



*Improving the Lives of Older Adults and People with Disabilities
Through Services, Research, and Education*

EJCC Presentation – June 8, 2023
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Written Remarks

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on some of ACL's activities regarding elder justice and disasters. ACL funds services and supports for older adults, people with disabilities across the lifespan, and caregivers, provided primarily by networks of community-based organizations.

The need for connections between aging and disability networks and disaster preparedness and response systems is critical.

In my role as director of ACL's Center for Regional Operations, our team uses our subject matter expertise to make such connections and educate federal agencies on the populations and home and community-based service networks with whom ACL works. For example, disaster preparedness and response professionals may under-recognize that the majority of older adults live in communities, outside of nursing homes and may not understand the significant impacts of disasters on the residents of nursing homes. Aging services professionals may not understand, nor know how to connect with, the disaster preparedness and response infrastructure that exists at state, local, and federal levels.

At the federal level, ACL partners and coordinates with sister agencies within HHS, including ASPR, ACF, SAMHSA, and CMS, as well as with FEMA. I'm pleased to share two initiatives exemplifying this coordination, but first I will share a little background on how ACL's disaster-related work is organized.

Emergency and disaster preparedness issues can have unique geographic components, such as areas of our country that are more likely to experience hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes, and/or tornadoes. As the country's disaster response is designed to begin at the local level with state oversight and federal support, our Center for Regional Operations is uniquely positioned to have responsibility for ACL disaster preparedness and response activities.

ACL has a Regional Administrator serving each of the 10 HHS regions, and that Regional Administrator serves as the overall coordination point for disaster preparedness and response in their region. The Regional Administrator's relationships with local, state, regional, tribal, and federal contacts is key to successful coordination. When disasters occur, the Regional Administrator is in contact with state aging services network in the affected area to ensure that emergency needs of older individuals and clients are being met and to ensure our federally funded meals and other home- and community-based services are being provided in the immediate response and recovery phases of the disaster. Disaster

planning is required by the Older American Act including in state and area plans on aging, which Regional Administrators verify as part of their state plan on aging reviews.

The Regional Administrator is also a part of communications at the HHS regional level, as well as communicating with ACL colleagues in our central office. At ACL's central office level, we coordinate information sharing among team members responsible for a wide array of disability and aging programs and administer a small amount of discretionary funding to reimburse disaster-related expenses for State and tribal grantees under the OAA.

One initiative where ACL experience and expertise has been involved is in the National Advisory Committee on Seniors and Disasters. In recognition of the unique issues related to older adults and disasters, the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act¹ created this advisory committee.

The role of the advisory committee is to provide advice and consultation to the Secretary of HHS and the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) to assist them in addressing the unique needs of seniors in preparation for, responses to, and recovery from all-hazards emergencies and disasters.

The advisory committee held a public meeting two weeks ago where they discussed the following draft recommendations to strengthen and improve community readiness, infrastructure, and behavioral health:

1. advancing the dissemination of accessible, available, and usable emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation information and communication support services;
2. expanding trained community disaster partners;
3. establishing and sustaining Disaster Care Centers of Excellence for Older Adults as a model of care for regional collaboration, virtual support, and specialized guidance; and
4. capitalizing on the opportunity to expand the existing Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program with dedicated resources and additional employees to advocate for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery planning across the long-term care continuum

The EJCC may wish to consider how its work and the work of the National Advisory Committee on Seniors and Disasters intersect. We are grateful to Derek Lee, ACL's regional administrator serving Region 6 out of Dallas, for representing ACL on the advisory committee, including serving on the community readiness workgroup.

As a second example, ACL's regional administrator serving Region 2 out of New York City, Rhonda Schwartz, has co-led efforts with her Region 2 FEMA colleague to develop and deliver Ready Seniors Workshops. The goal of Ready Seniors Workshops is to assist community-based organizations that provide critical support services to senior citizens to plan ahead so they will be better positioned to assist older adults in an emergency.

¹ Public Law No. 116-22

In 2018, Region 2 FEMA received grant funding and reached out to ACL to partner. Since then, more than 20 workshops have reached over 1,800 attendees.

The typical format for these workshops is to hold presentations in the morning, followed by a scenario-based table-top exercise in the afternoon, followed by a de-brief/hotwash session. A summary of good practices is developed and shared with attendees after the event. Feedback regarding the workshops has been overwhelmingly positive – this time for learning, planning, and discussion is so vitally important.

Audience members have included emergency planners for nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior community centers, senior housing, adult day care centers, home delivered meal services, charitable organizations, and others who provide services to older adults as well as their family members and caregivers.

While in-person events became virtual during the COVID public health emergency, in-person events are resuming; a workshop was held in Ocean County, NJ on March 23, 2023, and an additional workshop tentatively is planned for July 26 in Passaic County, NJ. Discussions are also underway to potentially do a virtual event for Preparedness Month in September.

Similarly, the EJCC may wish to consider how the successes of the Ready Seniors Workshops can inform its efforts to promote elder justice.

As I conclude, resources on the slide packet include:

- ACL's emergency preparedness webpage: <https://acl.gov/emergencypreparedness>;
- The National Advisory Committee on Seniors and Disasters (NACSD) webpage: <https://aspr.hhs.gov/AboutASPR/WorkingwithASPR/BoardsandCommittees/Pages/NACSD/default.aspx>; and
- Contact information for the ACL-funded, toll-free Eldercare Locator hotline, which includes free materials on emergency planning and response and home improvement scams

Thank you for the opportunity to share information on the National Advisory Committee on Seniors and Disasters and on Ready Seniors Workshops. We are proud of our work and look forward to supporting the EJCC's work in this critical area.