

# Recovery from the Recent Disasters: Lessons for Disability Planning in Remote Areas

ADA National Network/FEMA Webinar Series

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# Presenters:

- Roxann Crawford, FEMA Region IX, Disability Integration Specialist
- Michael Houston, FEMA Region VIII, Disability Integration Specialist
- Danielle Bailey, FEMA Region X, Disability Integration Specialist

# FEMA Regional Disability Integration Specialist

- Planning within regions
- Support the development of advisory groups
- Deployments

# What do we mean by Remote locations ?

- Territories
- Rural
- Frontier
- Isolated Communities

# The Geography of Disability

- Rates of disability are higher in rural areas: 17.7% in the most rural counties compared to 11.7% in urban counties
- People living in rural areas report onset of disability a decade earlier than urban residents
- Rural Americans account for only 14 % of the total US population they represent a higher share of people who live in poverty, have a disability, and are older adults.

Source: University of Montana Rural Institute, Research Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities. (2017) Rural Research Summary.

# Geographical Impacts & Disability

- Characteristics of the physical and built environment
- Service and care provider shortages
- Limited clinic/hospital and specialty care services
- Limited mental behavioral health services
- Culturally different perspectives/stigmas on disability
- Lack of public and para transit services
- Differences in how disability programs are administered
- Access to adequate housing
- Disability

# U.S. Virgin Islands – Hurricanes Irma & Maria

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- Hurricane Irma struck as a Category 5 major hurricane on September 5, 2017
- Hurricane Maria struck as a Category 5 major hurricane on September 20, 2017
- Four people died in the United States Virgin Islands
- At the peak of the response to both Hurricane Irma and Maria, there were 1,400 people in nine shelters throughout the territory.



# U.S. Virgin Islands – Hurricanes Irma & Maria

- 100% of communications and electricity were down in St. Thomas and St. John in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Irma and partial interruption in St. Croix
- 100% of communications and electricity were down in St. Croix in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Maria
- 531 People were medically evacuated
- 4,800 self-evacuated on Mercy Flights and Mercy Cruises to the U.S. Mainland
- 38,408 total household registrations with FEMA (16,001 Irma, 22,407 Maria as of 03/01/2018)

# A Delicate Balance

- Nursing homes and assisted living facilities had waiting lists for entry pre-disaster
  - Damage to facilities and impact to service employees further impacted services available
- Access to Durable Medical Equipment (DME) challenging pre-disaster and completely non-existent post-disaster
  - External partners continue to work with survivors on DME needs
- Home health care services were limited and people utilized natural support systems and a sense of community which was severely impacted

# Evacuation Realities

- Over 200 dialysis patients evacuated to the Greater Atlanta Area
  - Impact to systems in destination city
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Feeding
  - Natural support systems
  - Mental health and emotional care
- Self-Evacuees
  - Support systems
  - Transfer of services

# Local Groups and Successful Collaborations

- Local disability groups such as the UCEDD and ILC collaborated and had positive results from their work
  - Weekly disability focused registration events
  - Weekly Deaf focused registration events with ASL interpreters on site for each event
  - Community outreach utilizing client list and door to door outreach to reach individuals unable to come to larger or regular disability focused registration events
  - Working together on a weekly call to organize resources, identify gaps and shortfalls, and build capacity for forward movement
  - AUCD working with Portlight Strategies to do research and create recommendations for response and recovery for the territories

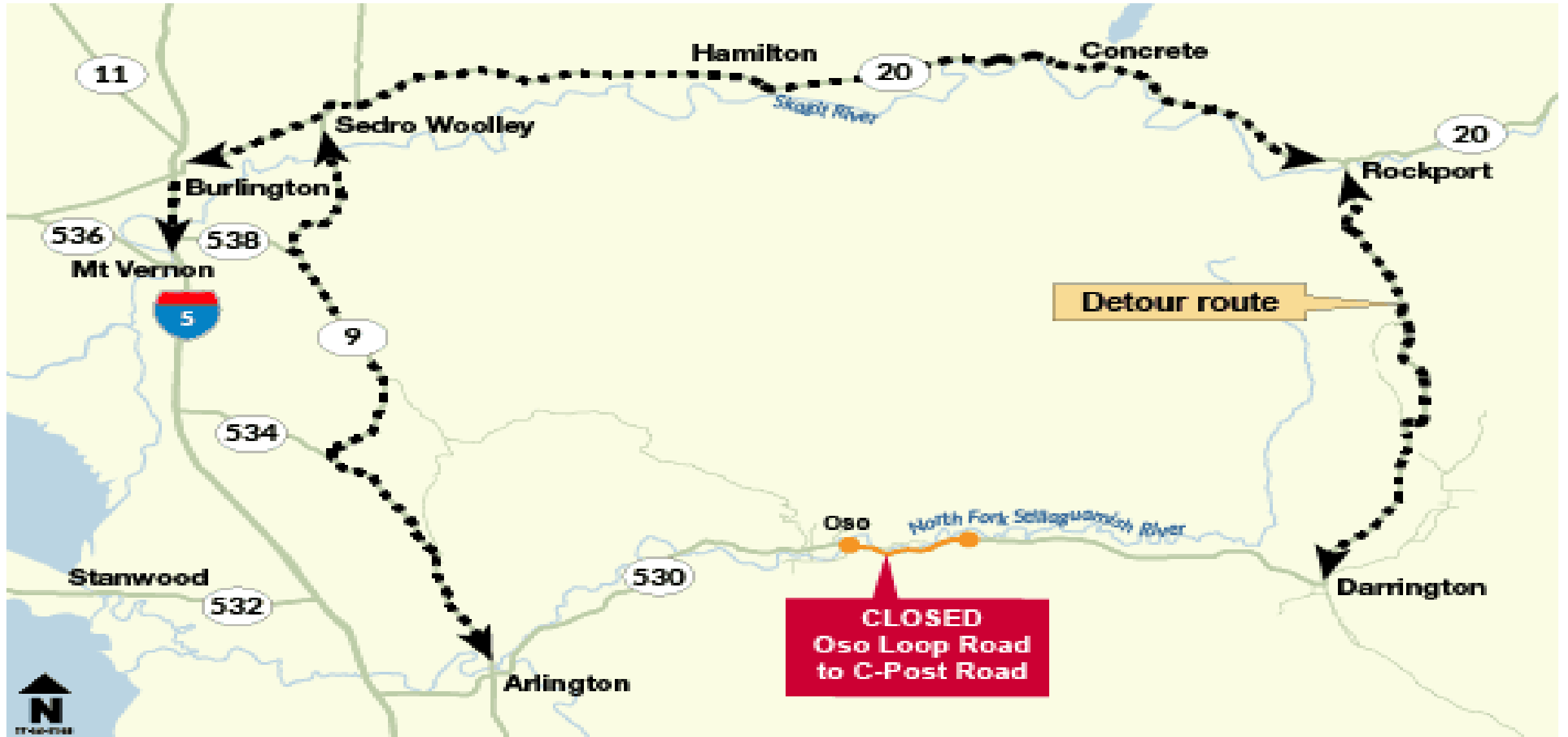
# What Have We Learned From Previous Disasters

# Isolated Communities: 530 Landslide



Source: Rick Wilking-CNN/AP News

# Road Map of SR530 Area & Traffic Reroute



# Impacts to People with Disabilities

- Lack of paratransit medical transport
- Delay in getting prescriptions
- Care giver/provider travel time



# Frontier Communities: Alaska Flooding



Photo Source: AP Photo National Weather Service, Ed Plumb

# Isolated communities: Alaska Flooding - Rebuilding

- Evacuation
- Rebuilding: considerations for elevation
- More difficult to coordinate wrap around services



# Frontier Communities: Home elevation



Source: Alexandra Gutierrez/APRN



# Home Rebuilding in Alaska



Photo by Adam DuBrowa - Jul 15, 2014 - Location: Circle, AK

# Isolated Communities: Colorado

- There were isolated communities created in the mountains when roads washed out; experiences were similar to Oso event (long “new” commutes, some 2-3 hours each way)
- Majority of washed out roads were private; people choose to remain in their (undamaged) dwellings...
- Became a local/state issue (local gov’t sent resources to support these families since their homes were not damaged and didn’t qualify for FEMA assistance)

# Isolated Communities: Colorado (continued)

- FEMA sent DSA teams to these communities and needed weather balloons type solutions that provided access to the internet which helped them connect to their iPads to register survivors
- Lesson learned: back then FEMA HQ controlled Facebook; during Harvey, FEMA in TX received permission from HQ to start a Harvey Facebook page and utilized all resources available (e.g., Facebook Live)...this is helping us reach more communities

# Lessons Learned

- Have plans for after evacuation
  - Continuation of care
- Remember that emergency management and response people don't know what they don't know.
  - Working with Ems and other organizations to educate about the needs of people with disabilities during an evacuation (DME, accessible transportation, continuation of care, natural support systems, etc.)
- Working with clients to address the realities of events and their preparedness shortfalls/gaps

# Lessons Learned (continued)

- Participate in drills and events
  - Become familiar with your local emergency management, police, fire, CERT, etc.
- Work with local and state for the creative ideas of EMAC-ing social service organizations
- Importance of mental health and emotional care



**You do not have to do this alone!**

# Building Local and State Partnerships

- Disability Core Advisory Group building
- Individual and agency preparedness planning
- Integration with local/state emergency management
- Seek opportunities to gain experience
- Don't wait to be invited (what capabilities can you bring to the table)
- Identify your disability networks

# National Partnerships

## **Pass It On Center**

- Provide coordination and support in the event of natural disasters to assure that reutilized assistive technology can reach those who need it quickly.
- Provide telephone and email technical assistance through its Rapid Response Solutions Desk to various request.
- Establish national transportation and electronic networks for the well-coordinated distribution of reutilized AT

## **FODAC**

- Durable Medical Equipment response to USVI
- Community support and creative responses to getting DME out to people who need it

# National Partnerships

## Portlight

- Focus on disaster response and relief
- Directly uses funds to support local organizations to be able to restore or expand their functions
- Ability to send staff and financial support to shore up operations (not lead or take over but support to allow impacted employees and organizations time to recover)
- Provides support to other national level organizations to enhance their functions and effectiveness

# National Partnerships

## Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies

- Focused on convening, collaborating, and supporting through technical assistance, problem solving and community engagement
- Created the national hotline for disaster response and immediate needs
- Able to respond to high level time sensitive requests (ex: partnership with the Cajun Navy) and individual needs (ex: getting specific consumable medical supplies to an individual during the peak of response in a two hour time frame)

# National Partnerships

## **National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) : Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee**

- Working with Agency on Community Living & Independent Living Administration on policy for Independent Living Centers involvement in emergency planning, response, and recovery.
- MOUs with ARC, FEMA, Portlight, PIDS and in negotiations with others
- Documenting disaster outcomes and after action on impacts to people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- Maintain dialog with DHS-Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties in regards to disability rights

# Strengths of Rural, Frontier and Territory Communities

- Strong relationships between people and organizations
- Willingness to volunteer
- Natural support systems
- Resilient communities (history of preparedness based on environment)

# What Can We Do

- Additional training and awareness: increase preparedness
- Improve reach of services through disability organizations /agencies
- Sharing experiences and lessons learned
- Expand partnerships think coordinated and consolidated efforts
- Identify shortfalls and gaps and clearly community with Emergency Management



# Information and Resources

- Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)
- Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities at University of Montana
- National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitating Research
- National Agrability Project – USDA sponsored program that assists farmers and ranchers and other agriculture workers with disabilities
- Rural Health Information HUB (Online Library)

# Resources: ADA National Network Centers

1-800-949-4232

- Pacific ADA Center (Region 9) <http://www.adapacific.org/emergency-preparedness-publications-resources>
- Rocky Mountain ADA Center (Region 8) <http://www.rockymountainada.org>
- Northwest ADA Center (Region 10) <http://www.nwadacenter.org>
- National website <http://adata.org>

# Links to Information and Resources

- <https://www.april-rural.org/>
- <https://www.ncil.org>
- <http://www.portlight.org>
- <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu>
- <http://www.agrability.org>
- <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org>
- <http://www.passitoncenter.org>
- <https://www.fodac.org>
- <http://www.disasterstrategies.org>

# Thank You

[Roxann.Crawford@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:Roxann.Crawford@fema.dhs.gov) - Region 9

[Michael.Houston@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:Michael.Houston@fema.dhs.gov) – Region 8

[Danielle.Bailey@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:Danielle.Bailey@fema.dhs.gov) – Region 10