

From: Administration for Community Living <acl@public.govdelivery.com>
To: Kester, Tonykester@aging.sc.gov
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Subject: Inclusive Emergency Prep: Three Questions

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Three Questions about Inclusive Emergency Preparedness for People With Disabilities

As National Preparedness Month comes to a close, we are reminded of the importance of making emergency planning efforts inclusive of people of all ages and abilities as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. ACL interviewed two disability community leaders working to ensure that people with disabilities are included in emergency preparedness efforts. Curt Decker is the Executive Director of the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) and Christy Dunaway is the Chair of the Emergency Preparedness Sub-Committee of the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL).

Q: What does an inclusive approach to emergency preparedness look like to you?

Decker: At NDRN, we often talk about how Hurricane Katrina taught us everything we now know about how to prepare for emergencies. Ten years ago, evacuation systems weren't accessible for people with all types of access and functional needs. As a result, service animals were lost in the process, and some people with disabilities were left behind. Shelters established during recovery were not set up to accommodate people with disabilities. When this happens, some end up going without necessary, life-sustaining assistive technology, durable medical equipment, and medications. People with disabilities get turned away from shelters and routed to nursing homes and institutions that can be easy to get into and difficult to get back out of.

That time in our country's history taught us that inclusive emergency preparedness means using a "baked in" approach. People with access and functional needs have to be considered in every phase and every aspect of the planning process. When inclusion is an afterthought tacked on to an established process, we typically find that systems are not designed to effectively serve all citizens.

Dunaway: An inclusive approach to emergency preparedness should include members of the disability community in all aspects of emergency management. Emergency management is more than preparedness; it is also mitigation, response, short-term recovery, and long-term recovery.

Preparing the community for an emergency takes planning. People with disabilities

should be included on task forces that are developing best practices, policy and procedure and included in emergency preparedness exercises.

State and local government entities responsible for emergency preparedness must take the initiative and reach out to members of the disability community in their local area to include them in all preparedness activities.

Individuals with disabilities are experts in the programs and services needed to allow for their independence in the event of an emergency. Planning without their input is planning for failure.

[Read more about steps people with disabilities can take to prepare for an emergency and the role of the disability network.](#)

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