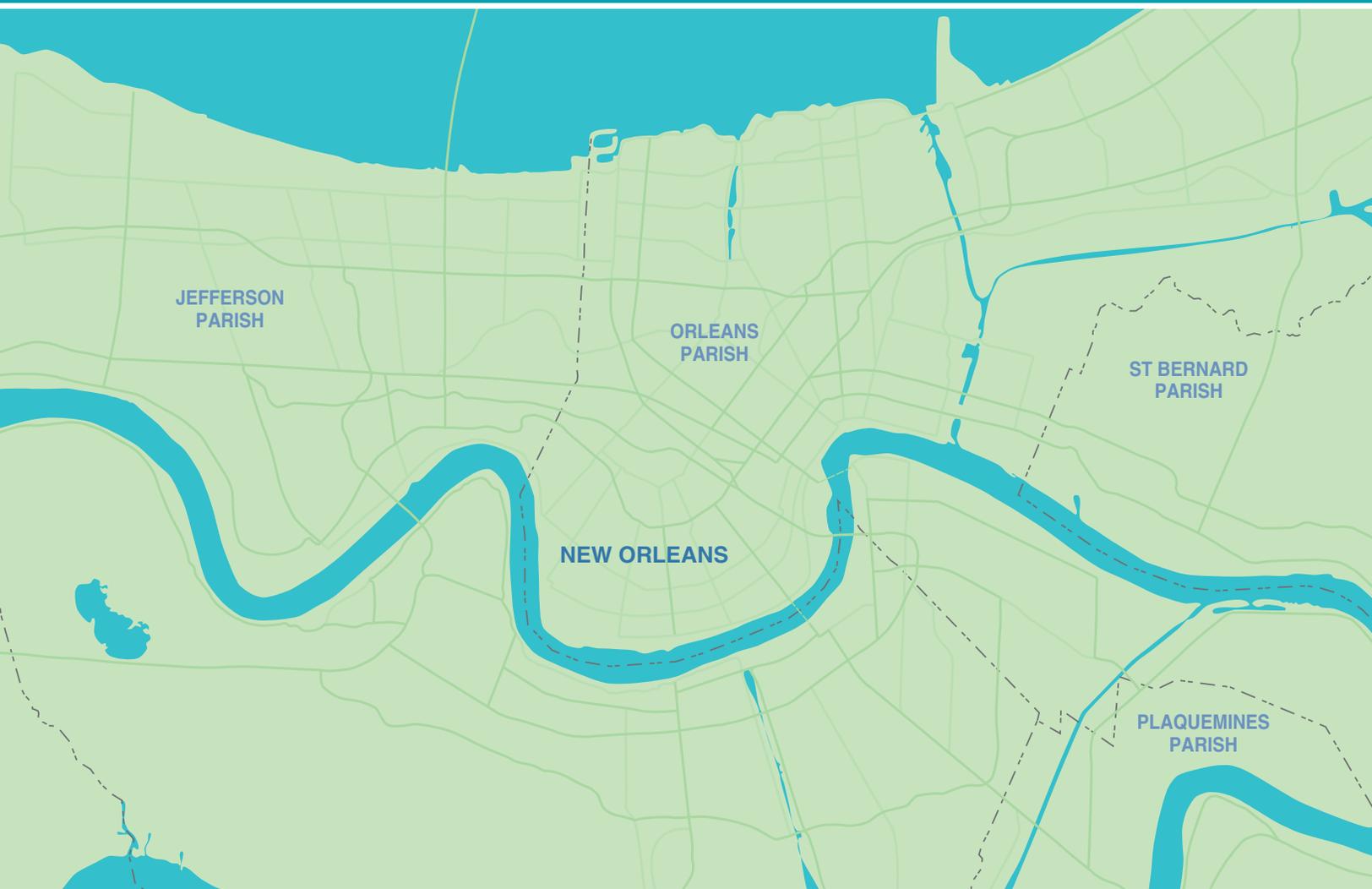


GIVING VOICE TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW ORLEANS: The Kaiser Post-Katrina Baseline Survey



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One year after Hurricane Katrina and the devastating levee breaches that followed in its wake, the Kaiser Family Foundation sent a team to the New Orleans area to conduct a comprehensive in-person survey. The aim of the project: to offer residents and the reconstruction effort a window into the changing shape and changing needs of the area's population, and to give people a channel to express their views of the rebuilding process as it moves forward. Another critical purpose of this and all of Kaiser's work in New Orleans is to help keep the facts about the challenges still present in the city and the surrounding region before the nation.

In deference to the particular challenges posed by surveying an area whose geography and population have shifted so massively, the survey was conducted the old-fashioned way – house to house, and face to face among 1,504 randomly selected adults living in Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes.

This baseline survey is the first of three similar surveys the Foundation plans to conduct in the New Orleans area at approximately 18-month intervals.

KEY FINDINGS

The Storm: Measuring Personal Impact

Hurricane Katrina, and the failure of government at all levels to respond to it more effectively, was personally devastating for a large percentage of the Greater New Orleans population in ways that continue to reverberate today. Overall, a third of Greater New Orleans residents (32 percent) said their life remains “very disrupted” or “somewhat disrupted” by the storm. This rose to 59 percent among African Americans living in Orleans Parish.

Measuring across seven wide-ranging areas of well-being, the survey found that the vast majority (81 percent) of those now living in Greater New Orleans have suffered some setback since the storm. More than half (55 percent) reported impacts in more than one domain.¹ Those in more heavily flooded Orleans Parish were particularly hard hit, with two-thirds reporting problems in two or more areas, compared with about half of those in Jefferson.

- The most commonly reported setbacks were in area residents' **financial situation**. Half said that their finances had suffered after Katrina, either generally, in terms of higher housing costs, or because of insurance claims that were not paid. For example, 33 percent said their monthly housing costs had risen “a lot,” and 13 percent said they have been denied or unreasonably delayed payment on a Katrina-related insurance claim.
- In a related domain, roughly one in six (17 percent) have suffered a setback on the **employment** front, either in terms of being newly unemployed (6 percent) or being in a job with lower pay or worse benefits.
- Nearly four in ten area residents (37 percent) said they had experienced some major **life disruption in their housing situation or in their social network**. This includes 17 percent who said they had been forced to move from their homes for more than three months, and 14 percent who lost a family member or close friend as a result of the storm.

¹ See “Appendix C: Creating aggregate impact and problem measures” for a description of the areas of impact measured and how they were created.

- More than a third of those living in Greater New Orleans (36 percent) have seen their **access to health care** deteriorate since the storm. One in five (22 percent) rated the way their health needs were being met as worse than before Katrina, and nearly as many (18 percent) said it was now harder for them to get to their regular place of care.
- One in five (19 percent) said their **physical health** has declined since the storm, and one in six (16 percent) reported some deterioration in their **mental health**.
- For one in four residents (23 percent), the **stress of the storm affected their behaviors** in ways that could endanger relationships. Seventeen percent said they have had a harder time controlling their temper since the storm, 14 percent said the storm and its aftermath had caused some level of stress in their marriage or serious relationship (including 3 percent overall and 5 percent in Orleans Parish who said their marriage ended as a result), and one in ten (9 percent) said they have increased their alcohol use.

Overall quality of life ratings were down substantially. While 65 percent said they were “very satisfied” with their quality of life before the hurricane, only 34 percent in the area overall (and just a quarter in Orleans Parish) said the same about their current quality of life.

Finally, one positive impact of the storm: three in four said their experiences with Katrina will make them better able to cope with future challenges.

State of the Population: A Portrait of Challenges Facing Current Residents

As officials attempt to rebuild, the survey provides a measure of the ongoing needs of the Greater New Orleans population, particularly in the areas of health, health care and employment. Results suggest that these needs are substantial. Fully three in four area residents (77 percent) said that they or their children were facing a challenge in one of these key areas of well-being, and more than four in ten (44 percent) reported facing problems in two or more areas.² More than half (52 percent) of those in Orleans Parish were facing problems in two or more areas, compared with four in ten (41 percent) of those in Jefferson.

More than four in ten area residents (43 percent) reported having a chronic condition or disability, or being in fair or poor health. Two in ten (18 percent) faced a serious mental health challenge.

Health needs are exacerbated by the fact that fully half of residents living in the New Orleans area reported facing some problem in getting medical care. One in four (27 percent) said their usual source of care when facing an illness or injury was a hospital emergency room, or that they had no usual source of care. One in four non-elderly adults (25 percent) reported being uninsured. And about one in eight overall (12 percent) said it is difficult for them to get to their place of care, including 42 percent of those dependent on public transportation.

Among those area residents whose households include children under age 19, a third (32 percent) reported that there was a child in the home with a serious health need or a potential problem getting access to health care.

One in four (27 percent) residents overall reported having some serious employment-related problem, either unemployment or employment in a job that doesn’t pay enough to cover basic expenses.

² See “Appendix C: Creating aggregate impact and problem measures” for a description of the problems measured and how the categories were created.

Priorities, Progress and Worries: New Orleans Area Residents Rate the Rebuilding Process

The study found a population both optimistic and worried about the recovery effort, one that was underwhelmed but not discontented with the progress being made in most areas, and in general felt the rebuilding effort was going in the right direction.

There is a considerable well of optimism in the area. Overall, 69 percent said they were optimistic about the future of Greater New Orleans. Almost as many, 63 percent, said that the recovery and rebuilding effort was generally going in the right direction.

Residents were also united on the broad questions: 75 percent said low-lying areas destroyed by the flood should be rebuilt. A nearly unanimous 95 percent supported rebuilding the levees beyond their pre-Katrina capacity. And most – 86 percent – said they were planning to stay in the area; just 11 percent were considering moving.

At the same time, many felt that New Orleans has fallen off Washington's agenda. Half (51 percent) said they felt the rebuilding of New Orleans was not a priority for Congress and the president. And relatively few (9 percent) said they thought federal officials were "very prepared" to deal with future hurricanes. Asked to prioritize recovery tasks, the public's top issues were preparing for the next storm (54 percent), controlling crime (48 percent), and getting medical facilities up and running (41 percent).

That emphasis on inadequacies in the health care system was reflected throughout the survey: nearly nine in ten residents (88 percent) said they felt there were not enough hospitals or other medical facilities to take care of people in New Orleans. Many residents were also worried about health care services not being available when they need them (81 percent). Perhaps as a result, more than nine in ten said they would support each of three proposed options to expand access for low-income residents: building a new hospital to replace Charity Hospital, building more community clinics to offer basic care, and expanding public health insurance programs like Medicaid and LaCHIP.

When it comes to judging progress, most said they saw at least some progress being made on seven of the ten recovery efforts measured on the survey, including restoring basic services (85 percent said "a lot" or "some" progress), getting schools up and running (75 percent), preparing for the next storm (69 percent), and getting medical services up and running (66 percent). By contrast, the majority saw little to no progress in three areas: public safety (60 percent said "not too much" or "no progress"), rebuilding destroyed neighborhoods (59 percent) and providing affordable housing (57 percent).

As the June 1 start of the hurricane season approaches, nearly nine in ten (86 percent) expressed at least some worry that the levees will not be rebuilt with enough strength. Almost as many (78 percent) were worried about another hurricane hitting the area.

A Special Focus on Race in Orleans Parish

Across a variety of measures – from those tied to particular impacts of the storm to those that provide an estimate of basic life challenges – African Americans living in Orleans Parish stand out as disproportionately affected. They also stand out as more likely to feel aggrieved in the rebuilding process.

African Americans in Orleans Parish were particularly likely to report that their lives were still "very" or "somewhat" disrupted (59 percent) compared to their white neighbors in the parish (29 percent). Similarly, and no doubt related, they were more likely to be living in areas that had an average of 2 feet or more of flooding (58 percent, compared to 34 percent of whites).

African Americans in the city were consistently more likely than whites to report setbacks in their quality of life since Katrina. In particular, they were more likely to report that their personal financial situation was worse than before the storm (47 compared to 32 percent of whites), and that their housing costs had gone up substantially (56 percent versus 42 percent).

These differences in storm-related impact are dwarfed by the differences in life challenges faced by the two populations. African Americans in the city were more than twice as likely to report some sort of ongoing problem in health care access or coverage – fully 72 percent did, compared to 32 percent of whites. For example, nearly half of African Americans reported relying on an emergency room for care, or had no place of care, compared to 15 percent of whites. And a third of African American adults in the parish reported being uninsured, compared to 12 percent of white adults. They were five times more likely to say traveling to care was difficult (26 percent compared to 5 percent).

In addition, there was a large gulf in reported employment-related challenges, with more than twice as many African Americans as whites reporting being unemployed or employed in jobs that didn't pay enough (46 percent compared to 17 percent).

The survey also recorded some striking differences of opinion on the fairness of the rebuilding process. Specifically, a majority of African Americans in Orleans Parish (55 percent) said they believed they were "being given worse treatment and opportunities in the rebuilding process" than whites. In comparison, 19 percent of whites in the parish held a similar belief regarding the treatment of African Americans. African Americans were also somewhat more likely than whites to say that race relations in greater New Orleans have gotten worse since Katrina (42 percent did, compared to 29 percent of whites).

This community is also markedly more worried about a range of problems facing residents. The survey found African Americans in Orleans Parish were at least twenty percentage points more likely than whites to be very concerned that health care services may not be available when they need them, that they might not have enough money to make ends meet, and that they won't be able to afford decent housing.

NEXT STEPS

This first Kaiser survey of the New Orleans area is a baseline, an initial step in understanding the impact of Katrina, the needs of the area's changed population, and the challenges residents of the Greater New Orleans area are facing. Future reports on this survey will focus more narrowly on specific aspects of the rebuilding process, in particular the health care needs and priorities of the population. The Foundation also plans to follow up with two more surveys, to be fielded at roughly 18 month intervals. We are committed to revisiting these and any new issues that arise in New Orleans in the next phase of the Kaiser post-Katrina survey project.

A NOTE ON SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The *Kaiser Post-Katrina Baseline Survey of the New Orleans Area* was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation. This in-person survey was conducted door-to-door from September 12 to November 13, 2006. Interviews were completed in English and Spanish among 1,504 randomly selected adults ages 18 and older residing in Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard parishes. These four neighboring parishes make up Region 1 as defined by Louisiana's Department of Health and Hospitals, an administrative region used for recovery planning. The sample design was a stratified area probability sample, with 456 sampling points distributed proportionate to expected population size in each of the four parishes, and in each of fourteen Census tract defined neighborhoods in Orleans Parish. An oversample was drawn in Orleans to allow for more detailed analysis of this area; final results have been weighted so that each parish reflects its estimated share of the area's population. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is plus or minus 4 percentage points; for results based on Orleans Parish or Jefferson Parish it is plus or minus 5 percentage points. For results based on other subsets of respondents the margin of sampling error may be higher. ICR/International Communications Research collaborated with Kaiser researchers on sample design and weighting, and supervised the fieldwork. See "Appendix D: Survey Methodology" for more details on survey sampling, fieldwork, and weighting.

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