

Understanding the needs of People with Disabilities in Disaster and Emergency Situations

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What's the problem?

People with disabilities --

- are not currently included in emergency planning and little, if any, communication exists between planners, responders and the disability community
- have a wide variety of communication, support and health needs that differentiate them from persons without disabilities



What's the law?

Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

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Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) & 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Prohibits

- discrimination against people with disabilities based on their disability
- exclusion from services or activities available to the general public

Requires

- equivalent access
- integration versus segregation



Emergency Response is a core program/service of local and state government

- Specific requirements for 911 and telephone emergency services and non-discrimination on the basis of disability
- Increased emphasis through settlement agreements, etc. with local governments via Project Civic Access (DOJ) to include emergency planning, communication and evacuation as part of the self-evaluation and transition planning process

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Discrimination

- Civil rights protection
- Guarantees equal opportunity in employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government services (regardless of size), and telecommunications

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Equal Access

- Removal of barriers:
 - buildings, transportation services, ramps, elevators
- Appropriate forms of communications:
 - interpreters, alternate media formats, auditory and visual signals

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Test of Reasonableness

A public entity must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices and procedures to ensure equal access to persons with disabilities

 Unless doing so would result in having to fundamentally alter the nature of the program or service

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Self-Evaluation and Transition Planning

- Evaluate what services are currently provided to citizens and how people with disabilities are included and/or excluded
 - Notification Systems
 - Text
 - Telephone
 - Sirens
 - TV/Radio
 - Identify someone responsible for addressing ADA related issues
 - Contact information for the public

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Who are people with disabilities?

People with:

- Visual impairments (Blind or low vision)
- Hearing impairments (deaf or hard of hearing)
- Speech and language impairments
- Intellectual disabilities (down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, Fragile X syndrome, etc.)
- Mobility impairments (paralysis, arthritis, etc.)
- Emotional disorders (mood disorders, psychotic disorders, etc.)
- Major medical conditions (heart disease, diabetes, etc.)
- Many people will have multiple disorders



What about hidden disabilities?

- Mild intellectual impairments (memory loss, etc.)
- Mild emotional disorders (stress or anxiety, depression, etc.)
- Episodic behaviors (asthma, migranes, etc.)
- Seizure disorders
- Learning disabilities

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Are there others who have similar needs?

People who:

- Do not speak English or LEP
 - Increase # of immigrants/refugees with disabilities or member of their family with disability
- Are considered elderly/senior citizens
 - · Often do not identify as "disabled"
- Are considered homeless
 - High percentage of the homeless population have some form of disability



Appropriate language

- People first language: i.e person with ...
- Wheelchair user -- not wheelchair bound
- Person with an intellectual disability or who has
 Down's Syndrome, -- not Mongoloid, cretin, retard
- Person who is not disabled or person without a disability— not "normal person"

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Other Appropriate Language

- Avoid words that have other negative connotations
 -- suffers from, afflicted, stricken, victim, invalid, having "fits"
- Don't refer to people with disabilities as -- lame, insane, crazy, loony, lunatic, mad\, maniac, mental, neurotic, nuts, simple
- What about the word handicapped? DON'T USE THIS WORD!!!

Let's talk about specific Issues



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What are some issues for individuals with disabilities?

- Communication barriers
- Comprehension of information/instructions
- Access to Emergency warning Sirens, horns, lights, televised alerts or radio broadcasts, etc.
- Assistance needed to:
 - Shelter in place
 - Evacuation
- Support during and after an emergency
- Rarely consulted or asked to participate in the planning process



Strategies for Successful Responses to Emergencies

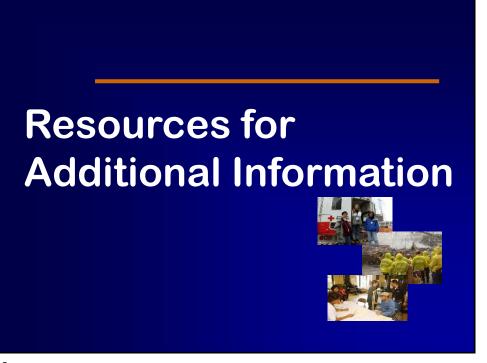
- Include people with disabilities in the planning process
 - Ensure meetings are accessible
- Include disability specific procedures
 - · Include different types of disability
- Train response personnel about disability issues
- Provide pro-active information to members of the disability community for personal preparation/planning purposes
- Create a voluntary identification listing
 - · Voluntary identification of self and needs
 - Buddy programs for checking on locations where people with disabilities, elderly, etc. may be more isolated and not aware of what is going on around them.

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Train response personnel

- Include disability awareness information for everyone on a regular basis
- Include procedures for assisting individuals with disabilities in all emergency preparedness training
- Include individuals with disabilities as trainers
- Be prepared for disagreement -- particularly within the disability community



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Resources

- American Red Cross, Disaster preparedness for people with disabilities, Disaster Services, American Red Cross, Washington, DC
 - https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-foremergencies/inclusive-preparedness-resources.html
- National Council on Independent Living, 1916 Wilson Blvd.,
 Suite 209 Arlington, VA 22201, (703) 525-3406, TTY: (703) 525-4153, Fax: (703) 525-3409, Email: ncil@ncil.org



Resources

- National Organization on Disability, Disaster Preparedness Initiative. Public and private program to address the needs of people with disabilities in disasters. Fact sheets and resources available at www.nod.org
- US Access Board Federal agency responsible for developing accessibility guidelines. Sample emergency evacuation plan posted to their web site along with resources for more information at www.access-board.gov

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Resources

- FEMA, Federal Agency responsible for coordinating emergency responses at the local, state and national level. Has resources related to people with disabilities and emergency preparedness/evacuation. www.fema.gov
- U.S. Department of Justice Toolkit for Local and State Government, Chapter 7, Emergency Management https://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/toolkitmain.htm

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