

Emergency Preparedness and Disability Inclusion

What do we know?

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) National Center on Disability in Public Health connects with partners to address health disparities, like emergency preparedness, through its National Technical Assistance and Training Center on Disability Inclusion in Emergency Preparedness.

We know that people with disabilities experience life disruptions, injuries and even death because of emergencies and disasters, like pandemics.

To change these negative outcomes, we need better local planning that includes all community members. Whole community planning is facilitated through strong partnerships between disability organizations and local emergency management and public health preparedness staff.

What did we learn?

In October 2020, AUCD's Prepared4ALL initiative conducted a national survey to learn more about **disability inclusion in local community emergency planning**. **Sixty-one** (61) people from 14 states took our survey. Half (50%) of respondents were emergency managers, 23% were local public health preparedness staff, and the remaining 27% were members of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Red Cross, Citizen Corps, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD), Emergency Medical Services staff, community healthcare providers, access and functional needs staff, or disability advocates.

What resources are used in local planning process? Which resources are most useful?

- The most used resources were from emergency management organizations, public health departments, and other government agencies.
- Community members with disabilities were ranked as the most useful resource for local emergency planning, but only 25% of respondents reported engaging community members with disabilities as a planning resource.

How can we make local emergency planning more inclusive of disability?

Top five ways to make emergency planning inclusive:

1. Make emergency communications accessible
2. Identify disability community partners
3. Include people with disabilities in preparedness drills and exercises
4. Train local emergency management and preparedness staff on access and functional needs
5. Increase funding and personnel

What are gaps in understanding disability inclusion in local emergency planning?

Disability community lacks understanding in:

- Emergency planning process and emergency management system

- Emergency manager and public health preparedness roles
 - People with disabilities' right to access and functional needs during emergencies
 - How to include people with disabilities in whole community planning
- Local Emergency Preparedness doesn't understand:**

What do respondents need to increase disability inclusion in local emergency planning?

- 🎯 Dialogue among disability stakeholders and local emergency/public health preparedness staff: *"Involve local emergency managers. Don't go around them."*
- 🎯 Training and education: *"Plans need to be presented in various formats, like audio, close captioned, large print, simple vocabulary."*
- 🎯 Funding and staff capacity: *"More funding requirements will encourage local emergency managers to create inclusive plans."*
- 🎯 How-to resources: *"Plans may fail to address all possibilities in a succinct fashion, and we end up ignoring them and responding to the needs as they arise. So, planning toolkits, templates and job aids would help."*
- 🎯 Expand partnerships: *"Even if they are short on time, building partnerships and connecting organizations to participate in existing planning committees or structures can be manageable for a local Emergency Manager."*

What does this mean?

- People with disabilities are viewed as a valuable resource, but they aren't included enough.
- Key ways to increase disability inclusion in local emergency planning include making emergency communications like alerts accessible, increasing funding and staff time, more training for staff on access and functional needs, and finding and utilizing people with disabilities as valuable resources.
- The key issue in holding us back from inclusive local emergency planning is lack of shared understanding across what people with disabilities experience and what local emergency managers and public health preparedness staff experience.
- Local emergency and public health preparedness staff often feel short on time, money and staff, but are open to building partnerships with disability stakeholders—they just may not know how to find disability partners.
- Local staff also need guidance on how to include disability stakeholders in local emergency planning—that's where Prepared4ALL Action Teams can really make an impact.

Find out more about Prepared4ALL here: <https://nationalcenterdph.org/our-focus-areas/prepared4all/>
 Email us at Prepared4All@aucd.org or join our listserv [here](#).