

Disabilities & Emergency Planning

While Colorado's institutionalized community has been included in emergency planning, people with disabilities living independently in the community are at risk in emergency situations when it comes to notification, evacuation and sheltering; all critical elements when responding to an emergency or disaster.

Imagine for a moment, that your mother is 85 years old, fiercely independent and living on her own with one or more of the disabilities that typically affect seniors. Now imagine a sudden disaster near her home that cuts you off from her.

Are you confident that authorities understand how to alert her to the danger? If she needs to be evacuated, do they know how to find her, understand what specific special needs she has and what equipment and medications she must have for daily living support? Then, once evacuated, can you find her? Is she literally confined to a hospital bed, or reasonably comfortable and cared for with regard to her disability?

This is not just a problem for seniors, but also for nearly half a million people in Colorado who are living in the community with a disability. This group includes people who have had strokes, quadriplegia or who are unable to see or hear. First responders need to understand the depth and breadth of helping a wide variety of people with individual needs. One response does not fit all.

You may not think Colorado is prone to natural disaster, but with Pine Beetle devastation and dramatic snowfalls, our dense urban areas and remote rural communities, just like other states, are at risk from the threat of forest fire, earthquakes, flooding and other natural or man-made disasters

There is no coordination in planning for the needs of people with disabilities who live in the community.

At every level of Colorado government, from statewide to local, planning and preparation is currently inadequate in addressing the needs of people living with disabilities, or functional limita-

Paving Pathways to...

tions with regard to Notification (alert) Evacuation (transportation) and Sheltering.

Who is the Functional Limitations Community?

As described by the Division of Homeland Security, the Functional Limitations Community includes people who may need additional response assistance before, during, and after an incident in the areas of: maintaining independence, communication, transportation, supervision, and medical care. This includes 1) people with disabilities living in the community, 2) who live in institutionalized settings, 3) are elderly, 4) are children, 5) who are from diverse cultures, 6) have limited English proficiency, or 7) who have no transportation.

From the 2004 American Community Survey, “an estimated 496,000 people in Colorado have a disability, or 11.9% of the population age 5 and over. An estimated 75,000 people, or 1.8% of the population 5 and over, have difficulty performing self-care activities, such as dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home.”

Members of this community often cannot function independently in an emergency situation.

With nearly one half million citizens who need specialized methods of alert, transportation and sheltering, Colorado and its communities must identify, develop and design systems that prepare this segment for the eventualities of an emergency situation.

Coordination

“The diversity of disability groups and its leadership, and established emergency management systems, brings natural confusion for both, as to who are the leaders to engage and how to make meaningful change in planning, systems and operations.”

Richard Devylder—Special Advisor to the Director of the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services.



The SILC...

Is appointed by the Governor to orchestrate the vision of independent living services for all Coloradans with disabilities.

There are 10 Centers for Independent Living around the state.

The council works with the center directors and the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to develop and implement a set of strategic goals for increasing access and independence for people with disabilities.

Our Mission

Paving the pathways to full participation for the community of people with disabilities served by Colorado’s Centers for Independent Living.

SILC Agenda

- Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities
- Housing
- Transportation
- Employment
- Quality Personal Assistance Services
- ADA Compliance in Rural Areas
- Disability Services in Rural Areas
- Youth with Disabilities Transition
- Improve Deaf Services in CILs
- Accessible Voting Services
- Changing Attitudes of Human Service Providers
- Cultural Competency
- Making Adapted Equipment More Available

Colorado defers planning to the local authority having jurisdiction. This creates a disjointed situation where there are no statewide emergency preparedness policies and procedures that provide coordination among local counties and municipalities planning for the functional limitations community. Consequently, plans can vary greatly between cities and counties and they are often unable to collaborate, communicate, or coordinate overlapping efforts.



Preparation/Planning

Emergency preparation must consider all disabilities in the planning process. There are three areas in emergency preparation that are repeatedly identified as most important to people with functional limitations:

- Notification (Alert, Warning, & Communication),
- Evacuation (Transportation),
- Sheltering (accessible facilities and procedures).

For instance, when considering emergency notification, planners must use multiple methods of contact such as closed captioning and text messaging for people who are hearing impaired, sirens and reverse 911 for those who are blind and personal contact for people who are cognitively impaired.

For evacuations to be successful, wheelchair accessible vehicles must be available. Using local paratransit providers (human services agencies and local transit companies) will greatly expand the emergency response efforts. They can assist in finding and moving persons with disabilities and their vital equipment, such as ventilators, wheelchairs and other adaptive technologies.

Adequate sheltering plans must include wheelchair accessible facilities that are not segregated, as family members will want to be with loved ones with disabilities.

Empowerment – Collaboration – Integration

Shelters must accept and provide for service dogs and personal assistants must be granted shelter access to provide daily living assistance with dressing, feeding and dispensing medications. Additionally, proper storage of medications and equipment must be planned for in advance.

Nothing About Us Without Us!

We advocate inclusion and participation in decision-making. While communities are working hard to create effective plans, they are also working without sufficient information. By including persons with a wide variety of disabilities and those with a “cross disability” perspective in the planning process, communities can implement plans that are practical and workable for the entire community.

Summary

The issues from the emergency planner perspective are twofold:

1. No unified statewide coordination or standardized efforts.
2. Plans that do not take into account the wide variety of disabilities and needs when planning for the notification, evacuation and sheltering elements of an emergency response.

Our Call to Action!

Functional Limitations Coordinator
Colorado’s counties are engaged in intensive emergency planning. The

time is now to have a statewide coordinator in the Governor’s Homeland Security Office who has the authority and experience to help these counties develop comprehensive plans that include the functional limitations community.

A coordinator who is knowledgeable about both disabilities and emergency response will provide leadership and guidance to ensure that local planners are adequately addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in their plans. Support for both counties and the disability community would build connections between disability groups and local emergency planners, creating improved statewide coordination across all counties.

Notification, Evacuation, Shelter

Emergency plans must address the three critical elements as they relate to a wide range of disabilities. If emergency plans are organized around these three elements as they relate to a wide range of functional limitations, such plans are much more likely to be inclusive, serving a much larger portion of the community.

Planning ahead correctly is critical for those who need additional assistance during an emergency...

Our lives depend upon it!

