

# American Red Cross Guide to Services



**American  
Red Cross**

## Mission of the American Red Cross

The American Red Cross, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers and guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, will provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies.



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## American Red Cross Guide to Services

Each and every day, the more than 600 chapters and 36 Blood Services regions of the American Red Cross provide assistance and resources to communities across the United States. This *American Red Cross Guide to Services* will help you learn more about our five major lines of service.

Whether it is a hurricane or a heart attack; a call for blood or a call for help, the American Red Cross is there.

## American Red Cross Congressional Charter

The American Red Cross is chartered by Congress. Under the Congressional Charter, the organization's mission is defined, as is its governance structure (36 U.S.C. §300101, et. Seq.). The charter also codifies that the American Red Cross and its chapters are a single national corporation organized to help fulfill United States treaty obligations under the Geneva Conventions. The charter mandates that the Red Cross maintain a system of domestic and international disaster relief, and entrusts the organization to serve as a medium of communication between members of the military and their families.

In May 2007, the American National Red Cross Governance Modernization Act (P.L. 110-26) was enacted into law. This legislation amended the Red Cross Congressional Charter for the first time in 60 years. While the American Red Cross works closely with governments at all levels, it is an independent, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

### The American Red Cross is a network of—

- More than 600 locally supported chapters.
- 36 Blood Services regions.
- 7 Blood Services divisions.
- 58 Service to the Armed Forces stations.
- Nearly 20 International Offices.

*In one of its first disaster relief operations, the American Red Cross set up feeding stations and provided medical care after the Johnstown, Pa., flood in 1889.*



American Red Cross Photo Archives



## American Red Cross

For more than 125 years, the mission of the American Red Cross has been to help individuals and families prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. The Red Cross provides disaster relief assistance to those affected by natural and human-caused disasters.

Every day through the American Red Cross, people mobilize to help their neighbors. More than half a million volunteers and 30,000 employees of the Red Cross, many from communities like yours, help provide these life-changing and often lifesaving services.

The Red Cross is not a government agency; it relies on generous donations of time, money and blood to do its work. An average of 91 cents of every dollar the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs.

Governed by volunteers and supported by voluntary donations, the American Red Cross is a network of—

- More than 600 locally supported chapters.
- 36 Blood Services regions.
- 7 Blood Services divisions.
- 58 Service to the Armed Forces stations.
- Nearly 20 International Offices.

The Red Cross provides a unique, community-based network focused on the following five major areas of service.

### **Helping Disaster Victims**

People affected by disaster need to know that they have a place to stay, food to eat and emotional support as they take the first steps to recovery.

Each year, the American Red Cross responds to more than 70,000 disasters nationwide. While the vast majority of these disasters are single-family and apartment home fires, the American Red Cross stands ready to support all affected in their immediate emergency needs. In addition to those individuals affected by a disaster, the American Red Cross provides immediate support to first responders.

Through our Red Cross chapter network, we are able to participate in federal, state and local government agency disaster planning exercises and response efforts. We work closely with FEMA as co-leaders of the mass care portion of Emergency Support Function #6 of the National Response Framework. The Red Cross also partners with community organizations and corporate supporters to provide emergency shelter, food and health and mental health services as well as resources and referrals to aid in recovery.

### **Connecting the Armed Forces With Their Families**

Long separations caused by military service create special needs for military families. The Red Cross provides support to active-duty military members, National Guard and Reserve members, veterans and their families. We also provide emergency communication services, support for the sick and wounded at military and veterans hospitals and assistance in obtaining emergency financial support.

### **Teaching Lifesaving Skills**

American Red Cross training and educational programs help to save lives and empower people to respond to disasters and other life-threatening emergencies. The American Red Cross helps ensure that individuals, families and organizations are prepared for disasters and other life-threatening emergencies through developing and implementing lifesaving training and education programs and materials. More than 15 million people each year gain lifesaving skills and preparedness information—including first aid, CPR and the use of defibrillators—through their local Red Cross chapter. As a result, our communities are safer because of Red Cross training.

### **Collecting, Testing and Supplying Blood Across Our Nation**

For more than 50 years, the American Red Cross has been committed to ensuring the availability of the safest possible blood and blood products to help meet America's blood needs. Every two seconds, someone in the United States needs a blood transfusion. Thanks to the generosity of its almost 4 million blood donors, the American Red Cross is the largest single blood supplier in the United States.



Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross

*A girl in Haiti receives clean drinking water from the Red Cross after the earthquake in January 2010.*

### **Partnering in International Services**

The American Red Cross is one of more than 180 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies worldwide that are devoted to alleviating human suffering wherever it is found. The members of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent network—including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies—work together toward common goals during times of crisis or disaster.

As a national society, the American Red Cross works within this framework to help provide services for the world's most vulnerable people. The American Red Cross works with our partner Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in more than 30 countries to support projects in disaster management and emergency health. In the United States, local Red Cross chapters support efforts to reconnect families separated by international disasters, as well as educate the public about international humanitarian law.

## Disaster Services

Each year, the American Red Cross responds immediately to nearly 70,000 disasters, including single-family and apartment home fires (the majority of disaster responses), hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, tornadoes, hazardous materials spills, transportation accidents, explosions and other natural and human-caused disasters.

Although the American Red Cross is not a government agency, its authority to provide disaster relief was formalized when, in 1905, the Red Cross was chartered by the U.S. Congress to “*carry on a system of national and international relief in time of peace and apply the same in mitigating the sufferings caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods and other great national calamities, and to devise and carry on measures for preventing the same.*” The charter is not only an assignment of responsibility, but also an obligation to the nation, to disaster victims and to the people who generously support its work with their donations.

Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people's urgent disaster-caused needs. When a disaster threatens or strikes, the Red Cross provides shelter, food, health and mental health services, and bulk

distribution of needed items to meet the basic human needs of those affected. Red Cross workers also meet one-on-one with clients to provide information and assistance and to connect them to other resources that can help to support their recovery. During times of disaster, the Red Cross provides blood and blood products to disaster victims and helps those affected by disaster to access other available resources.

The American Red Cross is also able to facilitate family communication through its Safe and Well website, found on [redcross.org](http://redcross.org). The Safe and Well website allows individuals to register their well-being using messages that can be seen by family and friends inquiring about their loved one's safety. When inquiries involve individuals with serious pre-existing health and mental health conditions inside a disaster area, Welfare Information Teams search for the vulnerable individuals, get them the help they need and help them reconnect with their worried loved ones.

### Emphasizing Disaster Readiness

Disasters deprive families of homes and belongings, cause major disruptions to businesses and cost billions of dollars. This immense social and economic impact can be dramatically reduced if families, businesses and communities take proactive steps to reduce their vulnerabilities. Therefore, disaster readiness and mitigation are priorities of the American Red Cross.

### Awareness and Education

We develop and distribute a variety of materials in various languages to educate the public. This includes electronic capabilities, printed and video materials as well as public service announcements (PSAs) and community presentations that inform the public about how to stay safe and protect their homes.

### Direct Mitigation and Advocacy

We have partnered with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the insurance industry, emergency management and environment officials, educators, businesses and others who are concerned about the increasing, and often unnecessary, losses caused by disasters. Across the nation, we are working to build a “culture of preparedness” and to limit the harm inflicted on families and communities by disasters.



Gene Dailey/American Red Cross

*Red Cross president and CEO Gail McGovern serves hot meals from the back of a Red Cross mobile response vehicle to families affected by Hurricane Ike.*



## Service to the Armed Forces

The Service to the Armed Forces (SAF) program ensures that service members, veterans and their families have worldwide, around-the-clock access to timely and reliable humanitarian services. While providing assistance to 1.4 million active-duty personnel and their families, the Red Cross also reaches out to more than 1.2 million members of the National Guard/Reserves and their families who reside in nearly every community in America. SAF services are delivered through the Red Cross chapter network in the United States and on military installations around the world.

The American Red Cross keeps pace with a changing military. The Red Cross sends communications on behalf of family members who are facing emergencies or other important events to members of the U.S. Armed Forces serving all over the world. Messages are delivered around-the-clock, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Emergency communications services have been provided to members of the military and their families for more than 100 years as part of the 1905 Congressional Charter that requires the American Red Cross to act ***“in accord with military authorities as a medium of communications between the people of the United States and their armed forces.”***

The Red Cross works hand-in-hand with military hospitals and wounded warrior units, providing material assistance that is vitally needed for the comfort and recovery of service members. The Red Cross is assisting not only the service members currently in warrior transition units, but also those in veterans health care facilities, family members, and surviving spouses, as well. Our services improve the morale, welfare and general quality of life of hospital patients and provide family members with peace of mind. SAF staff also offer respite from harsh conditions and bring a little bit of home to the troops overseas by operating 24-hour canteen services with coffee, cold drinks, snacks, games, videos, books and Internet access.

Prior to deployment, Red Cross workers educate service members and their families regarding available Red Cross support services, including assistance they can seek during deployment. Both active-duty and community-based military rely on the Red Cross to provide access to vital services such as financial assistance, counseling, family support groups, information and referrals to medical professionals. The Red Cross recently introduced a course especially for military families entitled, “Coping With Deployments: Psychological First Aid for Military Families.” The course teaches resiliency strategies for families and includes a special module for children.

The Red Cross additionally supports veterans and their families by representing them before the Board of Veterans Appeals. Red Cross volunteers are certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to work in nearly every medical facility. They provide a wide range of support to veterans via community-based programs in addition to the traditional support veterans receive in VA medical centers.



*An American Red Cross worker talks with a service member at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.*



## Health and Safety Services

American Red Cross Health and Safety Services helps to save lives and strengthen communities—imparting hope and confidence along with practical skills. It is the premier provider of education, training and products that enable people to prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters and other life-threatening emergencies through programs and services that include:

- First Aid/Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)/ Automated External Defibrillation (AED)
- Aquatics, such as basic swim lessons, Lifeguarding and Water Safety
- Caregiving, including Babysitter's Training

### Preparedness

Just as every disaster is an intensely personal experience, the American Red Cross believes that a commitment to making our homes and communities safe is also personal. Therefore, the American Red Cross works closely with local, state and national partners to help people personalize their risk to natural hazards and make preparedness a personal priority. The goal is to build a “culture of preparedness” that helps communities become safer and more prepared when disasters strike. The American Red Cross has numerous preparedness materials available in multiple languages.

### Be Red Cross Ready

Be Red Cross Ready represents the cooperative efforts of the American Red Cross and the Department of Homeland Security's Ready Campaign to encourage the public to be more prepared for a disaster or other emergency. This program contains

a simple message and a call to action. In today's climate, it is more important than ever that all of us be prepared for possible emergencies, and there are three actions everyone can take that can help make a difference.

- 1. Get a Kit.** What you have on hand when a disaster happens can make a big difference. Have at least three days of supplies for everyone in your household, including your pets. Include any necessary items for infants, seniors and people with disabilities in your kit. Keep a smaller version of the kit in your vehicle. Information on what to include in a kit is available on **redcross.org**.
- 2. Make a Plan.** Planning ahead is the first step to a calmer and more assured disaster response. Design a family communication plan that includes an evacuation plan and coordinates with schools, work and communities' communication plans.
- 3. Be Informed.** When a major disaster occurs, your community can change in an instant. Knowing what may happen and how you can help may make all the difference when an emergency happens. Make sure that at least one member of your household is trained in first aid, CPR and AED use.

To learn more about the Be Red Cross Ready initiative, go to an online presentation at **redcross.org**. The modules, which are available in English and Spanish, contain pictures, audio and video content that help individuals and their families become safer, healthier and more resilient in the face of an emergency.



*The American Red Cross trains millions of people in CPR/AED and first aid each year.*

## Blood Services

American Red Cross Blood Services touches many lives every day. The use of current medical technologies allows us to be a leader in transfusion medicine and to provide a variety of blood products for the hospitals and transfusion centers we serve. The American Red Cross and its Board of Governors have made a strong commitment to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ensure that regulatory compliance continues to be a top priority.

### Safety First

Medical advances in blood donor screening and testing have dramatically improved blood safety.

Changes in technology have also imposed enormous demands on blood centers. The National Testing Laboratories of the American Red Cross efficiently process and test donor samples and provide reliable results in a timely manner.

### Quality Assurance Unit

Our Quality Assurance unit reviews the processes developed and used in American Red Cross facilities to manufacture FDA-regulated products. The unit determines if the facilities meet appropriate regulatory and compliance standards. Quality Assurance utilizes the FDA's Good Manufacturing Practice regulations.

The Quality Assurance unit examines donor eligibility screening practices; support systems, such as Red Cross testing laboratories and information technology; and functions at Biomedical Services headquarters. The unit trains auditors, prepares audit reports and related analyses for Red Cross management and participates in various committees at Biomedical Services headquarters. Many of the unit's activities are governed by the 2003 Amended Consent Decree with the FDA as well as the biologics and pharmaceutical sections of the Code of Federal Regulations.

You can save lives by donating blood. Please call **1-800-RED CROSS** or visit us online at **redcrossblood.org** to schedule your blood donation appointment. If you are ineligible to give, please consider encouraging others to donate. If you have never donated blood, schedule an appointment to donate, and you'll see how good it feels to help save a life. Your donation can help save more than one life, including accident victims, cancer patients and children with blood disorders.



*Blood is tested at Red Cross national testing labs across the country.*

Daniel Cima/American Red Cross

## Consent Decree

In April 2003, the Red Cross and the FDA reached agreement on terms of an Amended Consent Decree, which provides legal guidance on the handling of donated blood. Both organizations are committed to further enhancing the safety of America's blood supply under the Amended Consent Decree.

- The nation's blood supply is safer today than it has ever been.
- The Red Cross is committed to keeping the blood supply as safe as possible and to holding itself accountable to the highest standards set by regulators and the American public it serves.
- The FDA wanted increased authority to ensure compliance, and viewed financial penalties as an important component. The Red Cross agreed that the FDA had the right to fine the organization if it is found to be in non-compliance with requirements in the future.
- The Red Cross recognizes that these challenges cannot be solved overnight; however, there is no higher priority than, or acceptable excuse for, anything but full compliance.

## Fast Facts

- Every day, the Red Cross relies on volunteer donors to give enough blood to help treat people with illnesses and injuries.
- The American Red Cross needs to collect 22,000 units of blood each weekday to meet patient needs. In addition, we must collect about 15,000 units each weekend.
- Each year, the Red Cross collects approximately 6.5 million units of blood, from roughly 4 million volunteer blood donors.
- From these donations, the Red Cross distributes around 9.5 million blood products each year, including 6 million red cells, to patients at approximately 3,000 hospitals and transfusion centers across the country.
- This work is accomplished through the organization's national network, composed of 7 divisions and 36 blood regions.
- The Red Cross is the nation's largest single supplier of blood and blood products.

*Roughly 4 million volunteer blood donors give the gift of life at Red Cross blood drives each year.*



Andrew Yates/American Red Cross



## International Services

The American Red Cross helps vulnerable people around the world to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters, armed conflicts and life-threatening health conditions.

The American Red Cross accomplishes these goals by working within the global Red Cross and Red Crescent network. The Red Cross is the world's largest humanitarian network with more than 180 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and approximately 97 million volunteers, members and staff.

The American Red Cross works to build the capacity of our partner national societies by strengthening their leadership, financial management, volunteer networks and technical capabilities. With global Red Cross partners, the American Red Cross works to train and organize volunteers and educate communities to empower them with the skills they need to help themselves. To ensure that programs are comprehensive, the American Red Cross establishes partnerships with other public and private organizations whose capabilities strengthen and complement our initiatives.

American Red Cross international programs focus on disaster management, disease prevention, restoring family links and the promotion of international humanitarian law. For each of these priority areas, we promote cost-effective, community-based programs that target large numbers of people with humanitarian aid that is rapid, effective and large scale.

### **Disaster Response and Preparedness**

American Red Cross response activities focus on relief supply distribution, shelter, healthcare, water and sanitation services and reconnecting families. We also implement disaster preparedness programs to create more resilient communities with decreased dependence on external relief assistance. Following the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the American Red Cross established the Haiti Assistance Program to assist survivors and their communities. The American Red Cross and its partners have helped more than 2 million people with programs focused on providing homes, water and sanitation; preventing disease and providing medical care; restarting livelihoods and preparing for future disasters. In addition, our programs are providing emergency assistance to refugees from conflicts.

### **Emergency Health**

American Red Cross international health initiatives focus on tackling the challenges of measles and other diseases. The American Red Cross is a founding member of the Measles Initiative, a partnership committed to reducing measles deaths globally by 90 percent between 2000 and 2010. The Initiative has supported the vaccination of more than 700 million children worldwide, primarily in Africa and Asia. Largely due to the Measles Initiative, measles deaths declined by 78 percent globally between 2001 and 2008. The American Red Cross also supports initiatives that help prevent HIV and provide care and support to people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as community-based health and first aid education.

### **Restoring Family Links**

Through the global Red Cross network, the American Red Cross works to locate loved ones who are missing due to war, natural disaster or civil unrest and send Red Cross messages between these separated family members.

### **International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Education**

The American Red Cross educates the American public about IHL's guiding principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality established by the Geneva Conventions and taught in courses by trained instructors. Our Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) program provides educators with the learning materials and strategies to help students, ages 13-18, to explore issues of humanitarian law and principles of respect for life and human dignity.



*Mothers, such as this one in Zimbabwe, bring their children to vaccination centers run by Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers.*



## American Red Cross Volunteers

The American Red Cross has been able to provide services for more than 125 years in large part because of the tireless and dedicated work of volunteers. All across the United States, more than half a million “Red Crossers” help save lives by providing assistance to disaster victims, delivering community education courses and working with millions of volunteer blood donors.

This special family includes individuals who help with a single event or who volunteer several times a month. Many Red Crossers have been involved in their communities for 10, 20 or even 80 years, providing lifesaving services and leadership and helping to prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Our volunteers represent their communities, speak many different languages, are of all different ages and represent all races and ethnicities. We invite you to join us. Help make the Red Cross even stronger and better.

### **A Helping Hand**

Among other things, Red Cross volunteers—

- Assist victims of hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, winter storms, wildfires and home fires.
- Help wounded service members with their recovery.
- Provide community disaster education in first aid, CPR/AED, swimming, babysitter training and other classes.
- Donate blood to meet the needs of accident victims, cancer patients and others.
- Help vulnerable people around the world prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

## The International Movement in Brief

The Red Cross began in 1859, when Henry Dunant, a young Swiss man, came upon the scene of a bloody battle in Solferino, Italy, between the armies of imperial Austria and the Franco-Sardinian alliance. Some 40,000 men lay dead or dying on the battlefield. The wounded lacked medical attention. Dunant organized local people to bind the soldiers' wounds and to feed and comfort them. On his return, he called for the creation of national relief societies to assist those wounded in war, and pointed the way to the future Geneva Conventions.



Henry Dunant

In October 1863, the International Red Cross Movement was created in Geneva, Switzerland, to provide nonpartisan care to the wounded and sick in times of war. The Red Cross emblem was adopted at this first International Conference as a symbol of neutrality and was to be used by national relief societies. In August 1864, the representatives of 12 governments signed the Geneva Convention Treaty.

Today, the global Red Cross and Red Crescent network is composed of the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), as well as national societies in more than 180 countries, including the American Red Cross.

# Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the American Red Cross follows these seven fundamental principles.

## **Humanity**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement), born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavors, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all people.

## **Impartiality**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavors to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## **Neutrality**

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## **Independence**

The Movement is independent. The national societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## **Voluntary Service**

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## **Unity**

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## **Universality**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



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For more information about the American Red Cross,  
contact your local chapter or visit **[redcross.org](http://redcross.org)**.