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

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• 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

- 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
Impacts to People with Disabilities

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

Road Map of SR530 Area & Traffic Reroute
Frontier Communities: Alaska Flooding

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
  o Continuation of care

• Remember that emergency management and response people don’t know what they don’t know.
  o 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
  o 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
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 negations 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 Centers

• 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
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

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