EMERGENCY SHELTER ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Adapted from <u>U.S. Department of Justice, ADA Checklist for Emergency Shelters</u>

Emergency managers and shelter operators need to ensure that sheltering programs are accessible to people with disabilities, including individuals who use wheelchairs.

- **Ensure that the sheltering program is accessible to people with disabilities.** Emergency managers and shelter operators need to ensure that sheltering programs are accessible to people with disabilities, including individuals who use wheelchairs. If you need assistance in determining if your shelter is accessible, this <u>checklist</u> can help. **Keep accessible parking spaces clear!**

- **House people with disabilities in mass care shelters.** To comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act's {ADA} integration requirement, emergency managers and shelter operators need to plan to house people with a variety of disabilities in mainstream mass care shelters, including those with disability related needs for some medical care, medication, equipment, and supportive services. Emergency managers and shelter operators must also ensure that eligibility criteria for mass care shelters do not unnecessarily screen out people with disabilities who are not medically fragile based on erroneous assumptions about the care and accommodations they require.

- **Respect the right of people with disabilities to make choices about where to shelter**. In some communities, emergency managers have designated shelters specifically for individuals with disabilities or those with a specific type of disability - this is not required and people with disabilities should be offered an opportunity to choose the best shelter for them (and with their families).

- **House people with disabilities in mass care shelters even if they are not accompanied by their personal care aides.** Local governments and shelter operators may not make eligibility for mass care shelters dependent on a person's ability to bring his or her own personal care attendant.

- **Modify "no pets" policies to welcome people who use service animals.** Many emergency shelters do not allow residents or volunteers to bring their pets inside. But shelters must generally modify "no pets" policies to allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals. A service animal is not a pet. Under the ADA, a service animal is any animal that is individually trained to provide assistance to a person with a disability.

- **Provide emergency supplies that enable people with disabilities to care for their service animals.** Ensure there are designated relief areas for service animals and staff are aware.

- **Modify kitchen access policies for people with medical conditions that may require access to food.** Most shelter operators restrict residents' and volunteers' access to the kitchen to preserve food and beverage supplies and maintain efficient kitchen operations. Shelter operators need to make reasonable modifications to kitchen policies so that residents and volunteers with disability-related needs can have access to food and beverages when needed.

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- **Modify sleeping arrangements to meet disability-related needs.** To maximize efficiency, shelter operators typically provide one standard type of cot or mat for use by shelter residents. However, some people have disability-related needs for cots to be modified or may need to sleep on cots or beds instead of on mats placed on the floor.
- **Provide alternate format materials for people who are blind or who have low vision.** People who are blind or have low vision may request documents and brochures in alternate formats (Braille, large print, or audio recording). Generally, shelter supplies should include alternate format versions of documents that are routinely made available to shelter residents.
- **Ensure that audible information is made accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.** In emergency shelters, most information is conveyed through oral announcements. Shelter operators must ensure that people who are deaf or hard of hearing have access to this information in a timely and accurate manner.
- **Offer orientation and wayfinding assistance to people who are blind or have low vision.** Inform about primary places like restrooms, information stations, kitchens, medical, and sleeping.
- **Maintain accessible routes**. Cots and other furniture need to be placed to ensure that accessible routes – routes that people who use wheelchairs, crutches, or walkers can navigate – connect all features of the shelter.
- **Eliminate protruding objects in areas where people can walk.** Furniture and other items should be positioned to direct pedestrians who are blind or have low vision safely away from overhead or protruding objects.
- **Consider low-stimulation "stress-relief zones."** The stress from the noise and crowded conditions of a shelter – combined with the stress of the underlying emergency – may aggravate some disability-related conditions, such as autism, anxiety disorders, or migraine headaches.
- **Consult residents with disabilities regarding placement of their cots.** Some individuals will have disability-related needs that require accommodation when assigning the location of their cot.
- **Provide an effective way for people to request and receive durable medical equipment and medication.** Ensure staff are aware that this may be a need for some residents and have a plan.
- **Whenever possible, provide refrigeration for certain types of medication.** If electricity is available, give priority to people with disabilities who use ventilators, suctioning devices, and other life-sustaining equipment. Some people with disabilities require ventilators, suctioning devices, or other life-sustaining equipment powered by electricity.
- **Provide food options that allow people with dietary restrictions to eat.** Because of disabilities, some people are unable to eat certain types of food.
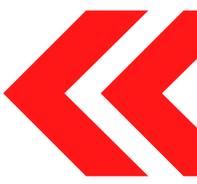
Contact Able South Carolina if you have questions, concerns, or need support to adequately support a person with a disability seeking shelter.
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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST FOR SHELTERS & PROGRAMS

Use this checklist to make sure your emergency response respects autonomy, inclusion, and accessibility.

Planning & Inclusion

☐ Have you included people with disabilities in planning meetings?

☐ Have you asked individuals directly about their needs (not assumed)?

☐ Have you considered different living situations (independent, with family, supported)?

☐ Have you asked about medical, dietary, language, cultural, or religious needs?

☐ Have you asked about pets or service animals?

Accessible Physical Space

☐ Are entrances, exits, bathrooms, and shelter routes accessible to wheelchairs and mobility devices?

☐ Are paths clear, wide, and well-lit?

☐ Are there large print or braille signs posted?

☐ Are flashlights, magnifiers, or tactile tools available?

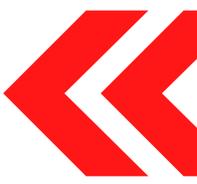☐ Are service animals allowed in all areas?

Accessible Communication

☐ Can information be provided in large print, audio, braille, and pictographs?

☐ Do you have dry erase boards, notepads, or communication apps available?

☐ Are interpreters, captioning, or video relay services available if needed?

☐ Do you know and honor each person's preferred communication method?

Respectful Interaction

☐ Are staff trained not to touch assistive devices without permission?

☐ Do staff always ask before offering help?

☐ Do you speak directly to the person, not to their support person?

☐ Do you give people enough time to speak, respond, or make decisions?

☐ Are instructions clear, concrete, and available in visual or step-by-step formats?
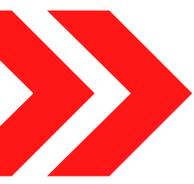
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Assistive Technology (AT) Support

☐ Have you asked if someone uses AT (wheelchairs, communication devices, etc.)?

☐ Can people charge their AT or access backup devices?

☐ Are chargers, batteries, or adapters available?

☐ Are AT devices labeled, photographed, and tracked?

☐ Have support people been taught how to use essential AT?

Staff Preparedness

☐ Has your staff received disability etiquette training?

☐ Do you practice emergency drills with accessibility in mind?

☐ Do staff know how to assist without taking over?

☐ Are "no-scent" policies and air quality guidelines enforced?

Community Systems

☐ Are evacuation routes and alert systems accessible to all?

☐ Do you have a backup plan for people who receive meal deliveries or in-home care?

☐ Are shelters and safe areas you connect people with physically and programmatically accessible?

Ongoing Updates

☐ Do you review and update your emergency plan every 6 months?

☐ Do you restock kits and test alarms and batteries regularly?

☐ Have you gotten feedback from disabled community members recently?

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