



One year later: WellMed looks back on Hurricane Ian

One year after Hurricane Ian devastated southwestern Florida, WellMed patients and employees are still coping with the destruction of their homes and lives. Still, the community's resilience and spirit shines through, partly thanks to the support and guidance WellMed provided in the immediate aftermath.

Tia Melot, clinic administrator at WellMed at North Tamiami Trail in North Fort Myers, Florida, vividly recalls the challenges her team faced after the storm. While the clinic remained relatively unharmed, it lost power and internet, leaving staff unable to contact patients, whose homes were filled with debris and water.

Desperate to check on their patients, the team took to the streets in the WellMed Comfort Care vehicle to establish contact and hand out food, water and first aid. The team also provided something else essential – emotional support, compassion and their time, creating the sense that they were all in it together.

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“When I watched the WellMed Comfort Care vehicle and our team helping people in the community, I felt a strong sense of purpose. I saw how thankful the people were for the help they were getting, and it made me think about how even a small act of kindness can make a big difference when things are tough,” Tia said. “Every time our team helped someone, shared a smile or made things a little easier, it showed me that when we work together, we can do amazing things for one another.”

This approach created strong bonds, especially among the staff, many of whom were new, as they faced the challenge. Traveling from home to home, they showed their dedication to helping and caring for their community.

As they made their way through the community bringing first aid and emergency supplies, Tia's team met a patient in her late 80s who had a birthday coming up. Determined to celebrate, even as they battled through chaos, the team brought her cupcakes and sang “Happy Birthday” to her. This small kindness illuminated the community's bond and the WellMed team's remarkable patient care.

Despite progress made in the past year, the community has a way to go to return to normalcy. Many families are still without homes, and the remaining storm damage is a constant reminder of the devastation they faced. Even so, there are signs of hope — newly repaired roofs and structures — that represent a step toward recovery.



Sarah Hilton, a medical assistant at WellMed at North Tamiami Trail was one of those personally affected by the hurricane. Her home was destroyed, leaving her family to start over from scratch. Even so, Sarah was inspired by the unwavering assistance and compassionate care she received from WellMed. Like so many others, Sarah is beyond thankful.

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“WellMed was so supportive, kind and generous for everything everyone needed at that time,” she said.

Mitchell Galignano, another WellMed team member, also lost everything. WellMed became his lifeline. The WellMed integration team provided essential resources that enabled Mitchell to start rebuilding his life.

“Without their help at that critical moment, I wouldn't be where I am; they did things for me I couldn't do for myself. I'm deeply grateful,” he said. “The support from WellMed was remarkable and the donations of food and emergency supplies to the clinics were awe-inspiring.”

The WellMed Charitable Foundation (WCF) also showed its commitment by raising \$690,600 in donations, which were directed toward local community organizations and employees affected by the hurricane. In mid-September, the foundation will present a check to the Ft. Myers community to recognize the collective effort and its impact.

Though there is still work to be done, WellMed continues to stand as a shining beacon of hope and recovery for this hard-hit community.

“Thank you WellMed, I am so grateful,” Sarah Hilton said. “You were immensely helpful for me and my family during this unexpected time when we needed you most.”
