

SEPTEMBER 2025

HURRICANE HELENE ONE-YEAR REPORT



**American
Red Cross**



“Being in this shelter has made such a difference in our lives”

JENNIFER WALKER

After being forced to flee their home by Helene’s storm surge, Jennifer Walker and her husband, Jeffrey, found refuge at a Red Cross shelter in Clearwater, Florida. “I was standing on the kitchen counter as the water came up,” Jennifer said, and when it reached my waist, I knew we had to go.”

Jeffrey, a disabled military veteran, knew that money in the household was tight to begin with, and now they had to deal with a hurricane. “We knew we needed to evacuate,” he said. “We didn’t have any place else to go, and we wound up here. The volunteers in this shelter have treated us great, and it’s a safe place while we try to figure out what to do.”

“Being in this shelter has made such a difference in our lives,” Jennifer added. “Everyone is like a big family here, and the volunteers have been so kind to us — it’s been a way of bonding and beginning to build a new life.”

Above: Photo by Marko Kokic/American Red Cross

Cover photo: Red Cross volunteer Linda Kerner shares an embrace with Gary Howell at a food distribution site in Weaverville, North Carolina. Gary stopped by the location to pick up a hot meal while he worked to recover from the devastation left by Hurricane Helene. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

A LETTER FROM

Cliff Holtz, President and CEO, American Red Cross



It's been one year since Hurricane Helene's devastating march across Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana. The scale of the disaster was staggering, and the need for help was immense. Coastal flooding and torrential rains inundated homes in Florida and Georgia, while in the Appalachians, where catastrophic flooding is rare, entire neighborhoods were swept away. Some survivors escaped with little more than the shirts on their backs.

Powered by our compassionate donors, Red Cross teams mobilized quickly, navigating washed-out roads and storm wreckage to deliver warm meals, drinkable water, physical and mental health services and financial assistance directly into the hands of those who needed it.

While visiting western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene's impact, I was particularly struck by the dedication of these Red Cross disaster responders, the majority of whom are volunteers. Their enduring strength became a powerful symbol of hope for people facing some of the most difficult days of their lives.

A year after landfall, the Red Cross is still at work in the hardest-hit communities — helping individuals and families recover from the Gulf Coast to the mountain towns of North Carolina and Tennessee. Alongside our community partners, we are supporting critical work such as debris removal, expanding the reach of food pantries, creating resilience hubs, teaching lifesaving skills and much more in the five hardest hit states: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

The people at the heart of these communities have shown remarkable courage, care for one another and determination to rebuild. Thank you for your invaluable support, which continues to make a lasting difference for those we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cliff". The signature is stylized with a cursive 'C' and a simple 'liff'.

Cliff

American Red Cross President and CEO Cliff Holtz meets with Red Cross disaster workers on a visit to western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene's impact. Photo by American Red Cross





HURRICANE HELENE IMPACT AT A GLANCE



Reached an estimated **473,100 people** with relief and recovery services, including \$10.9 million in financial assistance



Served more than **3.3 million meals and snacks** with partners



Provided nearly **56,500 overnight shelter stays** with partners



More than **149,000 households** provided with relief items

*Cumulative figures for responses in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana as of August 26, 2025.

Red Cross Mounts Massive Response to Aid Helene Survivors

Last September, Hurricane Helene tore through the southern United States, leaving a trail of destruction from Florida's Gulf Coast to the Appalachian Mountains. Powerful winds and storm surge battered homes along Florida's western coastline and Big Bend area, and, as the storm moved inland, its remnants unleashed relentless rainfall, triggering flash floods that overwhelmed neighborhoods, businesses and vital infrastructure. Western North Carolina, including the city of Asheville, was dealt a catastrophic blow, with surrounding mountain communities in neighboring states also experiencing severe damage as Helene's remnants swept through.

In the wake of this widespread disaster, the American Red Cross launched a large-scale emergency response spanning 10 states. Despite significant challenges — including disrupted communications and limited access to affected areas — Red Cross teams mobilized quickly. Volunteers and staff worked tirelessly alongside local partners to deliver essential aid, including secure shelter, nourishing meals, clean water and critical relief supplies, to tens of thousands of people reeling from the storm's impact. In addition to putting a roof over survivors' heads, our shelters also became safe spaces where affected families could charge electrical devices and access food, water, free wi-fi and current information.

Above: Red Cross volunteer Richard Kimball delivers cleanup supplies and says hello to Mancha, a dog belonging to Hermila Contreras Ortiz and her daughter, Yajahira Guadalupe Gonzales Contreras. The family's Swannanoa, North Carolina, home sustained significant damage from Hurricane Helene. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

For many hurricane survivors, the immediate aftermath of Helene was just the beginning of the disaster. In some of the hardest-hit communities from Florida to North Carolina, many residents endured days without electricity, running water or reliable road access. The Red Cross remained on the ground in these heavily impacted areas, helping families navigate these hardships. Our teams provided basic health services, such as replacing lost medications and eyeglasses, and offered emotional support to those coping with trauma and uncertainty. We also helped individuals and families reconnect with loved ones who had been separated by the storm.

“I cannot believe [Leah] did all this just for one person.”

SARAH ARMSTRONG, OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., SHARING HOW A RED CROSSER HELPED HER FIND ESSENTIAL MEDICATION FOR HER MOTHER-IN-LAW IN HELENE’S AFTERMATH

SARAH’S STORY: Sarah Armstrong, an Asheville, North Carolina, resident, and her family found themselves without power, reliable cell service or water after Helene passed through. These difficulties were compounded by the family’s efforts to care for both her mother-in-law, who lives with diabetes, and an aunt with multiple sclerosis who relies on a motorized wheelchair. There was another problem: “My mother-in-law realized that she didn’t have any insulin,” said Sarah.

With many locations closed due to Helene’s impact and phone connectivity spotty, Sarah struggled to find an open pharmacy, but her calls weren’t getting through. Then, on a visit to the local Asheville police and fire station to recharge her aunt’s wheelchair, “I saw a gentleman in a Red Cross vest,” said Sarah. “I stopped him; I was just asking for resources. But he immediately said, ‘Come with me; we’ll take care of it.’”

This Red Crosser connected Sarah with Leah Thorndyke, a Disaster Health Services Volunteer from South Carolina. Making calls nearly nonstop for the next 24 hours, Leah found an open pharmacy in Charlotte with insulin in stock. She coordinated with a volunteer who was traveling to Asheville to bring along the insulin for Sarah’s mother-in-law.

“I cannot believe [Leah] did all of this just for one person,” said Sarah. “We already felt so isolated without communication, without power. So this — having that stress relieved by you guys and all of the effort it took to make that happen — was a total life-changer for us.”



Reunited at the Asheville Red Cross Chapter office, Sarah Armstrong (left) embraces Disaster Health Services Volunteer Leah Thorndyke, who helped her obtain critical medication for a family member in the wake of Helene. Photo by American Red Cross

“...we’ve seen blizzards and floods, but nothing quite like this”

STACEY RANDOLPH, LOCAL RESIDENT, YANCEY COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Meeting the Unique Needs of Impacted Residents and Communities

As roads reopened and bridges were repaired, Red Cross emergency response vehicles reached remote and isolated areas with food, water and relief supplies. Along with this traditional aid, the Red Cross also provided enhanced services and non-traditional relief items to meet the specific needs of Helene survivors and their communities.

For example, in western North Carolina, we worked alongside local volunteers and partners to deliver critical support to mountain valleys and rural towns where flooding had cut off access to basic services and left residents stranded. As part of “Operation Mountain Hope,” Red Cross teams delivered supplies like laundry and shower trailers, generators and generator spark plugs, cooking stoves, ready-to-eat meals, drinking water, filtration straws, power banks and more to help people in need.

One of our teams spoke with Stacey Randolph, a local resident near Bee Log, an unincorporated community in Yancey County, while providing him with a generator. Randolph had been working with his friends, neighbors, emergency responders and local volunteers to clear new trails for people to use to evacuate. “I’ve lived here all my life,” he said. “It’s something else; we’ve seen blizzards and floods, but nothing quite like this.”

Nearby, at a repurposed school building that was now serving as the Bee Log community resource center, residents were assembling food, clothes, tarps, diapers, pet supplies and more. The Red Cross acquired key resources for the center, including an Automatic Electric Defibrillator (AED), smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, fire extinguishers, well-testing kits and water-filtration systems, as well as shelving units to organize and store donated goods.

In addition, our teams reached out to isolated and economically vulnerable communities across multiple states to ensure they were aware of and able to access available resources. Our special shelter transition teams helped local residents who needed additional assistance to move out of emergency shelters and find more stable housing solutions. And we offered crucial support like disaster mental health services, with trained Red Cross mental health workers available to assist Helene survivors with disaster-related trauma.



In western North Carolina, volunteers check their maps as they navigate roads destroyed by Helene to deliver critical relief supplies to stranded residents. Photo by American Red Cross.

“I’m a mountain girl from North Carolina. I’d never seen anything like this..”

SARAH BRACKEN, OF BREVARD, NORTH CAROLINA. HER FAMILY RECEIVED RED CROSS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AFTER THEIR HOME WAS FLOODED BY HELENE.

Delivering Cash Assistance to Hard-Hit Individuals and Families

Powered by the compassionate support of generous donors, the Red Cross also launched a **multi-phase financial assistance program** to support residents whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged by Helene.

Immediate Assistance — flexible emergency funds that empowered survivors to make decisions based on their unique circumstances — was a key element of our emergency response. Whether used for groceries, fuel, temporary housing, transportation, utility bills or other expenses, this support helped families take the first steps toward rebuilding their lives.

A second round of **Bridge Assistance** delivered additional funds to help the most severely affected households overcome barriers to their recovery. This assistance, offered a few months after the disaster, helps bridge the gap when a disaster destroys the community’s ability to help itself recover and other large-scale resources may not yet be available. Families often use this round of financial assistance for a wide variety of recovery needs, such as paying for home repair expenses, replacing damaged furniture and appliances, health care needs and more.

This assistance was a big help to Helene survivors like Sarah Bracken, of Brevard, North Carolina, and her family, whose home was inundated by Helene’s flash flooding. The family was living in a camper in the front yard, eagerly awaiting home repairs to be completed so they could move back in. “I’m a mountain girl from North Carolina,” she says. “I’d never seen anything like this.” She planned to use the Red Cross assistance for repairs to the camper, which was leaking, and ultimately, to replace damaged items in her home.

So far, the Red Cross has distributed approximately **\$10.9 million in direct financial assistance**, including Immediate and Bridge Assistance, to help Helene survivors with their most pressing needs.



Brevard, North Carolina, resident Sarah Bracken was grateful to receive Bridge Assistance from the Red Cross after her home was heavily damaged by Helene’s floodwaters. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

The Red Cross has disbursed approximately \$14.0 million in rapid response impact grants and long-term recovery grants so far, with much more to come as additional grants continue to be approved.

Providing Ongoing Support to Help Survivors Get Back on Their Feet

Thanks to the generosity of donors, the Red Cross has launched a long-term recovery operation to aid individuals, households and communities. In addition to financial assistance, grants continue to be awarded on a rolling basis to partner organizations that can help meet vital needs across the most heavily impacted states — Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

This multi-year program will provide funding to nonprofits and community-based groups to facilitate the expansion of current services and the creation of new programs that aid in individual and community recovery and the strengthening of resilience across the affected areas. This could include direct support for hurricane survivors, such as home repair, food security needs, mental health programming and legal advocacy, as well as aid to the impacted communities — from empowering community members to inform and guide recovery efforts, to developing and implementing a range of preparedness and resiliency initiatives.

The Red Cross has disbursed approximately **\$14.0 million in rapid response impact grants and long-term recovery grants** so far, with much more to come as additional grants continue to be approved.



In St. Petersburg, Florida, a Red Cross worker delivers meals to residents in the wake of Helene's destruction. Photo by Marko Kovic/American Red Cross

The Hope Initiative/Hope for Coffee (serving Coffee County, Georgia) is among the organizations that have already received recovery grants. We awarded Hope for Coffee two long-term recovery grants — a \$150,000 capacity-building grant and a \$1 million individual household needs grant to help 58 families impacted by Hurricane Helene. This funding is helping to repair 50 homes in Coffee County and build eight new homes.

With Red Cross support, this community-driven approach seeks to address critical needs, focusing on safe housing, debris removal and home repairs.

“The Hope Initiative is led by local organizations and supported by the Red Cross, aiming to not only rebuild homes, but also strengthen the long-term resiliency of Coffee County.”

**JACKIE SHOEMAKER,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE RED CROSS OF
SOUTH-CENTRAL GEORGIA**

The effort will be led by faith-based leaders, community volunteers, local contractors and other partners.

“This project represents a major step forward in restoring dignity, safety and stability to families who were impacted by the storm,” said Jackie Shoemaker, Executive Director of the Red Cross of South-Central Georgia. “The Hope Initiative is led by local organizations and supported by the Red Cross, aiming to not only rebuild homes, but also strengthen the long-term resiliency of Coffee County.”

In partnership with another Red Cross grantee, **Appalachia Service Project**, the Red Cross also recently celebrated a groundbreaking event in Hartford, Tennessee, marking the start of construction on resilient homes for impacted families. Additionally, in Florida, **The Community Development Corporation of Tampa** has been awarded nearly \$1 million in long-term recovery grant funds from the Red Cross to establish three Disaster Recovery Centers, standalone community-run sites, serving Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.

Along with grants like these to community recovery partners, a major focus of the Hurricane Helene Long-Term Recovery Operations is investment in capacity-building for long-term recovery groups (LTRGs), with several grants being awarded to these critical local organizations. This investment will not only speed recovery in the immediate term, but these groups will continue and reactivate if future disasters occur in their communities.

The Red Cross will remain by the side of those whose lives have been forever changed by Hurricane Helene as they continue the long journey to recovery. This vital donor-funded recovery aid — from direct financial assistance for affected individuals and families, to long-term recovery grants and LTRG support — will help people rebuild their lives in the wake of Helene’s devastation and help their communities become better prepared for future emergencies.



Red Cross volunteer Richard Kimball talks with Asheville, North Carolina, residents Nhim Nhing and Son Sok, whose home was flooded during Hurricane Helene. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross



Compassionate Supporters Power Relief and Recovery for Helene Survivors

Thanks to compassionate supporters, the Red Cross has raised \$174.4 million¹ designated for our Hurricane Helene response to help people impacted by this disaster—including the value of critical donated goods and services. As of August 26, 2025, the Red Cross had already spent or made commitments to spend approximately \$79.1 million on relief and recovery efforts for Hurricane Helene. We will continue to program the remaining funds, as well as funds from our combined Hurricanes Milton and Helene designation, to provide and support services for both individual and community long-term recovery for people impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Hurricane Helene Expenses and Commitments ^{2,3,4} (in millions)						
As of August 26, 2025						
Expense Categories	Food, Shelter and Relief Items	Health and Emotional Support	Financial Assistance	Community Recovery & Resilience	Total	Expense %
Financial assistance, food, shelter and other relief items	\$17.8	\$0.7	\$2.9	\$0.5	\$21.9	28%
Long-term recovery programs to help unmet needs	\$0.2	—	\$8.0	\$13.5	\$21.7	28%
Deployment of volunteers and staff (includes airfare, lodging, meals and vehicles)	\$7.9	\$1.2	\$1.9	\$0.1	\$11.1	14%
Kitchen, shelter and other logistics that enable service delivery	\$2.9	\$0.4	\$0.7	—	\$4.0	5%
Full-time Red Cross employees	\$1.9	\$0.1	\$0.2	\$1.1	\$3.3	4%
Temporary disaster hires	\$1.0	\$0.3	\$0.4	\$1.7	\$3.4	4%
Equipment, maintenance and fueling of Red Cross emergency vehicles and rented trucks	\$2.4	—	—	—	\$2.4	3%
IT, communications and call centers	\$1.3	\$0.1	\$0.5	—	\$1.9	2%
Freight, postage and warehousing	\$1.5	—	—	—	\$1.5	2%
Total Program Expenses	\$36.9	\$2.8	\$14.6	\$16.9	\$71.2	90%
Management, general and fundraising ⁵					\$7.9	10%
Total Spent & Committed					\$79.1	100%
Program Dollars Remaining					\$85.8	
Management, general and fundraising remaining to be applied					\$9.5	
Total Budget					\$174.4	

¹As of August 26, 2025, the Red Cross had raised \$51.7 million for the combined Hurricanes Milton and Helene designation (not included in the total above). These funds will be programmed as needed to help people impacted by hurricanes Helene and Milton.

² Dollar figures are rounded to the nearest \$100,000; therefore, expenses \$49,999 and below are represented as zero.

³ Includes Hurricane Helene responses in Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

⁴ Includes expenses that will be reimbursed by the State of Florida.

⁵ Management, general and fundraising expenses support our work at its core and are indispensable to running the organization and helping people in need. They include the people and systems to maintain our enterprise-wide computer and telecommunications, HR and payroll systems to support nearly 18,000 employees and more than 265,000 volunteers, fundraising and communications functions, and other support services across all program lines. Ninety cents of every dollar spent for Hurricane Helene will support the delivery of care and comfort for people affected by this disaster.



Your Support Made a Real Difference

The extraordinary generosity of the public helped tens of thousands in need after Hurricane Helene.

The Red Cross must be ready for every disaster, big or small, and we respond to an average of nearly 65,000 disasters each year — including home fires, severe weather, floods and wildfires. Those in need turn to the Red Cross in their darkest hours because they know they can depend on us right after the disaster and throughout their recovery. Your donation helps us fulfill this promise. We are grateful for your trust.

To learn more about our response and some of the people we've helped, please visit our **Hurricane Helene Stewardship Story Map** at redcross.org/hurricane-helene.

Thank you!



**American
Red Cross**

Above: "My parents have lived in this house for 40 years — I grew up here," said Courtney McDonald of St. Petersburg, Florida. "We've never seen a flood like this." Red Cross volunteers were delivering hot meals throughout the neighborhood, to help Courtney and her neighbors as they began to recover from the storm surge that flooded their homes. "We lost everything," she explained to Red Cross volunteer Erica Santella. "We haven't been able to prepare a hot meal since the storm — this is awesome!" Photo by Marko Kokic/American Red Cross