

PRESS RELEASE UPDATE

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Heart to Heart International spends time around Thanksgiving serving residents impacted by Hurricane Harvey

Houston, TX (November 21, 2017) - Families around the country spend the fourth Thursday in November gathering in homes, giving thanks and eating tables full of food. But for many people in the metro Houston area, this Thanksgiving will have a decidedly different flavor. Homes where families once gathered are now destroyed or in a state of absolute disrepair, and families are struggling with finding enough food to eat on a normal day, not to mention trying to navigate new holiday traditions.

The clean-up and return to normal for the more than 600,000 people who have registered for assistance through FEMA's Individual and Household Program has been slow and often painful. Cleaning out contaminated water and inhaling mold has led to skin infections and respiratory distress. Heart to Heart International, a non-profit international health organization, has been helping people with medical care, hygiene supplies and vaccinations since the start of the hurricane recovery.

The rotating teams of medical volunteers have been working to bolster the capabilities of three different clinics (Christ Clinic, Casa el Buen Samaritano, and TOMAGWA Healthcare Ministries) as their patient load increased in some cases by double after the flooding.

"In addition to the immediate health conditions precipitated by a flood such as, moldy homes, infection, and fungus, the disruption of normal healthy habits exacerbates otherwise manageable health issues. Chronic diabetes afflicts many here in Houston and the flooding adversely impacts management as well as access to necessary treatments," Joel Bruerd said. Bruerd has been in the Houston area with Heart to Heart International since September 26.

Heart to Heart International is passionate about creating sustainable and accessible health systems and helping those who need it most, and Houston residents are no exception. "There are very few problems that are unique to disasters," Dr. Rick Randolph, Chief Medical Officer, Heart to Heart International, said. "... But most of the patients that we see are those whose support system had been removed by the floods. These are those who have been forced from their homes, living with relatives or living in shelters."

One pastor in northeast Houston told Bruerd that FEMA assistance runs out at the end of the month, so many families in his community who have been staying in temporary housing will be homeless again or moving back into their flooded homes right around Thanksgiving. That is the case for one 85-year-old grandmother who attended a HHI clinic and was asked about her Thanksgiving plans. She responded sadly that it was the first year in her life she would spend the holiday at a restaurant. Every year prior, she has cooked large meals in her kitchen. But this year, flood damage and insurance delays have made it impossible.

This November, Heart to Heart International volunteers are giving back in the way they can: by providing care to those who may feel that the rest of the world has forgotten them.

Heart to Heart International is a nonprofit international health organization with its headquarters in Lenexa, Kansas. Since its inception in 1992, HHI has delivered medical aid and supplies worth \$1.5 billion to more than 130 countries, including within the United States. HHI responds to crises and natural disasters both domestically and internationally by supplying medical relief and mobilizing volunteers. The organization is a Charity Navigator 4 Star charity (nine years in a row), a BBB Accredited Charity, and is on the "Philanthropy 400." From the start of the response to date, HHI has treated more than 2,500 patients and administered more than 3,000 tetanus and 2,600 flu vaccines throughout the hardest hit areas of the Houston metro.

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