

Emergency Plans should be in place for seniors and people with access and functional needs

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Advanced emergency preparations are critical for persons with access and functional needs because they need assistance when incidents occur. It is less stressful for them, their families, and their caregivers when emergency plans are in place. Persons with access and functional needs, which may consist of a variety of visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive, emotional, mental, and language limitations, are found frequently in the older and pediatric populations, may result from belonging to differing cultures, and may include those with medical fragility or chemical dependence. Any of these individuals may have challenges with independence, communication, transportation, self-supervision, and medical care before, during and after an incident.

That's why it is important for these individuals to engage in pre-planning. For instance, it is important to determine what to do in case of interrupted utilities (electricity, gas, phone, and garbage disposal). Those who rely on oxygen and ventilators need back-up plans in case power failures occur. Delawareans also need to think ahead about how to overcome interrupted transportation (medication deliveries, transportation to and from work, and caregiver and family visits). Individuals on medication should get their prescriptions filled promptly, especially if bad weather is approaching, as shelters do not supply medicine, oxygen, ventilators, or hearing aids.

Sometimes, persons with access and functional needs are not able to complete this planning on their own. The Division of Public Health's (DPH) Office of Preparedness advises Delawareans who live alone or have access and functional needs to ask someone dependable to serve as their preparedness buddy, and identify someone else to be an alternate buddy. These individuals serve important support functions both before and during an emergency.

It is recommended that individuals and their designated buddies complete the Preparedness Buddy personal emergency plan brochure before a crisis occurs. The fillable form provides a step-by-step template to complete an emergency plan using a personal support network, or buddy system. The Delaware Access and Functional Needs Committee (Delaware AFN) and disability partners developed the brochure, which is available in seven languages. Find the Preparedness Buddy brochure at <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/php/preparednessbuddy.html>.

Preparedness buddies review and update emergency plans each year or during peak disaster seasons. The original emergency plan should be kept in the person's disaster kit, while copies should be shared with the preparedness buddy, an alternate buddy, and caregivers. They should also regularly check on their designated buddies to ensure they have adequate medications, oxygen and medical supplies, food, and water.

Home health care agencies are required by law to have preparedness plans for their clients. Their social workers or nursing agency representatives assist in developing the plans. Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health clients receive a Preparedness Buddy brochure at their yearly review; the social worker completes two copies, one of which remains with the client.

In addition to the Preparedness Buddy brochure and the support provided by Delaware AFN, the Office of Preparedness attends, sponsors, and hosts numerous workshops, health fairs, and conferences that are tailored to the needs of seniors and people with disabilities. The Access and Functional Needs Committee shares outreach information with the Office's Vulnerable Populations Coordinator, who publicizes preparedness events on the PrepareDE Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/PrepareDE/>) and distributes flyers at local libraries and outreach events.

To improve personal health and safety and emergency preparedness, the Office of Preparedness, Citizens Corp, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency, Independent Resources, and the Modern Maturity Center annually co-host a Community Preparedness Workshop for seniors and people with disabilities. The workshop features technology tools provided by the Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative and community resources, including fire safety and fire extinguisher selection and use, Smart 911™, and Text-to-911. Other shared resources are the File of Life, a magnetized pouch containing medical information that is kept on the refrigerator (see Figure 1), and PulsePoint, a mobile phone application that allows users to view and receive alerts on calls fire departments and emergency medical services are responding to. The CHEER Center in Georgetown asked the Office of Preparedness to provide a similar workshop in Sussex County in 2020 that provides additional insight on county-specific resources. The Office of Preparedness will hold a Community Preparedness Workshop on February 4, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the CHEER Community Center, located at 20520 Sand Hill Road in Georgetown, Delaware.

Figure 1. File of Life

FILE OF LIFE

KEEP INFORMATION UP TO DATE !!
Review At Least Every Six Months !

MEDICAL DATA REVIEWED AS OF		MO.	YR.
Name:			Sex: M F
Address:			
Doctor:	Phone #:		
Preferred Hospital:			
EMERGENCY CONTACTS			
Name:	Phone #:		
Address:			
Name:	Phone #:		

DPH recommends registering Delawareans with access and functional needs at the Smart911™ website: <https://www.smart911.com/>. Smart 911™ is a free service in all three counties that allows residents to create a household Safety Profile for first responders. When a call is placed to 9-1-1 from a phone associated with a person's Safety Profile, the 9-1-1 call taker can view it and provide the appropriate response.

The Office of Preparedness attends numerous community health fairs, as well as the Legislation, Independence, Family, and Education Conference, the Alzheimer's Association Annual Dementia Conference, and the CHEER Senior Center's Annual Beach Day celebration (see Figure 2). In total, the Office of Preparedness strives to provide information and resources to help our most vulnerable populations prepare for and recover from emergencies and disasters.

Figure 2. Family Emergency Preparedness Day 2018, photo taken by April Cleveland.



Resources

American Red Cross, New Castle County Emergency Operations, <http://ncde.org/154/Emergency-Management>

American Red Cross Pillowcase Project, <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/news-and-events/press-release/2018/red-cross-trains-1-million-children-to-prepare-for-disasters-thr.html>

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities, Guide to Services for Older Delawareans and Persons with Disabilities, Emergency Preparedness section, <http://www.delawareadrc.com/>, pages 82-84.

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/php/preparednessbuddy.html>.

Delaware Emergency Management Agency, PrepareDE.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency, Ready.gov

Kent County Emergency Operations, www.co.kent.de.us/public-safety/emergency-management.aspx

Sussex County Emergency Operations, www.sussexcountyde.gov/emergency-operations-center

Smart 9-1-1 website, <https://www.smart911.com/>

University of Delaware, Emergency Readiness Planning for Delawareans with Disabilities, Allreadyde.org

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