



Florida's Public Health & Medical System **PREPARES & RESPONDS**

VULNERABLE POPULATION: Persons with Disabilities and/or Functional Impairments

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the definition of an "Individual with a disability" is a person who:

- (1) Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (Examples: inability to walk, speak, dress one self, etc. Driving a vehicle is not a "major life function."); or
 - (2) Has a record of such an impairment; or
 - (3) Is regarded as having such an impairment.
- Physical impairment is defined by the ADA as "any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, and endocrine."
 - Neither the ADA nor the implementing regulations list all the diseases or conditions covered under the umbrella of the ADA. This is not feasible due to the extremely large number and variety of potential impairments.

The Florida Department of Health (DOH) Bureau of Preparedness and Response and the Florida Division of Emergency Management work in partnership with local communities, professional organizations, community advocates, other state agencies, and private providers to assist people with disabilities and their families during times of crisis or disaster. The mission of the Florida Department of Health is to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county, and community efforts.

Key Issues:

- Persons with disabilities usually live independently or with family members. Some, who have co-occurring disabilities, may require sheltering in a disaster. Most people living with a disability can be accommodated in a regular shelter.
- A person's ability or inability to care for themselves during an emergency or disaster will vary significantly.
- A number of disabilities are "silent." By just looking at a person, you cannot always tell if they are impaired or to what extent.
- Most people with disabilities can function without a great deal of assistance. They have routines or systems to address their needs.
- Persons with disabilities should be advised to have a seven day supply of prescription medications available or any other medical equipment needed.
- In many cases, an established routine is what enables someone with disabilities to function independently; once this is compromised, persons with disabilities may need additional support to stay safe and healthy.

- If the event is severe or the recovery phase is of long duration, persons with disabilities, in addition to those who support them, may require sheltering or other assistance to support both their physical and mental healthcare needs.
- Always remember, persons with disabilities are PEOPLE first. Some persons may not do well with change, loud noises, or crowds. Acting out may be caused by one or more of these issues.

Planning Considerations:

- Clients with disabilities should be encouraged to plan for their needs ahead of time.
- Persons with complex medical needs or who require special equipment, electricity, or oxygen to maintain their life, should be encouraged to pre-register for a special needs shelter with the local county emergency management office. This will help shelter staff know the issues and plan for them.
- Work with the local county emergency management office, the state agency responsible for providing services to, or local Center for Independent Living to ensure required materials are available in the formats needed.
- Don't ASSUME if you see a person with a white cane, they are totally blind. Also remember not all persons who are legally blind use a cane or service animal.

Supporting Agency:

Florida Division of Emergency Management www.floridadisaster.org/disability

Florida Department of Children and Families www.myflfamilies.com

Florida Department of Health www.FloridaHealth.gov

Additional Information: The following resources provide more information on planning considerations for persons with disabilities and/or functional impairments during disasters and other emergencies:

FEMA Office of Disability Integration & Coordination www.fema.gov/office-disability-integration-coordination/office-disability-integration-coordination/office-1

FEMA Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters, November 2010 www.fema.gov/pdf/about/odc/fnss_guidance.pdf