Six months after Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico residents are struggling with their mental health. Between August and January, suicide attempts increased from 782 to 1,075 and suicide-related calls to the island’s crisis hotline more than doubled. Counselors at the Ponce Health Sciences University mental health center treat 4,000 or more patients a month, and have reported recent increases in post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicide attempts. Puerto Rico’s state-run crisis hotline receives between 500 and 600 calls a day, providing crisis support to callers and following up to connect them with services. As some residents still struggle to meet basic needs, such as electricity and running water, hundreds of mental health professionals have also been dispatched across the island to help support those in distress. According to hotline crisis manager Silvette Acosta, helping others cope during difficult times makes the stress of her job worthwhile. “Some of the cases we work with are difficult,” she said. “But the satisfaction we receive—like saving a life—is all that matters.”

Spark Extra! Learn more about suicide prevention in Puerto Rico [2] and visit SAMHSA’s Disaster Distress Helpline [3].

Links within this resource