
Emergency Preparedness Is Everyone's Business

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By ACL Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging Lance Robertson

Every September, [National Preparedness Month](#) brings focus to disaster planning and getting ready for emergencies. This year's theme says it best – we should aim to be “Prepared, Not Scared.”

Of course, even with the best plan, a catastrophic storm, or wildfire, or any other kind of emergency situation can still be very scary. And no amount of preparation will completely eliminate the stress of evacuating your home. But with a comprehensive, individualized emergency plan, no one should have to be afraid for their life, health, or independence.

Emergency preparation is important for everyone. However, older adults and people with disabilities often face additional challenges during emergencies because of health issues, mobility challenges, and use of devices that rely on power. Those individual circumstances make having a plan absolutely critical.

Whether you're updating your existing plan, or creating one for the first time, asking yourself these questions can help frame what you need to think about:

- What kinds of disasters are most likely to affect your community?
- How might a disaster affect you?
- Is evacuation a likely possibility? Where would you go?

- Could you make it on your own for at least three days? What would you need?
- What problems would you experience if you did not have power for 8 hours? 24 hours? A week?

Every plan will be different, based on individual needs. However, everyone should have an emergency kit that includes food, water, and at least a week of medications. Include this [this card](#), completed with your vital medical information, and if you have a communication-related disability, this [card](#) can help first-responders assist you in the way that is best for you. Include a flashlight and extra batteries, and first aid supplies. Ready.gov has an outstanding [emergency kit checklist](#) that will help you think of everything you need. ([For additional ideas, see this checklist for kids.](#))

Other things to think about when you're putting together your plan include:

- Which shelters are able to accommodate your individual needs? If possible, be ready to tell first responders, so that you are able to evacuate with your family, service animal, caregiver, personal assistant, and assistive technology devices and supplies.
- Plan ahead for accessible transportation. Work with local services, public transportation or paratransit to identify your options, and include contact information in your emergency kit.
- If you are dependent on dialysis or other life-sustaining medical treatment, note the location and availability of more than one facility.
- If you use in-home medical equipment that requires electricity, talk to your health care provider about how you can prepare for a power outage.
- If you use an augmentative communications device or other assistive technologies, plan for how you will communicate with emergency personnel if your equipment is not working -- this might include laminated cards with phrases, pictures or pictograms.
- If you use assistive technology, make sure your plan considers what you will need to take them with you. Have extra batteries available. To simplify replacing equipment that is lost or destroyed, your emergency kit should include model information, where the equipment was purchased, and how it was paid for (Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, etc.).
- Don't forget to include your service animals and pets in your planning. Have an emergency kit that includes food, water, medicines, and first aid supplies for them, too.

Finally, consider the help you may need to execute your emergency plan. Create a support network of friends, family and others who can assist you during an emergency, and share your disaster plans with them.

National Preparedness Month also is a great time for communities to make sure their disaster response and recovery plans consider the needs of older adults and people

with disabilities. Across the nation, the community-based organizations that form the [aging and disability networks](#) are providing critical expertise that is resulting in emergency plans that are more inclusive and accessible than ever before. If you are working to improve your community's plan, I encourage you to bring the networks in as partners.

Whether you're working on your personal emergency plan, are part of a community planning team, or are supporting older adults and people with disabilities in the community (or all of the above!), [ACL's website](#) can point you to many resources available to help.

Planning for disasters is everyone's business, and together, we can make sure everyone is included.

[Back to top](#)



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