

Helping Older Adults Weather the Storm Before, During and After Disasters



Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, chemical spills, wildfires and other man-made and natural disasters can have long-lasting and sometimes permanent effects on communities and the older adults who live in them. Community services and supports are critical tools that help older adults meet their needs before, during and after disasters, but these vital services can be limited or reduced as communities and individuals recover. Fortunately, there are steps that can help older adults—particularly those who have chronic illnesses, functional limitations or other impairments—maintain their independence as they prepare for, go through and recover from the devastating effects of disasters.

Disasters can strike without warning, but there are steps older adults and their caregivers can take to prepare themselves. The emergency management agency in your state or county will have the most current information that is specific to your community. To find the emergency management agency serving your community, visit www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies.

The tips provided in this fact sheet will help older adults and their caregivers prepare for disasters.

Before a Disaster


- **Create a communications plan.** Communication is critical during disasters. However, it may be difficult to connect with neighbors, friends and family members if communication is hampered, as it often is during major disasters. Start your plan by creating a list containing the emergency contact information for any family, friends or loved ones you would like to keep in touch with before, during and after any disaster. Your plan should also include information on locations to meet after a disaster, as well as important medical information.

 **Tip:** Program emergency contact information into your cell phone.

- **Make a medical plan.** Many older adults rely on assistive devices to help with mobility and other needs. Many of these devices, which may include oxygen machines, hearing aids and wheelchairs, require electricity to operate. Where possible, ensure that each of these items and their battery backups are fully charged. In addition, make a list of all components to




help ensure you have everything you need in the event of a disaster.

 **Tip:** Contact your local utility companies to let them know you have a medical device that requires electricity so they can put your home on a priority list for service restoration.




- **Get connected to local information.** Some state and local governments have created text message alert systems to provide critical information during emergencies. These systems convey information about special needs registries, recommended evacuation routes and the location of emergency shelters. Contact your local emergency management agency to learn how to get on the list for your community.


 **Tip:** If you're on social media, stay connected to your local emergency management agency by following their social media accounts.

- **Create emergency kits.** Emergency kits can help older adults withstand disasters. Because circumstances can quickly change during disasters, it is best to create two types of emergency kits—one to take with you if you are able to evacuate and another if you need to shelter in place. Both kits can include first-aid supplies, food, water, duct tape, clothing, keys, copies of important documents (e.g., a list of prescriptions, doctors and

insurance information), batteries, flashlights, hand-crank radios, cell phone chargers, pet food and other items. See www.ready.gov/build-a-kit for a list of additional items to include.


 **Tip:** Review your emergency kits on a regular basis and replace expired items.

- **Don't forget your animals!** Just like humans, pets and service animals also need to be prepared for disasters. In addition to finding out about locations of animal shelters and pet-friendly hotels in your area, it is a good idea to have the following information about your pets on hand in the event of a disaster: pet microchip numbers, tags or other forms of identification, photos, vaccination records and specialty food.


 **Tip:** Check with your local emergency management office to learn which shelters accept service animals or pets.

During a Disaster


- **Heed evacuation warnings.** Take your to-go emergency kit and any necessities such as medications with you to a safe location. Stay connected to local emergency information via television, radio and text message alerts.

 **Tip:** Make sure all of your electronic devices (cell phones, tablets and medical devices requiring batteries) are charged.

- **If evacuation is not possible,** keep your shelter-in-place emergency kit nearby, conserve water and electricity, and monitor local conditions.

 **Tip:** Keep a hand-crank radio nearby in case of power outages.

- **Secure your home.** Whether you evacuate or remain in your home, it may be necessary to lock your home's doors, board windows and shut off power. Follow the recommendations of local officials.


 **Tip:** Leave a note on the outside of your home to let first responders know whether you were able to evacuate.






After Disaster Hits: What to Expect in Your Community


- **Returning home.** Depending on the severity of the disaster and how it affected your community, your home may not be safe when you return. Keep in mind that resources like water and electricity may not be fully operational in the days immediately following a disaster.

 **Tip:** Take a flashlight with you and wear protective clothing such as safety gloves and shoe covers when returning home.


- **Prescription refills.** The Emergency Prescription Assistance Program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (www.phe.gov/EPAP) assists individuals who need to refill prescriptions after disasters. In addition, some communities may make it possible for individuals to obtain emergency refills of needed medications.

 **Tip:** Keep all prescription information on hand in a secure location to make it easier for pharmacies to refill your prescriptions.

- **Federal assistance and benefits.** www.DisasterAssistance.gov can connect survivors of disasters with information, support, services and a means to access and apply for disaster assistance.

 **Tip:** If applying for disaster assistance, take before and after photos of any property damage to help speed the application process.


- **Other government assistance.** In addition to assistance available from the federal government, states and local governments may have grant programs that can provide support to individuals as they recover from disasters. Contact your local emergency management agency to learn more about the programs that may be available in your community. To the extent feasible, the Eldercare Locator can also connect you to local resources that may be able to provide additional help to older adults and caregivers.

 **Tip:** Contact the Eldercare Locator at 1 (800) 677-1116 or www.eldercare.acl.gov to get connected to resources.

- **Home repairs.** Unfortunately, disreputable companies can take advantage of people who are recovering from disasters. Some repair companies may charge more to complete a job than it actually costs. Make sure to get multiple bids for work from contractors. Also, make sure that any contractor you hire is licensed, bonded and insured. Do not make payments ahead of time and pay only as the work is completed. Make the final



payment only when all work performed fulfills contract requirements.

 **Tip:** Read the *Eldercare Locator's brochure, Home Improvement Scams: Tools to Reduce Your Risks, before you hire anyone!* Find the brochure online at www.eldercare.acl.gov.

There are many ways older adults and their caregivers can prepare themselves before, during and after disasters. However, it is important to remember that quickly changing circumstances often necessitate that people deviate from their plans and improvise when necessary—no matter how prepared they may be.



RESOURCES

Eldercare Locator

1 (800) 677-1116

Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. ET

www.eldercare.acl.gov

Launched in 1991, the Eldercare Locator is the only national information and referral resource to provide support to consumers across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans. The Locator was established and is funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging, part of Administration for Community Living, and is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).

Ready.gov

www.ready.gov

Ready is a national public service campaign of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that is designed to educate and empower the American people to prepare for, respond to and mitigate emergencies, including natural and man-made disasters. The goal of the campaign is to promote preparedness through public involvement.

Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA)

www.fema.gov

FEMA is an agency under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's mission is to lead America to prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from disasters with a vision of "A Nation Prepared." FEMA provides information on how to prepare for disasters and resources that older adults and their communities can use as they recover from disasters.

Red Cross

1 (800) RED CROSS 1 (800-733-2767)

www.redcross.org

Red Cross volunteers and staff work to deliver vital services, from providing relief and support to those in crisis, to helping prepare communities to respond in emergencies.

Critical Conversations Series

Helping Older Adults Weather the Storm Before, During and After Disasters is part of the Eldercare Locator's Critical Conversations series of fact sheets which address emerging topics and important issues impacting the health and well-being of older adults.

This project was supported, in part, by grant number 901R0002, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.



Connecting You to Community Services



advocacy | action | answers on aging



Administration for Community Living