



Coalition on Inclusive
Emergency Planning
(CIEP)



Washington
Statewide
Independent
Living Council

CIEP AFN Review
December 2025
Winter Weather Disaster (25-4783)
FEMA# EM-369-WA
DR-4906-WA

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Table of Contents

CIEP Disaster AFN Review	7
Situation Overview:	9
Federal Emergency Declaration Approved	14
Introduction to the AFN Review	15
Communications	21
Narrative:	21
ASL Interpreters on televised news briefings	21
Outdoor Warning Systems	26
Washington State Legislation:	28
Community Engagement	29
Cultural/Political Influences	31
Communication Accessibility and Assistance	32
DeafBlind Population	34
Gestures and Nontraditional Ways to Communicate	36
Situational Awareness Concerns	36
Accessible Shelter Design Features	37
Other issues	37
Recommendations	39
Resources	41
Checklist of COMMUNICATIONS best practices	43
Accessible Announcements	43
Accessible Newscasts and Social Media	43
Community Collaboration	44
Maintaining Health	45
Narrative:	45
Interagency Collaboration	46
Electrical Power	46
Durable Medical Equipment	46

Knights Community Hospital Equipment Lend Program (KC-HELP).....	47
Public Health.....	49
DOH Recovery	49
Shelter statistics	59
Access to prescription refills.....	59
HHS EmPOWER Program used in Public Health Emergency Declaration	60
Environmental Health	61
FEMA Application for IA.....	61
Community Needs	64
Potential Disaster Concerns	64
Other issues	65
Recommendations:	66
Resources	67
Checklist of MAINTAINING HEALTH best practices.....	69
Accessible Shelter Protocols	69
Information & Referral.....	69
Whole Community Collaboration	70
Decontamination Protocols	70
Independence	71
Narrative:	71
Living in RVs and other vehicles	72
Insurance Issues	73
USDA Letter of Priority Entitlement (LOPE)	73
Long-Term Housing Recovery	74
SBA Disaster Loans	74
Gaps in data collection	75
State and National Partners.....	75
WASILC Response	76
Recommendations:	78

Resources	80
Checklist of INDEPENDENCE best practices	81
Whole Community Shelter Design	81
Blue-Sky Planning.....	81
Electrical Power Stability.....	81
Support, Safety, and Self-Determination	83
Narrative:	83
AFN Experts in Incident Command Structure	83
Disaster Assistance Centers	87
Recovery Process.....	88
Impact of FEMA Changes	89
Recommendations:	90
Resources	91
Checklist for SUPPORT, SAFETY, and SELF-DETERMINATION best practices.....	97
Recovery Partners	97
AFN Role during Emergencies	97
Mental Health and Disabilities.....	98
Support Services	98
Training.....	99
Transportation.....	101
Narrative:	101
RARET Summary.....	101
Evacuation Protocols	106
DAC Site Considerations.....	108
Resources	111
Recommendations:	113
Checklist of TRANSPORTATION best practices.....	115
Evacuations.....	115
Accessible Service Alternatives	115

Transportation Planning	115
Infrastructure Readiness.....	116
The Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning.....	117
Who's Who at WASILC & Contributors	117

CIEP Disaster AFN Review

December 2025 Weather Disaster

FEMA Disaster Declaration # [EM-369-WA](#)¹

WA Severe Storms, Straight-Line Winds, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides

Incident Period: Dec 9-15, 2025; recovery continuing

State Governor Declaration Date: Dec 12, 2025

Federal Disaster Declaration Approved: April 7, 2026

[DR-4906-WA](#)²

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¹ <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/3629>

² <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4906>

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Situation Overview:

WA Governor Bob Ferguson News Release – [Governor Ferguson requests federal major disaster declaration, \\$21.3 million in FEMA assistance for families following historic December flooding](#) January 21, 2026³



Residents of 10 counties, 15 Tribal nations could be eligible for assistance

³ <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAGOV/bulletins/4057cea> Office of the Governor / Office of Financial Management sent this bulletin at 01/21/2026 01:07 PM PST

OLYMPIA — Today, Governor Bob Ferguson [sent a letter to President Donald Trump](#)⁴ formally requesting a [federal major disaster declaration](#)⁵ following December's historic storms. Governor Ferguson also requested FEMA to open Individual Assistance funds for survivors in affected counties and Tribal nations, an estimated \$21.3 million. A request for funding to help repair the state's damaged infrastructure is separate and will come in February after the damage assessment is complete.

Between December 5 and 22, a series of catastrophic atmospheric rivers and winter storms caused widespread flooding, landslides, high winds, power outages, and severe damage to homes and critical infrastructure across the state. More than 100,000 people were under evacuation orders, 383 emergency rescues were conducted, one person lost their life, and nearly 4,000 homes were damaged.

The federal government previously [granted an emergency declaration](#)⁶, which allowed federal resources, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard, to provide assistance during the emergency.

The request follows previous steps by Governor Ferguson to support communities across the state, including [providing \\$3.5 million in state emergency funds](#)⁷ for food assistance, shelter, and other immediate needs following the flooding. The state's Disaster Cash Assistance Program has already provided nearly \$1 million in direct aid to more than 2,600 households. More information on state and county assistance is available at [FloodRecovery.wa.gov](#).⁸

⁴ <https://governor.wa.gov/news/2025/governor-ferguson-declares-statewide-emergency-responding-major-flooding>

⁵ https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/Encl%20C%20-%20OMB%20No.%2011660-0009-FEMA%20Form%20010-0-13%28202601114%29.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

⁶

https://bsky.app/profile/governorferguson.bsky.social/post/3m7sqmxnvuc2n?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

⁷ https://governor.wa.gov/news/news-releases?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

⁸ https://floodrecovery.wa.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

“The scale, duration, and severity of this disaster overwhelmed local and state response capabilities,” Governor Ferguson said. “Thousands of families experienced devastating loss. Federal assistance is essential to help Washingtonians recover from these historic floods.”

To help demonstrate the severity of the damage, the Governor’s Office produced a video, [available here](#)⁹.

Later this week, the Washington state congressional delegation and the leaders of all four state legislative caucuses are expected to send their own bipartisan letters supporting the governor’s request.

Governor Ferguson’s request asks FEMA to approve the maximum funding available for its Individual Assistance program. To be clear, this amount will not make all Washingtonians whole but seeks the maximum amount that FEMA can provide. If FEMA approves Individual Assistance as part of the major disaster declaration, the next step for residents is to apply directly with FEMA. Governor Ferguson’s request currently includes Chelan, Grays Harbor, King, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Thurston, and Whatcom counties, as well as 15 federally recognized Tribal nations.

FEMA Individual Assistance is intended to support individuals with limited means to help repair their homes or find stable housing until a more permanent solution is available. While Individual Assistance is not intended to fully fund individual recovery, it is a critical piece of the puzzle. More information on FEMA Individual Assistance [here](#).

If the federal government declares a major disaster, impacted homeowners, renters, business owners and non-profits can also apply for [low-interest loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration](#).

Today’s request specifically seeks assistance for individuals. Washington state is still working to separately collect information about damage to public

9

https://ofmwagov.box.com/s/om9xrf8di0b58pbstvdxqg83lwsf0kai?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

infrastructure, like roads and levees. The state will submit a request for FEMA Public Assistance funding to repair our infrastructure, as well as Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding to build our state's resiliency ahead of future storms. Some communities have already built infrastructure to protect against flooding, such as [Mount Vernon's flood wall](#). The damage would have been even worse without these projects.

The deadline for the state to apply for Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Grants is February 18.

Storm impacts

The impacts from 18 days of storms were extensive.

Approximately 30 rivers flooded, with three of Washington's largest rivers breaking all-time records. The water breached levees and dikes, causing sudden and severe flooding in industrial and residential areas. The agricultural heartland of the state's west side was devastated by river flooding and landslides that took out farms and access to major roads, including two interstates and three U.S. highways. Farmers, rural residents, and small businesses suffered the most from the storms. Many farmers had significant losses, including eroded land, livestock deaths, saturated fields and damaged crops.

The Washington State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) was activated at the highest level — Level 1 — as conditions worsened, coordinating response efforts across state agencies, Tribal nations, and local governments. Governor Ferguson mobilized approximately 400 soldiers and airmen from the Washington National Guard to support lifesaving missions, flood mitigation, evacuations, sandbag operations, aviation rescue, and debris removal.

The following information highlights the severity of this disaster:

- Three of the state's largest rivers (Skagit, Snohomish, and Cedar) reached their highest levels in recorded history.

- A total of 33 rivers exceeded flood stage, with 18 of those exceeding major flood stage.
- Approximately 3,891 homes were damaged statewide, with 440 homes being destroyed or sustaining major damage.
- The storm resulted in one fatality, 383 emergency rescues, and approximately 1,000 assisted evacuations.
- More than 100,000 people were ordered evacuated, including the residents of two entire cities.
- 34 state-managed transportation routes were severely impacted, including portions of two interstate highways and three U.S. highways.
- Amtrak Cascades rail service was suspended for four days between Vancouver, B.C., and Seattle, due to weather-related rail line disruptions.
- Approximately 450,000 customers experienced power outages during the disaster.
- At the peak, 15 emergency shelters were operating.
- One skilled nursing facility, with its 78 patients, was evacuated; two additional facilities closed due to flooding; one Level 3 facility sheltered in place for multiple days; and one facility operated on generator power for three days.
- Seven Tribal Nations issued emergency declarations, and 13 counties issued disaster declarations.
- 20 county and Tribal emergency operations centers were activated.



Federal Emergency Declaration Approved

PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP APPROVES EMERGENCY DECLARATION FOR STATE OF WASHINGTON

Release Date: April 11, 2026

Approved on: April 7, 2026

WASHINGTON—[FEMA announced today](#)¹⁰ that federal disaster assistance is available to the state of Washington to supplement response efforts due to emergency conditions resulting from severe storms, straight-line winds, flooding, landslides, and mudslides beginning on December 9, 2025, and continuing.

The President’s action authorizes FEMA to coordinate all disaster relief efforts to alleviate the hardship and suffering caused by the emergency on the local population and to provide appropriate assistance to save lives; to protect property, public health and safety; and to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in Benton, Chelan, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, King, Kittitas, Lewis, Mason, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum, Whatcom, and Yakima counties; the Samish Indian Nation; and all other Tribal Nations within the specified jurisdictions.

Specifically, FEMA is authorized to identify, mobilize, and provide, at its discretion, equipment and resources necessary to alleviate the impacts of the emergency. Emergency protective measures, limited to direct federal assistance under the public assistance program, will be provided at 75% federal funding.

John Harrison has been named the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal response operations in the affected area. Designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.

¹⁰ <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20251212/president-donald-j-trump-approves-emergency-declaration-state-washington>

Introduction to the AFN Review

This AFN CMIST Review After-Action Report (AAR) encapsulates our findings covering [Access and Functional Needs](#)¹¹ (AFN) best practices and unmet needs from the atmospheric river storms in December 2025. These findings were gathered from a series of “AFN Review” daily and weekly calls from December 15, 2025, until the completion of this AAR in the spring of 2026. The findings were organized into five distinct subject areas under the [CMIST framework](#).¹² CMIST stands for Communications, Maintaining Health, Independence, Safety/Support Services, and Transportation. Each section begins with a narrative that highlights relevant issues that came to the attention of the Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP), the Washington Statewide Independent Living Council (WASILC), and our partners. We follow up with our responses and include resources, recommendations, and end each chapter with a checklist of best AFN practices. This [AFN Review](#)¹³ is available on the WASILC website to all emergency management agencies and partners in the state of Washington and throughout the country. A [Plain Language version](#)¹⁴ is also available. While both documents are free to use, please credit WASILC when you cite materials from either AAR document.

This document builds on previous findings outlined in the [Summary of Conclusions](#)¹⁵ from a one-day tabletop exercise convened by the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) National Exercise Directorate (NED) that CIEP hosted during June 2022. We discussed the impact of a catastrophic disaster such as a Cascadia Subduction Zone 9.0M earthquake that may be imposed on our AFN work, especially with issues affecting

¹¹ https://aspr.hhs.gov/at-risk/Pages/at-risk_afn.aspx

¹² <https://disasterstrategies.org/blog-post/defining-functional-needs-updating-cmist-by-june-isaacson-kailes-disability-policy-consultant/>

¹³ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fg9NI8F8jK8gyjeSHuMlw0HVBByIOAyFb/edit>

¹⁴ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1P2NL-Ooai4q5Ymg7pEpS4gwHXOrl1k9AT_-7H0Lq3Lo/edit?tab=t.0

¹⁵ [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/6332f99d269e1d4d0147c18f_WA%20CIEP%20TTX%20Summary%20of%20Conclusions%20\(20%20Sep%2022\).pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/6332f99d269e1d4d0147c18f_WA%20CIEP%20TTX%20Summary%20of%20Conclusions%20(20%20Sep%2022).pdf)

communications and transportation. This report confirms and reinforces these findings based on lived experiences.

Not all the findings are new. Despite years of advocacy, many of these barriers have come up again and again. For example, the lack of ASL interpreters on emergency news briefings has come up each time we have inclement weather or some other disaster for several decades. Agencies and organizations that serve people with disabilities have raised these issues repeatedly, only to find everything was back to square one a few years later. Mainly it is because people in positions that implemented improvements did not make those changes permanent by writing updated emergency plans. When they leave, someone else takes over, and the new processes are forgotten. Best practices were not always shared within industries and across agency jurisdictions. Currently, CIEP is a documented supporting partner in the Washington State [Emergency Support Function #6 Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing and Human Services \(2024\)](#) Plan¹⁶ and the [Washington State Emergency Repatriation Plan \(SERP\)](#)¹⁷ that undergoes review and is updated every five years. CIEP and its AFN partners continue to seek more opportunities to collaborate in documenting plan updates implemented by EMD and other agencies.

This is not to point fingers at specific individuals or agencies but to reform long-existing systemic barriers. Referring to this report as a living document during future disasters will give us ongoing opportunities to measure our progress in ensuring that AFN is embedded in every part of emergency management. Remember, **Nothing About Us Without Us!**

The string of atmospheric river storms began on December 9, 2025. During the following week, on December 15, CIEP began a series of daily calls on best practices and gaps impacting those with AFN through mid-January, and then weekly calls beginning in February until completion of this After-Action

¹⁶ <https://mil.wa.gov/asset/682606b5891e7/ESF-6-Mass-Care,-Emergency-Assistance,-temporary-Housing,-and-Human-Services-2024.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://mil.wa.gov/asset/6936ea185f6ec/WA-SERP-2-0-FINAL.pdf>

Report. This presented an ongoing opportunity for our partners to share observations about how different agencies can better serve the whole community despite the impacts from extreme rainfall, windstorms, mudslides, and closed highways. An ASL interpreter was provided for each AFN Review call with Live CART or Zoom auto-captioning text that were saved as transcripts to create this document.

Governor Bob Ferguson requested a federal major disaster declaration and \$21.3 million in FEMA assistance following historic flooding in Washington from December 5 to 22, 2025. The state experienced a series of catastrophic atmospheric rivers and winter storms that caused widespread flooding, landslides, power outages, and severe damage to homes and infrastructure. Over 100,000 people were evacuated, nearly 4,000 homes were damaged, and one fatality occurred. Major rivers reached record flood levels, breaching levees and devastating agricultural areas, rural residents, and small businesses. The Washington State Emergency Operations Center at Camp Murray was activated at the highest level, mobilizing 400 National Guard personnel for lifesaving missions and flood mitigation. Multiple counties and Tribal Nations declared emergencies, with widespread disruptions to transportation, power, and shelter operations. Here is a list at [Historic Flood Emergency: Financial Resources and Recovery for Washingtonians | WA.gov](https://wa.gov/how-to-guides/historic-flood-emergency-financial-resources-and-recovery-washingtonians)¹⁸

CIEP, a program led by WASILC, played a key role in advising on accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities and AFN during the disaster. CIEP facilitated daily review calls from December 15, through January, then weekly calls in February, engaging government agencies, nonprofits, emergency managers, and community groups to collect and share observations, identify gaps, and improve inclusive emergency response. The report organizes findings according to the CMIST framework used as the basis for CIEP's AFN recommendations toward its goals of access to effective communications, physical access, and programmatic access.

¹⁸ <https://wa.gov/how-to-guides/historic-flood-emergency-financial-resources-and-recovery-washingtonians>

CIEP receives its funding from the [Executive Office of Resiliency and Health Security](#)¹⁹ (ORHS) at the state Department of Health (DOH) since July 2015. Over the years, CIEP has formed partnerships and connections with other agencies and community-based organizations such as the [Washington Emergency Management Division](#)²⁰ (EMD) and the Office of Emergency Management²¹ (OEM) at the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the American Red Cross, all the [Centers for Independent Living](#)²² in the state, and many other non-governmental organizations, locally and nationally. Jim House, the Disability/AFN Integration Manager, is a member of the [Washington State Emergency Management Association](#)²³ (WSEMA).

Overall Recommendations:

- Enhance coordination between state, tribal, and local agencies for disaster response, with an emphasis on inclusive planning and support for AFN populations.
- Increase preparedness and resilience for severe weather events, including infrastructure improvements to protect critical transportation routes and utilities.
- Expand outreach, training, and resources for emergency shelters and disaster assistance centers to ensure accessibility and accommodate people with disabilities.
- Strengthen partnerships between government, nonprofits, and community organizations to improve disaster case management and resource distribution.

¹⁹ <https://doh.wa.gov/about-us/transformational-plan/emergency-response-and-resilience>

²⁰ <https://mil.wa.gov/afn>

²¹ For more information contact dshsreecc@dshs.wa.gov

²² <https://www.wasilc.org/centers-for-independent-living>

²³ <https://wsema.org/>

- Develop and maintain comprehensive data systems and communication tools to better track and support vulnerable populations during emergencies.
- Promote ongoing engagement and education for emergency managers and community partners through coalitions like CIEP to build inclusive response capacity.
- Leverage lessons learned from this event to update emergency plans, policies, and after-action reports using the CMIST framework.
- Pursuing federal and state funding opportunities to support recovery, mitigation, and resilience efforts, prioritizing equitable access for all affected communities.

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Communications

In report = ASL access, language access, community outreach

Narrative:

This report highlights critical gaps and actionable steps to ensure that emergency communications in Washington State are fully accessible to all residents, particularly those who rely on ASL and other accommodations for effective communication. Continued collaboration, investment in technology, and adherence to legal requirements will enhance safety and equity in emergency response efforts.

ASL Interpreters on televised news briefings

During the catastrophic atmospheric river event in December 2025 in Washington State, early emergency communications from Governor Bob Ferguson's media briefings from Camp Murray notably lacked American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, leaving approximately 600,000 Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing residents without vital visual information. Not all the Deaf community is fluent in ASL while other population groups such as those with speech disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and certain audible processing disorders use ASL as well. This deluge resulted in historic floodings and landslides across the state, leading to unprecedented evacuations. The last time CIEP noted accessible governor news briefings was during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This ongoing omission continues to violate accessibility requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (Rehab Act), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations that mandate emergency news bulletins be accessible both visually and audibly to everyone.

Since the pandemic in 2020, through disasters such as wildfires, floods, and other extreme weather events, there have been no accessible news briefings from the Governor's Office. During hurricanes on the East Coast and many other disasters, such as the LA Wildfires in early 2025, ASL interpreters were

routinely on screen to help warn every one of the impending events. Here is a link to search results on “[ASL interpreters disasters](#).”²⁴

Just last year, the [National Association of the Deaf](#)²⁵ (NAD) had a significant court victory requiring the White House to provide an interpreter during its press briefings. [This victory](#)²⁶ underscores the importance of being accessible to all people. If an event is worthy of press attention to inform everyone, an interpreter should be an integral part of the picture to include people who rely on sign language. The NAD has further tips on making sure emergency information is accessible at [NAD – Emergency Preparedness](#).²⁷ Best practices during presentations can be found in a joint publication, the [WFD/WASLI Guidelines on Access to Information in Sign Language During Emergency Broadcasts](#)²⁸ by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI).

CIEP has collaborated with several state agencies, such as ORHS under DOH that fund its work, EMD, DSHS, and the Washington State [Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)²⁹ (ODHH) within the DSHS Home and Community Living Administration (HCLA). One of the projects involved a trial series demonstrating the feasibility of producing ASL alerts. However, as the ODHH [Position Statement on Accessible Emergency Management for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Residents of Washington State](#),³⁰ describes our findings, it stresses the need to integrate ASL Alerts into standard emergency

²⁴

https://www.bing.com/search?q=ASL+interpreters+disasters&cvid=d0dd6fda952d493fa24389d97dcd85d6&gs_lcrp=EgRlZGdlKgYIABBFgDkyBggAEUUYOTIICAEO6QcY_FXSAOg5NDg0ajBqNKgCALACAA&FORM=ANAB01&PC=U531

²⁵ <https://www.nad.org/2025/05/28/national-association-of-the-deaf-sues-white-house-for-access-to-press-briefings/>

²⁶ <https://clearinghouse.net/case/46642/>

²⁷ <https://www.nad.org/resources/emergency-preparedness/>

²⁸ https://wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/WFD-WASLI-Guidelines-on-Access-to-Information-in-SL-During-Emergency-Broadcasts_Final.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh>

³⁰ <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/ALtsa/odhh/documents/WA-Position-Statement-on-Accessible-Emergency-Alerts-Final-Draft-9-22-2025.pdf>

announcement protocols. ODHHS does not have the capability to sustain ASL emergency alerts because it is not a designated emergency response agency.

For an overview of AFN best practices nationwide, CIEP has access to a network of Disability/Access and Functional Needs (DAFN) Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in California, Colorado, Florida, and many other states. Here are some additional recommendations from a general national perspective, courtesy of [The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](#)³¹

Community organizations and state agencies are collaborating to enhance the dissemination of accessible emergency information and resources. However, barriers persist for DeafBlind populations, those with digital illiteracy, and individuals requiring culturally and linguistically appropriate communication during crises.

Below is a timeline of events and recommendations for effective communications during emergencies.

- After the news conference on the [Green River levee breach](#)³² in Tukwila last December, CIEP received emails and texts asking why there weren't any interpreters during Governor Bob Ferguson's initial TV news briefings about the December 2025 weather disaster, beginning on December 8th. Upon becoming aware, the WASILC Executive Committee and several CIL directors sent a letter to the Governor's Office, and an interpreter was present on a subsequent media briefing by the end of the following week.
- On December 15, the CIEP Disability/AFN Integration Manager personally received a FLASH FLOOD warning on his phone from King County. His home in Renton was barely outside the initial red five-mile evacuation zone for a possible flash flood from the Green River levee breach in Tukwila. Although he prepared a go-bag for himself and his

³¹ <https://disasterstrategies.org/comments-to-ncd-on-improving-state-and-local-disaster-plans-for-people-with-disabilities/>

³² <https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2025/12/15/king-county-levee-breach-tukwila-renton-kent-flood-evacuation-seattle>

dog, a follow-up news bulletin showed a much smaller evacuation zone, so it was not necessary for him to leave his home after all.

- CIEP met with the Governor's Office to discuss ASL during emergency TV news bulletins. It has been a long battle over the years, but with a new governor, they reached out to us. Our discussion is still ongoing. CIEP is also in touch with TVW, who oversees all the broadcasts from the State Capitol in Olympia.
- Recommendations for improving effective communications on televised emergency news bulletins:
 - The public information officers (PIOs) at the Governor's Office and EMD should develop a Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) to air accessible TV briefings within two hours after an emergency is declared by state or federal officials.
 - Some state agencies have their own ASL and spoken language interpreters working in-house for staff and clients who are Deaf or use a language other than English. These staff interpreters who work in a designated bilingual position that includes a five percent [dual language assignment pay](#).³³ They should be allowed to switch duties from their non-emergency jobs to help support state-level response and recovery efforts when an emergency is declared by the governor.
 - The PIOs should work with ODHH to expedite interpreter scheduling for news briefings. With a team of one hearing ASL interpreter off-camera and a qualified Deaf Interpreter on camera, news briefings can be made more accessible.
 - If the interpreter is on-site with the governor, avoid cropping, zooming out, or cutting away during the governor's comments.

³³ <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/rpau/ap/DSHS-AP-18-82-Internet-official.pdf>

The interpreter must remain visible and readable throughout the briefing.

- If the interpreter is not taped on-site with the Governor, ensure that TV Washington's (TVW) broadcast capabilities include a large Picture-in-Picture (PIP) to show the ASL interpreter at one-fourth to one-third of the screen instead of a small "postage stamp sized" box in the corner so viewers can see the interpreter better on their phones or other small screens.
- Move the PIP to the lower right corner of the screen so the closed captioning and other graphics beginning on the left side do not interfere with our view of the ASL interpreter.
- TVW also needs to upgrade its capabilities to insert live open captioning while the emergency briefing is being aired. Captioners can be obtained at the same time interpreters are requested. Live captioning is still beneficial for people who became deaf later in life and are not as fluent in sign language. Where possible, do consider supplementing with illustrative background graphics.
- Instruct local news broadcasters through the Washington State Association of Broadcasters (WSAB) to maintain full view of interpreters signing through the entire briefing without cropping, zooming out, or cutting away to other video while it is being aired while there continues to be breaking news about the disaster.
- If the Emergency Alerting System (EAS) is used, FCC regulations require full visual and audible accessibility to both the alerting and warning portions. Here is a 2019 article with a commentary on one station's EAS alert with the Washington State Broadcasters Association's [WSAB\) Newsletter - February 7, 2019](https://myemail.constantcontact.com/WSAB-Newsletter---February-7-2019.html?soid=1124728404486&aid=Ndb9Br6uHaQ)³⁴. Scroll down till you see the EAS logo.

³⁴ <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/WSAB-Newsletter---February-7-2019.html?soid=1124728404486&aid=Ndb9Br6uHaQ>

- The FCC has created templates for multilingual alerts and warnings. The 18 written languages supported with [templates](#)³⁵ are Arabic, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), French, German, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The American Sign Language (ASL) templates are provided as [video clips](#)³⁶ that can be redone using regional hazards in local sign language.
- Be sure to evaluate Plain Language planning and technology access in developing alerts.

Outdoor Warning Systems

- While this disaster did not necessitate the use of All-Hazards Alert Broadcast (AHAB) outdoor warning systems, the possibility remains that a future disaster may require their use.
- AHAB systems are sirens (and sometimes strobe lights) strategically attached to poles to warn nearby people that a natural hazardous incident is imminent and are interconnected with the local [Integrated Public Alerting and Warning System](#)³⁷ (IPAWS) using televisions, wireless devices, [NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards](#),³⁸ and other equipment. Other states in the US use them for tornados, flash floods, and other short- or no-notice hazard alerts.
- The lahar alerting system in [Pierce County](#)³⁹ has 42 siren towers strategically placed downstream from Mount Rainier along the Puyallup River Valley and the Nisqually River Valley. The purpose is to alert residents in low-lying areas below Mount Rainier to lahar (mudflow) eruptions or other volcanic activity.
- Every two years, East Pierce County school districts in Puyallup, Sumner-Bonney Lake, Orting, White River, Carbonado, Buckley, and

³⁵ <https://www.fcc.gov/multilingual-wireless-emergency-alerts>

³⁶ <https://www.fcc.gov/WirelessEmergencyAlert-Templates-ASL>

³⁷ <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system>

³⁸ https://www.weather.gov/nwr/nwr_receivers#buy

³⁹ <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/5888/Outdoor-Warning-System>

Wilkeson coordinate a full-scale [regional lahar evacuation drill](#)⁴⁰ where over 50 facilities in low-lying areas are cleared within their goal of 90 minutes.

- The poles for lahar evacuations do have blue strobe lights for visual alerts, but they are way up high on top of the poles, making it difficult to see on a blue-sky day. The strobe lights should be placed near eye-level for maximum effectiveness. Here is an [after-action report](#)⁴¹ that CIEP did in November 2020.
- The second AHAB alerting system in Washington includes 121 towers along the western coast of the state, in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and parts of the Puget Sound. The purpose is to [alert residents](#)⁴² and visitors along the coast of impending tsunami incidents that sometimes follow earthquakes or underwater landslides. When the sirens are activated, people need to leave the beach and go inland to higher ground.
- In October 2024, EMD installed a pilot strobe light on a tsunami siren pole in Ocean Shores that we evaluated and provided an [accessibility assessment](#)⁴³ with feedback. Since then, EMD has constructed a mock pole at Camp Murray to test design features for optimal accessibility and purchased 37 additional strobe lights. Additional lights will be installed on poles with priority on major population centers and active tourist areas.
- On page 2 of the newly updated [United-States-Tsunami-Alerting-Analysis-2026](#)⁴⁴, there is a list of unmet needs, including additional wayfinding to identify evacuation shortfalls and needs. Another unmet need on page 3 is to complete the installation of emergency lighting on

⁴⁰ <https://laharexercise.com/>

⁴¹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/603febe5a510ca44aa6a0220_CIEP%20After%20Action%20Report%20-%2011-2-2020%20Pierce%20County%20Outdoor%20Warning%20System%20Upgrade%20Test%20Final.pdf

⁴² <https://mil.wa.gov/alerts>

⁴³ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/673670322400bb6c07ec541b_Tsunami%20Alert%20Accessibility%20Evaluation.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://mil.wa.gov/asset/69a08a91462bf/United-States-Tsunami-Alerting-Analysis-2026-updated.pdf>

all sirens for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. On page 39, the analysis mentions some of the best practices to ensure the information is accessible to people with visual disabilities.

- We still need to evaluate the accessibility of the 40+ existing and proposed [tsunami vertical evacuation structures](#)⁴⁵ along the coast. Discussions still need to occur on improving mapping and wayfinding for people, especially those with access and functional needs, who may not be as familiar with nearby safe areas of refuge.

Washington State Legislation:

- Senate Bill 5046 (2017) – Washington’s law on Language Access for Emergency Alerts [SB 5046 Washington State Legislature](#)⁴⁶ is in effect, and both the state and all counties need to follow and implement alerts using languages that are used by at least five percent of the population in their jurisdiction.
- Senate Bill 5027 (2021) – Washington [SB 5027 Washington State Legislature](#)⁴⁷ (or RCW 49.60.520) requires that at least 50% of all TV sets in places of public accommodations must have the captioning turned on unless a program does not have its own captioning. In 2019, the [City of Seattle](#)⁴⁸ and the [City of Tacoma](#)⁴⁹ both enacted similar captioning laws. It is one way to achieve situational awareness during severe inclement weather if you are not at home or your phone is not working.
- Chapter 2.42 RCW – [Interpreters – Persons with Hearing or Speech Impairment](#)⁵⁰. This state law requires interpreters for people with

⁴⁵

<https://mil.wa.gov/asset/6723ccad3ed27/Manual%20for%20Tsunami%20Vertical%20Evacuation%20Structures%202nd%20Edition%202024.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5046&Year=2017>

⁴⁷ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/BillSummary/?BillNumber=5027&Year=2021&Initiative=false>

⁴⁸

https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodeId=TIT14HURI_CH14.05CLCAPLPUA_C_SMC_14.05_Closed_Captioning_in_Places_of_Public_Accommodation

⁴⁹ <https://cms.tacoma.gov/cityclerk/Files/MunicipalCode/Title01-AdministrationAndPersonnel.pdf> 1.29.190 Provision of Universal Closed Captioning begins on page 1-241

⁵⁰ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=2.42>

hearing or speech impairments in court or other legal settings. The next chapter 2.43 RCW deals with interpreters for Persons with Limited English Proficiency. Neither section deals with emergency situations.

- [Report to the Legislature:](#)⁵¹ ESSB 5950 Sec. 204 (47) Laws of 2024 Legislative Session – Establish a workgroup to address the statewide shortage of qualified and certified American Sign Language interpreters and ProTactile interpreters. This report by the Home and Community Living Administration under the DSHS outlines the findings by ODHH in their study that was published on April 25, 2025.
- While this legislation does require access to some type of services, none of them explicitly mandate ASL interpretation of emergency alerts on the state level. One possible solution would be to include ASL not just in disability access laws, but also in our [state language access laws as is now done in New York](#).⁵² This move recognizes ASL as a fully recognized language option, not just disability accommodation.

Community Engagement

- How are we getting messages of AFN resources out to the community?
- Some of the commentary illustrated confusion about where to call for help. Many were advised to call overwhelmed emergency services such as [2-1-1 Washington](#)⁵³. Recent state cuts have forced some counties to set up their own [regional hotlines](#)⁵⁴. That led some callers to seek other agencies for urgent assistance related to recharging items that had depleted electrical power because the electricity was turned off as part of the flood response. Some of those regional hotlines or helplines may not have consistent AFN resources in their databases.

⁵¹

https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=ODHH%20ESSB%205950%20Legislative%20Report%20Final_f29b6b48-ebd4-4062-98ef-8b48749e7dab.pdf

⁵² <https://www.whec.com/top-news/gov-hochul-announces-american-sign-language-now-included-in-new-yorks-language-access-law/>

⁵³ <https://wa211.org/>

⁵⁴ [After state reduction of 211 services, regional agency launches local hotline | Local News | goskagit.com](#)

- Many senior citizens or people with a disability may not have access to media or wireless devices and would not be able to receive any emergency alerts. It is recommended that they use the buddy system, seeking a trusted friend or neighbor to provide alerts manually.
- Disaster Assistance Centers (DAC) plan for language access and other ADA requirements, including ASL.
- King County used Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) for ASL plus in-person spoken language interpreters while other counties used in-person interpreters as requested.
- Skagit County only requested Spanish interpreters from the state, but other counties used their own vendors.
- American Red Cross (ARC) outreach teams have access to virtual interpreters for ASL and language access. Some areas might have spotty internet coverage.
- All emergency alerts must be written using [Plain Language Guidelines](https://governor.wa.gov/plain-language/plain-language-guidelines)⁵⁵ from the Washington State Governor.
 - Know your audience
 - Prioritize relevant information
 - Use familiar terms
 - Favor active voice
 - Use personal pronouns
 - Limit sentences and paragraphs
 - Design clear pages
 - Requirements
 - Training
 - Learn about readability formulas

⁵⁵ <https://governor.wa.gov/plain-language/plain-language-guidelines>

- What looks like a denial letter may be just a request for additional documentation/information and may not require an appeal. Folks need to read the letter closely or contact FEMA for an explanation of the letter. The letters are NOT written in plain language
- CIEP helped DOH create a [communications toolkit](#)⁵⁶ with a CDC grant after the pandemic that helps people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) in the use of plain language to be able to understand important public health information.
- The goal for one-stop information sharing is not to have proprietary ownership of information but to share verified data.
- Please lean on our IL Centers and peer Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to help navigate communication and other technological concerns from their home or CBO office.
- WASILC has a [comprehensive list of disaster recovery and emergency management resources related to disability and access](#)⁵⁷. It was last updated in January 2026.

Cultural/Political Influences

- Under Title II of the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#)⁵⁸ (ADA), the [Federal Communications Commission](#)⁵⁹ (FCC) has required that emergency news briefings must be visually and audibly accessible to everyone.
- Anti-discrimination regulations for people with disabilities in [Sections 504 and 508](#)⁶⁰ of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended also come into play here.

⁵⁶ <https://doh.wa.gov/public-health-provider-resources/emergency-preparedness/emergency-communications-toolkit>

⁵⁷ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/6812a5db365cb8e84ec5fb17_WA%20State%20Disaster%20Recovery%20D-AFN%20Resource%20List%20-%20updated%20April%202025.pdf

⁵⁸ <https://www.ada.gov/topics/emergency-planning/#:~:text=Alerting%20the%20public>

⁵⁹ <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/accessibility-emergency-information-television>

⁶⁰ <https://www.disabilityhelp.org/what-is-the-difference-between-section-508-and-504/>

- Closed captions are only a partial solution, which works only for those who are bilingual, know ASL, and can read/write English fluently. Because caption text lacks the tone of urgency, it does not effectively reach the large portion of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community that relies solely on ASL with facial expressions and other visual prompting cues because of significant language differences, especially during times when things are tense.
- Attacks on DEI initiatives have impacts on interpreter availability and other disability policies.
- Deaf people don't always see themselves as having disabilities; they can do anything except hear.

Communication Accessibility and Assistance

- [ODHH Case Management Services](https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh/office-deaf-and-hard-hearing-case-management-services)⁶¹ can provide communication support for ASL users. Clients can call by videophone and ask case managers to translate announcements and other documents to ASL.
- One of ODHH's case managers contacted CIEP seeking guidance on locating a client who lives near the North Fork of the Skagit River. CIEP provided some tips from EMD on shelters and other resources in the area. A few days later, the client contacted her when he was able to recharge his phone and provided an update. Although his home was spared from flood damage, he still needed assistance for recovery.
- Let our CILs and other disability-led peer orgs know how ODHH is engaging so they can coordinate services regarding other communication and access needs by community members.
- People need to know there are other types of accessible application forms.
- Computer/digital illiteracy can be a barrier for applying for services

⁶¹ <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh/office-deaf-and-hard-hearing-case-management-services>

- Sometimes it is easier to text than make a voice call or video call during emergencies when infrastructure is damaged.
- Here is an abstract on the effectiveness of Early Earthquake Warning (EEW) Systems from the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction “[Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing student experiences with earthquake early warning in the United States: Evaluating language planning and technology access.](#)”⁶²
 - *The growing literature on deaf and hard of hearing (DHH+) populations and disasters demonstrates that emergency communication (including alerts) is not reaching global DHH + individuals with dangerous impacts for morbidity and mortality. This is the first research study in the U.S. to qualitatively explore the experiences of DHH + persons with earthquake early warning (EEW) through group-based dialogue sessions. The study investigates eight DHH + university students' past earthquake experiences, access to EEW alerts, and perceptions of ShakeAlert[®], an EEW system for detecting earthquakes and alerting residents of California, Oregon, and Washington. Findings highlight key gaps in disaster alert usability within four thematic areas: lack of messaging in participants' language(s), unclear alert messaging, deficient message delivery mechanisms for deafblind persons, and insufficient access to earthquake information and training that leads to dependence on informal information networks. Weaknesses identified in these four themes reduce DHH + trust in EEW systems and compromise the capacity of alert recipients to take swift protective action or to mentally prepare before shaking starts. The study also underscores structural factors such as insufficient linguistic representation in disaster language planning and technology design, which ignores the linguistic and sensory access needs of*

⁶² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221242092600107X>

DHH + individuals. Building on disaster language planning frameworks, we recommend involving DHH + populations to co-develop EEW alerts. By centering DHH + perspectives, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to ensure that EEW systems reach everyone.

DeafBlind Population

- Seattle, Washington, has one of the largest DeafBlind (DB) population centers in the United States amid a nationwide ASL interpreter shortage. However, many DeafBlind residents have migrated to other towns across the state such as Spokane, Vancouver, Yakima, and other places due to the lower cost of living.
- While approximately 20% of DeafBlind individuals use Braille, many struggle to find accessible information, while hearing blind people often rely on audio materials.
- Many DeafBlind people communicate through tactile sign language (in the hands) and other means. This includes [ProTactile](#)⁶³, which recently had been identified and recognized as a revolutionary new language based on touch.
- Due to dual disabilities affecting both their vision and hearing in varying degrees, DeafBlind survivors would likely need in-person interpreters or have their own co-navigators arrange for transportation, and/or communication assistants to help them read documents, fill out application forms, and provide environmental information.
- [DeafBlind Service Center](#)⁶⁴ (DBSC) in Seattle provides case managers, Pro-Tactile interpreters, co-navigators, and communication facilitators for DeafBlind residents throughout the entire state.

⁶³ <https://www.pbs.org/video/protactile-a-language-of-touch-1u5hgv/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.seattledbcs.org/>

- DBSC offers training on how to guide DeafBlind individuals while respecting their autonomy.
- When an emergency arises, and if there is a DeafBlind person in the area, go up to him or her and draw a big **X** on their back with your finger and guide the person to the nearest safe place. [DeafBlind individuals have been trained](#)⁶⁵ to follow you out of danger. In all fairness, be sure to take the time to explain what happened when it is safe.
- Should DB residents wear a band on their arms so that police, fire, and medical emergency personnel can recognize them and escort them to an appropriate shelter that is aware of the DB situation to assist them? Information probably needs to be shared with appropriate emergency personnel so that they are aware and can recognize and assist them.
- There is little to no awareness among DeafBlind people about Disaster Assistance Centers and other resources.
- Case managers at DBSC and other service agencies should bring up emergency preparedness when new clients go through the intake process and during annual reviews.
- Service agencies such as Centers for Independent Living and other disability-led organizations should explore the feasibility of membership with [Washington Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters](#)⁶⁶ (WAVOAD).

We do recommend that DB residents and others do the following:

- Create a communication plan on who to contact for help and to let family members know.
- Register with local 911 call centers and PSAPs to let them know your accommodation needs, such as interpreters. Note that this does not guarantee your safety during a major disaster.

⁶⁵ <https://deafblindservices.ca/resources/sighted-guide-technique>

⁶⁶ <https://www.wavoad.org/>

- Develop a buddy system that includes several people such as co-navigators, personal assistants, roommates, co-workers, interpreters, neighbors, etc. who can help depending on circumstances and location during the emergency.
- Become familiar with different ways to contact 911
- Sign up for emergency alerts with your local city/county jurisdiction.

Gestures and Nontraditional Ways to Communicate

- CIEP offers Gesture Training as a “Just-in-Time” training to emergency management and volunteers to bridge impromptu communication gaps during the initial stages of disaster recovery between the onset and when professional interpreters are deployed and positioned in the field.
- The goal of CIEP’s Gesture Training workshop is to help participants be comfortable using their hands, face, props, apps, and other tools to communicate basic needs and to understand each other and help bridge initial impromptu communication gaps from the onset of any disaster UNTIL professional interpreters and other resources are in place. The tools provided in this workshop does not replace professional interpreters, the outcome is to improve communications between survivors and responders or volunteers and fill AFN gaps on effective communications between survivors who are Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, or do not use English as their primary language.
- The [Show Me for Emergencies](#)⁶⁷ app from Massachusetts is a great tool on your smartphone that allows you to use icons with simple word labels.

Situational Awareness Concerns

- Concerns about short notices. Some of us need extra time to make additional arrangements for transportation and communication support, especially during evacuations.

⁶⁷ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/show-me-for-emergencies>

- The best places to stay informed on local updates are usually through county websites and Facebook pages
- We should promote the use of the [NOAA Weather Radios](#) to keep abreast of weather and some non-weather-related threats. Some models include a small strobe light and bed-shaker for heavy sleepers that will not wake up to audible chirps.
- The Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing [Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program](#)⁶⁸ includes the [Sonic Alert alarm clock](#)⁶⁹ bundled with a smoke/CO detector, NOAA weather radio, and a subscription service that can send alerts to your phone as they happen.

Accessible Shelter Design Features

- a. Are all rooms/areas labeled in Braille or with tactile markings?
- b. Are all rooms/areas labeled using simple language and visual graphics?
- c. Are there stanchions and ropes in place to help blind people access vital areas independently such as restrooms, cots, food areas, etc.?
- d. Is there access to an amplified or captioned telephone?
- e. Is there access to a video telephone?
- f. Is there access to a large-button telephone?
- g. Is there access to a telephone with voice feedback?
- h. Is there public access to the internet/Wi-Fi?

Other issues

- The Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) in the US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) issued the following in its [Recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Individuals with Disabilities and Disasters \(9/19/2023\)](#)⁷⁰

⁶⁸ <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh/telecommunication-equipment-distribution>

⁶⁹ <https://www.sonicalert.com/home-aware-signaling?page=1>

⁷⁰ https://us.pagefreezer.com/en-us/replay/w/id-6acc95083dd1f:614be660d24450de7a5387c008a8cedc/20250203025130mp_/https://aspr.hhs.gov/AboutASPR/WorkingwithASPR/BoardsandCommittees/Documents/NACIDD/NACIDD-Recommendations-19Sep2023-Final.pdf

- Include timely development and distribution of videos, press releases, press conferences, and all other communication in American Sign Language and regional or locally used sign languages appropriate for the populations affected by a PHE. All communication must be in plain and easy-to-understand language and produced for people with Limited English Proficiency before, during, and after an emergency to provide equally effective communication access.
- Lack of consistent language access in local county and city alerts. Alerts that originate from the city or county level need to be accessible as well. Pierce County has a library of pre-produced videos covering all hazards to be used immediately at the onset of a disaster.
- The National Council on Disability (NCD) has issued a Request for Information – Creation of a State, Local, Territory and Tribal Emergency Management Toolkit (FR Doc. 2026-04513) [National Council on Disability | NCD announces RFI on disability emergency management toolkit](#)⁷¹ that will provide promising practices and guidance on how to create an emergency management plan inclusive of people with disabilities and update the federal agency’s 2009 report, [Effective Emergency Management: Making Improvements for Communities and People with Disabilities](#)⁷².
- As the United States prepares for major global events such as the FIFA World Cup 2026, 9-1-1 centers can expect a significant increase in calls from international visitors using mobile devices purchased and provisioned outside the U.S. These calls often behave differently from domestic wireless calls, and [9-1-1 service will be impaired](#)⁷³.
- Be aware that Washington and other states are experiencing an ongoing nationwide ASL interpreter shortage. This running [document examines](#)

⁷¹ <https://www.ncd.gov/2026/03/09/ncd-announces-rfi-on-disability-emergency-management-toolkit/>

⁷² <https://www.ncd.gov/report/effective-emergency-management-making-improvements-for-communities-and-people-with-disabilities/>

⁷³ <https://www.nena.org/page/fifa>

[the collaborative efforts](#)⁷⁴ of the Washington Signed, ProTactile, and Trilingual Interpreter Shortage Workgroup working with ODHH to address the shortage of qualified sign language interpreters in our state.

Recommendations

1. Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) for Accessible Briefings:

- Develop and implement an SOP requiring the Governor’s Office and Emergency Management Division with the goal of providing accessible TV briefings with ASL interpretation within 2 to 4 hours after an emergency declaration.

2. Interpreter Coordination:

- Establish a dedicated team including both hearing ASL interpreters (off-camera) and certified/qualified Deaf interpreters (on-camera) to ensure effective communication.
- Create GIS maps indicating locations (home and workplace) of interpreters working in the state of Washington. Qualified out-of-state interpreters should be identified to provide virtual services. Local interpreters can be called to the scene of the disaster or provide virtual services from their homes or offices if their electricity and internet coverage are not disrupted.
- Create GIS maps showing higher concentrations of Deaf individuals residing in areas identified as having high risks for wildfires and flooding to help with the placement of interpreters and skilled professionals who are fluent in ASL.
- Utilize in-house ASL interpreters with dual language pay from state agencies by reassigning them to emergency roles during disaster declarations.

74

<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/ALTSA/odhh/documents/ODHH/12.19.2024.Website.Content.HB.2221.pdf>

- Provide training with Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to ASL interpreters in Washington State, similar to the [Emergency Response Interpreter Credentialing \(ERIC\) Program](#)⁷⁵ in Arizona, the [CMIST Response Team: Emergency Response Interpreter Program](#)⁷⁶ in Colorado, and the [Disaster Response Interpreter \(DRI\) Program](#)⁷⁷ in California.
- Maintain a pool of standby interpreters and trained counselors who can provide immediate ASL services during emergencies.

3. Broadcast Enhancements:

- Upgrade broadcast capabilities (e.g., TVW) to feature interpreters prominently via large Picture-in-Picture (PIP) windows and live open captioning. Position the PIP window on the right so it does not conflict as much with the closed captioning, which usually reads from left to right.
- Instruct newscasters to maintain uninterrupted full-screen visibility of interpreters throughout emergency briefings.

4. Expanded Language Access:

- Ensure local county alerts and Emergency Alerting System (EAS) messages meet full visual and audible accessibility standards.
- Advocate for FCC mandates requiring mobile phone providers to support ASL and other language settings for emergency alerts.
- Create and disseminate plain-language, accessible informational materials, including emergency resources, shelter locations, and mutual aid contacts.

⁷⁵ <https://dema.az.gov/resources/emergency-response-interpreter-credentialing-eric-program>

⁷⁶ <https://www.colorado-nwrhcc.org/events/2025/5/14/cmist-response-team-emergency-response-interpreter>

⁷⁷ <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/policy-administration/access-functional-needs/communication/>

5. Community and Organizational Collaboration:

- Strengthening partnerships among Deaf and DeafBlind service organizations, Independent Living Centers (ILCs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and agencies like ODHH for coordinated outreach and support.
- Provide accessible application options for emergency services, including text-based communication and alternative formats.

6. Focus on Marginalized Populations:

- Address unique needs of DeafBlind individuals, including in-person interpreter support, transportation assistance, and accessible application processes.
- Learn non-traditional communication methods such as sign language, gestures, writing on palm, or use props such as communication cards, white board, cell phones, and assistive technology to communicate with those who do not use English.
- Increase awareness of Disaster Assistance Centers and ensure availability of ASL, Braille, and audio materials.

Resources

- This tool from Snohomish Health Department provides excellent [Guidance for Improving Accessibility of Public Health Communications](#)⁷⁸
- Prioritize restoration of broadband networks that were damaged. According to an article, [Gallaudet students travel to North Carolina to learn from communities recovering after Hurricane Helene | Certificate in Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction](#)

⁷⁸ https://www.snohd.org/DocumentCenter/View/14426/FINAL_IDD-Documents_10-28-24

[and Emergency Planning | Gallaudet University](#)⁷⁹, Deaf and Hard of Hearing people were cut off from the internet in North Carolina for more than three days during the aftermath of Hurricane Helene during September 2024. This meant they were cut off from community resources as they had lost their ability to contact emergency services, as well as families, friends, and loved ones.

- State and local emergency management should investigate Deaf Link, which is a unique provider of accessible communication solutions. Deaf Link's mission is to address the critical communications needs of people with sensory disabilities who may be Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, DeafBlind or literacy challenged. Core to Deaf Link's services is the [Accessible Hazard Alert System](#)⁸⁰ (AHAS). The public can sign up for those through the city. It sends a text with the appropriate sign language video attached to the message with a link. Some advocates have found that the cost is a barrier, while others feel that local interpreters should be prioritized because of regional variations in sign language.

⁷⁹ <https://gallaudet.edu/international-development/certificate-in-global-leadership-in-deaf-centered-disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction-and-emergency-planning/gallaudet-students-travel-to-north-carolina-to-learn-from-communities-recovering-after-hurricane-helene/>

⁸⁰ <https://deaflink.com/>

Checklist of COMMUNICATIONS best practices

Accessible Announcements

- i. Is there an overhead Public Address (PA) system to broadcast audio announcements?
- j. Is there a microphone system to amplify audio announcements?
- k. Is there an audio loop induction system to work with hearing aids or cochlear implants?
- l. Are all audio information announcements able to be posted on electronic signs or used with CART Services?
- m. Do video information announcements contain captioning?
- n. Do video information announcements contain video descriptions?
- o. For urban, rural, and wildland interface areas, do you include notifications using accessible methods other than mobile PA systems?
- p. Have you ensured access to ASL and spoken language interpreters on standby with payment and support contracts in place?
- q. Have you coordinated with state and local PIOs for assistance with accessible messaging?
- r. Do you provide information in alternate formats such as large print (using block letters on buff paper), Braille, or thumb drives?
- s. Have you made use of the full continuum of alternate formats such as large-print, Braille, thumb drives, or other media?
- t. Have you ensured that announcements and advisories about hazardous conditions, including contaminants, chemicals, and tainted water, are produced in accessible formats for everyone?

Accessible Newscasts and Social Media

- u. Do local media provide accessible emergency messaging, including quality captioning and qualified sign language interpreters?
- v. Can social media announcements be sent using a video message?
- w. Can social media messages be sent with ASL interpretation?

- x. Have you identified accessible communication needs/methods with the disability community regarding initial and ongoing accessible updates about emergency information and advisories, sheltering and/or evacuation instructions, shelter locations, transportation, restoration of services, regular service updates, disaster assistance, all-clear announcements, and incident closures with contact information in multiple formats for questions?

Community Collaboration

- y. Do you coordinate with local partners about the best “whole community” approaches across areas of impact?
- z. Does your contact information include ten-digit phone numbers with voice AND text capabilities?
- aa. Have you identified how to reach individuals who don’t use social media or the internet?
- bb. Have you identified alternatives to web-based messaging for use during power outages and internet disruption?

Maintaining Health

In report = sheltering and other public health issues

Narrative:

The report addresses sheltering and public health challenges during disasters, with a focus on collaboration gaps and health needs. There is a lack of coordination between emergency management and adult living facilities regarding acute and chronic access and functional needs (AFN) during evacuations. Public health agencies, such as [Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department](https://tpchd.org/)⁸¹ (TPCHD), are collaborating using networks like the Pierce County [Functional Assessment Service Team](https://www.piercecountywa.gov/995/Functional-Assessment-Service-Teams-FAST)⁸² (FAST), but gaps remain between [mass care \(ESF6\)](https://mil.wa.gov/asset/6786f625e554b/ESF%206%20Annex_Final%20Update.pdf)⁸³ and [public health functions \(ESF8\)](https://mil.wa.gov/asset/682607750cdbe/ESF-8-Public-Health,-Medical-and-Mortuary-Services.pdf),⁸⁴ particularly around durable medical equipment (DME) needs. The recovery phase poses challenges for those inexperienced in emergency management. Public health concerns include rising flu cases, water safety, and the need for mold cleanup. The pharmacy sector, including the [Washington State Pharmacy Association](https://www.wsparx.org/)⁸⁵ (WSPA) and the [American Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/disaster-relief.html),⁸⁶ supports access to prescription refills during emergencies. [Electrical power outage preparedness](https://www.commerce.wa.gov/eremo/wa-public-safety-power-shutoffs/)⁸⁷ and extreme weather forecasts add more complexity. Additional challenges include managing community data sensitively, PPE shortages, and waivers for food benefits. Upcoming events during peak heat season raise concerns for compounded disaster preparedness, including language access for international visitors.

⁸¹ <https://tpchd.org/>

⁸² <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/995/Functional-Assessment-Service-Teams-FAST>

⁸³ https://mil.wa.gov/asset/6786f625e554b/ESF%206%20Annex_Final%20Update.pdf

⁸⁴ <https://mil.wa.gov/asset/682607750cdbe/ESF-8-Public-Health,-Medical-and-Mortuary-Services.pdf>

Update coming soon.

⁸⁵ <https://www.wsparx.org/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/disaster-relief.html>

⁸⁷ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/eremo/wa-public-safety-power-shutoffs/>

Interagency Collaboration

- No coordination with area adult living facilities on acute or chronic AFN needs during disasters and evacuations
- Collaborate with Tacoma/Pierce County Public Health and make use of its FAST network
- DCAP uses a lot of public health volunteers
- Gap between ESF6 (Mass Care) and ESF8 (Public Health)? Some say people with DME are not a function of emergency management but more of health-related issues.
- The recovery phase may be overwhelming for those without experience in emergency management

Electrical Power

- Request an in-home audit of power supply to prepare for outages.
- Extreme Weather forecasts (heat/ice/rain/snow/wind) and [Public Safety Power Shutoffs \(PSPS\)](#)⁸⁸
- Establish backup power sources scaled to individual needs. Technical requirements vary for individuals relying on electrical devices for charging wireless communication devices, power chairs, and life-sustaining medical equipment.

Durable Medical Equipment

- What are the logistics to get replacements for durable medical equipment (DME)?
- Using the 1135 Waiver from CMS for Durable Medical Equipment
 - How the 1135 waiver works is when an individual who loses or has damage to a piece of durable medical equipment can get that piece of equipment repaired or replaced under the 1135 waiver to

⁸⁸ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/eremo/wa-public-safety-power-shutoffs/>

be paid for by Medicaid, Medicare, or insurance. It's not something that could be used for distributing replacement durable medical equipment. It is not like the waiver would give us a bunch of durable medical equipment that could be given away. People still must go through the process; they may have to get a new prescription or a statement from their doctor saying it was lost or damaged because of the disaster. It is a workaround where normally if someone has a wheelchair that is paid for by Medicaid, they can only get another wheelchair every so many years. And the 1135 waiver says that in the case where a piece of equipment is affected by a disaster, you don't have to wait that long; it can be done immediately, as immediately as that whole process enables it to be.

- Following the historic “bomb cyclone” in November 2024, CIEP conducted an informal survey during a [Northwest Healthcare Response Network](#)⁸⁹ (NWHRN) coordination call, asking if there was a spike in emergency room use by people who needed access to electrical power. Most representatives at the meeting from area hospitals replied that many of the users during the aftermath were from homes without power and were there merely to recharge their medical equipment and wireless devices, and not for medical services.

[Knights Community Hospital Equipment Lend Program \(KC-HELP\)](#)

Durable medical equipment (DME) has always been one of the heavy lifts for disability access and functional needs. And response and recovery. Just before the Spokane fires in August 2023, CIEP did an AFN Road Trip tour of Eastern Washington and Central Washington.

At one stop, the [Knights Community Hospital Equipment Lend Program](#)⁹⁰ (KC-HELP) in Pasco has a network of warehouses around the state. The manager gave us a tour of the KC-HELP facility, and one of the takeaways from that day

⁸⁹ <https://nwhrn.org/>

⁹⁰ <https://www.knightscommunityhospitalequipmentloanprogram.com/about.asp>

is that we could compare their process with how things worked in this flood. The coordinators with KC-HELP knew how to code CMS, Medicaid, Medicare, so that they could expedite the 1135 waiver capabilities and get equipment to people either as a loan or permanent ownership depending on the need.

So that is something where there is some guidance, and the tricky part that they said was the [CMS coding](#),⁹¹ which is a nightmare unto itself and changes often. If they are following, if they have a plan in place, let's see what they can help us to do; even without the 1135 waiver, we may be able to do some things as the state beforehand.

KC-HELP can help bypass red tape, so if you need DME on loan immediately, they can get that to you. All that is required is to just fill out a form, and you may get a loaner a lot quicker than if you were going to get a replacement through insurance. There are other agencies across the state that provide those same services or other channels for DME.

KC-HELP takes community donations of DME and stores them in their warehouse after cleaning and sterilization. They have a statewide network of facilities with hundreds of wheelchairs and all kinds of mobility equipment, crutches, and walkers; you name it, they've got it. Here are a couple of photos from an old CIEP ALERT newsletter after the AFN Road Trip in 2023.



Figure 1 (Left): In a KC-HELP warehouse, there are power wheelchairs, scooters, and other equipment and parts.

⁹¹ <https://www.cms.gov/data-research/monitoring-programs/medicare-fee-service-compliance-programs/medical-review-and-education/master-list-dmepos-items-potentially-subject-conditions-payment>

Figure 2 (Right): In a KC-HELP warehouse, there are manual wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches, and other equipment.

- Need to ensure that points of distribution for basic supplies are accessible

Public Health

Below are two recovery fact sheets issued by the Department of Health (DOH) along with slides showing a snapshot of public health recovery efforts in January 2026 and again in March 2026. Their summaries include a timeline of response/recovery efforts, and the number of people served.

DOH Recovery

Department of Health (DOH) Recovery Fact Sheet

Event: 2025 Winter Weather (25-4783)

Date: 01/02/2026

DOH Summary:

DOH continues to support statewide recovery from the 2025 Winter Weather Event, with focused monitoring of drinking water systems where impacts persist. Several utilities remain under abnormal or emergency operating conditions, and a limited number of weather-related boil water advisories remain in effect across affected counties.

At this time, no unmet resource, technical assistance, or health system support needs have been identified for DOH.

DOH remains engaged with community and health partners to monitor recovery needs, support individuals with disabilities or additional needs, and ensure public health and medical systems continue to stabilize and function effectively as communities transition into recovery.

DOH Recovery Supporting Areas:

Water Utility Status:

- 32 water systems are currently operating under abnormal conditions.

- 9 weather-related Boil Water Advisories remain in effect across Island, Skagit, Snohomish, Pierce, Lewis, Jefferson, and Cowlitz Counties.
- As of January 2, 2026, 40 utilities across Skagit, Whatcom, King, Pierce, Thurston, Lewis, Cowlitz, Chelan, and Yakima Counties are operating under emergency conditions. No outstanding resource needs have been identified at this time.

Resource Requests:

- There are currently no winter weather-related resource requests requiring DOH assistance.

Technical Assistance:

- No specific requests for technical assistance have been received from partners.

Health Systems:

- Currently, there are no requests for support from health systems.

DOH ESF 14 Primary Core Capabilities:

Public Information and Warning: Assist with public information support on disaster recovery operations to include providing support to and considerations for, our LEP and other Access and Functional Needs Populations.

- DOH surveyed local health jurisdictions in affected counties to identify any assistance needs related to planning and scheduling Disaster Assistance Centers (DACs).

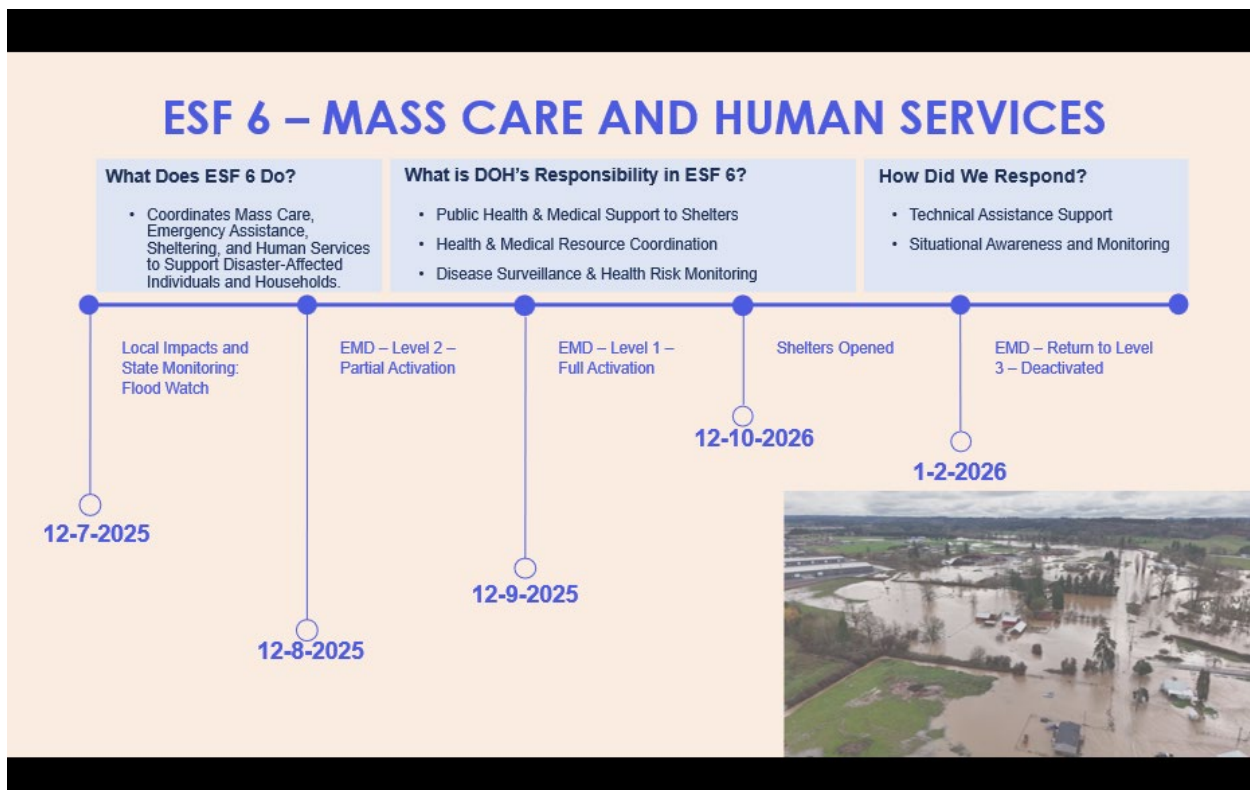
Health and Social Services:

1. Support the recovery of people with disabilities or additional needs through partnerships with specialized organizations.

- DOH continues to participate in coordination meetings with community organizations and maintain communication with partners to identify and assess recovery needs.

2. Restore and improve public health and medical systems to promote the resilience, health (including behavioral health), independence, and well-being of the whole community.

- Through ongoing coordination and communication with partners, DOH continues to monitor conditions, assess needs, and provide support as appropriate



Description of Slide #1: ESF 6 – Mass Care and Human Services

What Does ESF 6 Do?

- Coordinates Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Sheltering, and Human Services to Support Disaster-Affected Individuals and Households.

What is DOH's Responsibility in ESF 6?

- Public Health & Medical Support to Shelters
- Health & Medical Resource Coordination

- Disease Surveillance & Health Risk Monitoring

How Did We Respond?

- Technical Assistance Support
- Situational Awareness and Monitoring

12-7-2025

- Local Impacts and State Monitoring:
 - Flood Watch

12-8-2025

- EMD – Level 2 – Partial Activation

12-9-2025

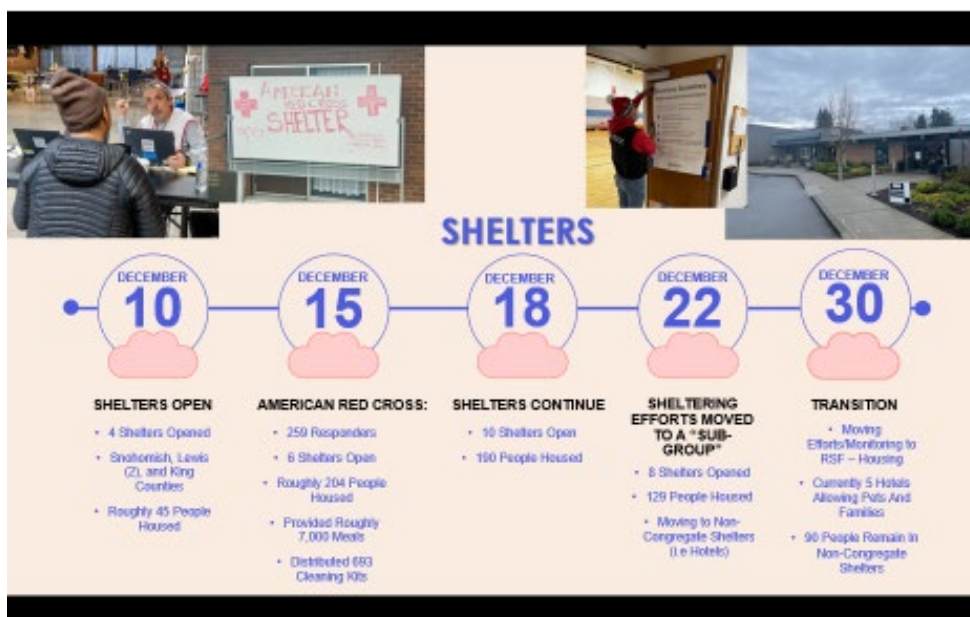
- EMD – Level 1 – Full Activation

12-10-2025

- Shelters Opened

1-2-2026

- EMD – Return to Level 3 – Deactivated



Description of Slide #2: SHELTERS

DECEMBER 10

SHELTERS OPEN

- 4 Shelters Opened
- Snohomish, Lewis (2), and King Counties
- Roughly 45 People Housed

DECEMBER 15

AMERICAN RED CROSS:

- 259 Responders
- 6 Shelters Open
- Roughly 204 People Housed
- Provided Roughly 7,000 Meals
- Distributed 693 Cleaning Kits

DECEMBER 18

SHELTERS CONTINUE

- 10 Shelters Open
- 190 People Housed

DECEMBER 22

SHELTERING EFFORTS MOVED TO A “SUB-GROUP”

- 8 Shelters Opened
- 129 People Housed
- Moving to Non-Congregate Shelters (i.e. Hotels)

DECEMBER 30

TRANSITION

- Moving Efforts/Monitoring to RSF – Housing
- Currently 5 Hotels Allowing Pets and Families
- 90 People Remain in Non-Congregate Shelters

Department of Health (DOH) Recovery Fact Sheet

Event: 2025 Winter Weather (25-4783)

Date: 03/11/2026

DOH Summary:

DOH continues to support statewide recovery from the 2025 Winter Weather Event with focused monitoring of drinking water systems impacted by flooding.

Water utilities continue to stabilize, with the number of systems operating under abnormal or emergency conditions continuing to decrease, with three weather-related Boil Water Advisories (BWA) in Island, Lewis, and Jefferson Counties remaining in effect. No unmet resource requests or health system support needs have been identified.

DOH remains engaged with state, local, and community partners through coordination meetings, public information efforts, and remains available for technical assistance.

DOH Recovery Supporting Areas:

Water Utility Status:

- **14** water systems are currently operating under abnormal conditions.
- **3** weather-related Boil Water Advisories remain in effect across Island, Lewis, and Jefferson Counties.
- As of March 10, 2026, **2** utilities in Skagit and Chelan County are operating under emergency conditions. No outstanding resource needs have been identified at this time.

Resource Requests:

- There are currently no winter weather–related resource requests requiring DOH assistance.

Technical Assistance:

- There are currently no technical assistance requests.

Health Systems:

- Currently, there are no requests for support from health systems.

DOH ESF 14 Primary Core Capabilities:

Public Information and Warning: Assist with public information support on disaster recovery operations to include providing support to, and considerations for, our LEP and other Access and Functional Needs Populations.

- DOH surveyed local health jurisdictions in affected counties to identify any assistance needs related to planning and scheduling Disaster Assistance Centers (DACs).

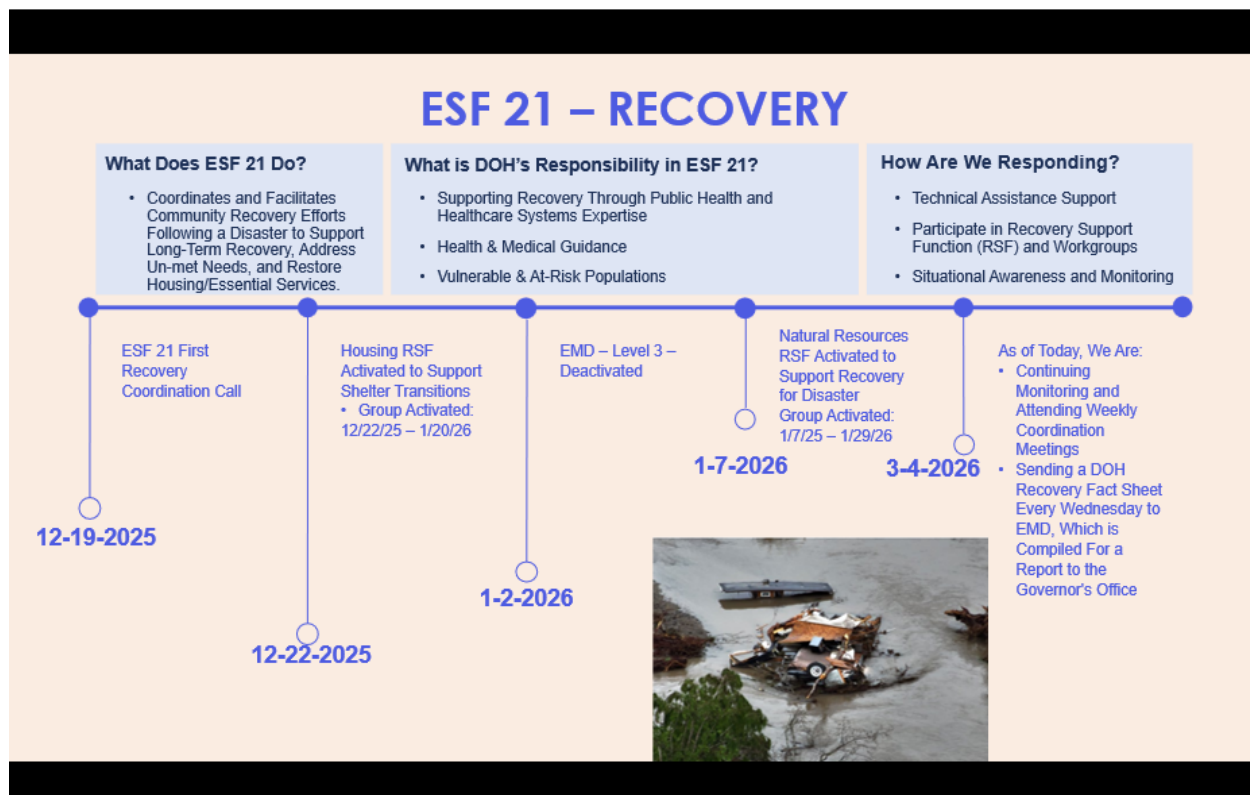
Health and Social Services:

1. Support the recovery of people with disabilities or additional needs through partnerships with specialized organizations.

- DOH continues to participate in coordination meetings with community organizations and maintain communication with partners to identify and assess recovery needs.

2. Restore and improve public health and medical systems to promote the resilience, health (including behavioral health), independence, and well-being of the whole community.

- Through ongoing coordination and communication with partners, DOH continues to monitor conditions, assess needs, and provide support as appropriate



Description of Slide #3: ESF 21 – Recovery

What Does ESF 21 Do?

- Coordinates and Facilitates Community Recovery Efforts Following a Disaster to Support Long-Term Recovery, Address Unmet Needs, and Restore Housing/Essential Services.

What is DOH's Responsibility in ESF 21?

- Supporting Recovery Through Public Health and Healthcare Systems Expertise
- Health & Medical Guidance
- Vulnerable & At-Risk Populations

How Are We Responding?

- Technical Assistance Support
- Participating in Recovery Support Function (RSF) and Workgroups

- Situational Awareness and Monitoring

12-19-2025

- ESF 21 First Recovery Coordination Call

12-22-2025

- Housing RSF Activated to Support Shelter Transitions
 - Group Activated: 12/22/25 – 1/20/26

1-2-2026

- EMD – Level 3 – Deactivated

1-7-2026

- Natural Resources RSF Activated to Support Recovery for Disaster
 - Group Activated: 1/7/25 – 1/29/26

3-4-2026

As of Today, We Are:

- Continuing Monitoring and Attending Weekly Coordination Meetings
- Sending a DOH Recovery Fact Sheet Every Wednesday to EMD, which is Compiled for a Report to the Governor's Office



Description of Slide #4: Recovery Support Function (RSF) – Natural Resources

January 7

ACTIVATED

- Meeting to Identify Agricultural Impacts and Debris Management
- Reports of RVs and Trailers Were Washed into Waterways

January 13

RV CHALLENGES

- Tentatively 12 RVs in Cowlitz River
- 3 Confirmed Conex Boxes [Cargo Containers] in Lewis County Rivers
- Biggest Challenge: Who is Responsible for Removing?

January 15

CONEX BOX CONCERN

- Conex Box in the Tilton River is Posing a Risk to the City of Morton Water Line and Sewer Main Line
- RVs still in Rivers
- Connected with Office of Drinking Water (ODW) for Situational Awareness

January 22

CONEX BOX LODGED

- Conex Box Was Lodged on the Riverbank
- Initial Plans of Removal Fell Through Due to Liability Restrictions
- What Permits Are Needed for Removal?

February 12

REMOVED

- Conex Box was Successfully Removed!
- City Will Connect with Dept. of Ecology for Possible Reimbursement

Shelter statistics

- We need more eyes on shelter and recovery operations.
- Improving Red Cross Connections
- American Red Cross manages 5 non-congregate shelters
- News reports on one father, a DSHS client with an autistic son who has unmet AFN needs.
- American Red Cross (ARC); Down to 4 shelters with one partner and down to 58 clients
- ARC has four two-man door-to-door outreach teams to do intakes from 8am to 4pm beginning next week.
- One month since flooding began, and ESF6 meetings are ending. Red Cross now down to two shelters
- Question about neighborhood visitation schedule and recruitment and training of volunteers – not sure if that schedule info is available. Recruits have five hours of training.

Access to prescription refills

- The American Red Cross can help refill prescriptions and perform emergency medical services.
- CIEP's past collaboration with the Washington State Pharmacy Association as well as emergency management and public health in directives, and there is some clear communication information there that it will be important to use as a recommendation as well.
- Another good source of prescription refills during disasters would be through the local [Medical Reserve Corps](#)⁹² via WAServ. Potential volunteers will need to register through their local health jurisdiction.

⁹² <https://doh.wa.gov/public-health-provider-resources/emergency-preparedness/waserv>

HHS EmPOWER Program used in Public Health Emergency Declaration

- The HHS emPOWER Program is a mission-critical partnership between the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The HHS emPOWER Program provides federal data, mapping, and artificial intelligence tools, as well as training and resources, to help communities nationwide protect the health of at-risk Medicare beneficiaries, including over 4.6 million individuals who live independently and rely on electricity-dependent durable medical and assistive equipment and devices and/or certain essential health care services.
- Public health authorities and their partners in all 50 states, 5 territories, and the District of Columbia use HHS emPOWER Program data and tools to strengthen emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation and take action to protect at-risk populations prior to, during, and after incidents, emergencies, and disasters.
- **HHS Declares Public Health Emergency for the state of Washington Following Recent Severe Weather**⁹³
- **HHS emPOWER Map**⁹⁴
- People with Disabilities (PWD) are a protected class.
- Our seniors/grandparents are mostly people with AFN and disabilities and deserve the protection of laws that are still in existence regarding protected class legislation!!!! 💛

⁹³ <https://aspr.hhs.gov/newsroom/Pages/PHE-Declared-for-Washington-Following-Severe-Weather-Dec2025.aspx>

⁹⁴ <https://empowerprogram.hhs.gov/empowermap>

Environmental Health

- There are many questions about potable water and boil water requirements in flood evacuation zones.
- Hospitals are reporting a rise in flu illnesses nationwide. Disaster centers need to be mindful of the flu and other common viruses and infectious diseases going around.
- Need people to help clean up mold and mildew
- Monitoring upstream dams and using controlled release of excess water contamination
- Need to loop in environmental health folks for home muck and debris clean-up
- Impacted residents will be seeking resources soon as we move into recovery phase
- Pierce County Duty Officers rotate on a weekly basis, so the easiest way to reach them is either emailing pceoc@piercecountywa.gov or calling 253-798-7470 (the phone tree will give you an option to connect directly to the duty officer).

FEMA Application for IA

When applying for FEMA IA assistance benefits, we know that answering some of these questions incorrectly is the greatest reason disaster survivors fail to receive all the benefits they are entitled to from FEMA.

FEMA has declared Individual Assistance (IA). What does this mean to you? It means that you can apply for disaster assistance from FEMA to help offset your disaster-related expenses. You can [apply online](#)⁹⁵ or by telephone at (800) 621-3362. Otherwise, you can download the FEMA app from the Google Play Store, or the Apple Store and you can apply for assistance on the app and upload receipts. Whichever method you choose, the form has a few questions that may be tricky. To avoid delays, please follow these tips:

⁹⁵ <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/>

1. One of the questions that FEMA will ask when you register is “**Do You Have Emergency Needs?**” This means during your evacuation or since staying at home during the disaster, do you need help with gas, medication, food (meals, water, no power, and everything spoils), shelter (you are staying with friends, family, or in a hotel); clothing; or durable medical equipment (oxygen, walkers, canes, glasses, all major equipment, etc.)? Say “**YES**” to this question. That will result in your receiving Displacement / Critical Needs Assistance, which is \$750.
2. When asked if **your home is/was accessible**, answer “**NO**” if there was debris, tree branches, continued flooding, loss of power, or damage or destruction that prevented you from staying there after the storm. This question is asking whether you can stay at your home or apartment and will trigger the ability for you to receive assistance to pay for hotels or provide funding to use while you stay with family or friends.
3. When asked if **utilities are out**, say “**YES**” even if your utilities have been out for a few days. This triggers assistance funds to stay somewhere other than your home or to buy fuel to power a generator.
4. When asked “**Are you willing to relocate?**” say “**YES**” if you cannot live in your home due to damage, loss of power, etc. This question means you are willing to stay in a hotel or apartment **temporarily** and triggers that funding for you. It is not asking if you are willing to move away from your home permanently.
5. **If you bought a generator**, FEMA would reimburse you up to \$629, but you must submit the receipt. If you bought a chainsaw, FEMA would reimburse you up to \$219. Again, you need to provide the receipt. Save your receipts.
6. It is important for people to answer the **question about disability**. Some people can be hesitant to do that for any number of reasons, and there are also people who just do not identify as having a disability, including the Deaf community. However, it gives us good data if people answer those questions about their disability needs.

7. Everyone who requires **language accommodation** needs to make sure that they include that in their application so that when FEMA reaches out to them, the FEMA staff will already know that people have a language requirement. That will make the process quicker and easier for the applicant. If people call the FEMA helpline, you should be aware that they have access to a language line. So, people who speak other languages, except ASL, can get an interpreter on the line for pretty much any language. So, people should not hesitate to call.
8. **Deaf people** who use ASL can use their preferred video relay service provider. Those who are hard of hearing or have a speech disability can dial 7-1-1 if they have a TTY or RTT, or they can use a captioned telephone or IP Text Relay.
9. There's sometimes confusion with people who own mobile homes or RVs, that sort of thing. **If they own the mobile home or RV** and they're paying a lease for the land, they should register as not a renter because they own the dwelling. If they apply as a renter, it will disqualify them from home repair.
10. **If you get a letter from FEMA**, it will probably say that your application has been denied because that's how all of them start. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's a denial. FEMA may say we can't follow through with your application because we need additional documents. Maybe they need the applicant to provide some identification documents or homeownership documents. There are different types of documents that FEMA requires based on what type of assistance people apply for, including things like medical equipment and vehicles. Those types of things will require additional documentation. So, there will be a letter that says denial in it, but it doesn't mean it's a denial. A denial would be where FEMA is talking about the fact that no matter what, if you've given them everything they need and they're not requesting additional documents, then that's a denial. Then you have the right to appeal that denial.

Community Needs

- We need community data. How can most of our data remain useful without identifying anyone in particular?
- CFI has lots of donated items such as children's clothing, STEM toys and games, food, vitamins, safety gear, and temporary sheltering items.
- The American Red Cross outreach schedule shows communities but not specific neighborhoods they will visit. Some of that information could still be useful for state and federal AFN planning.
- Running low on PPE and other supplies.
- SNAP extends service waiver for people to report loss of food bought with benefits
- CFI capturing issues in a survey medically and holistically about direct outreach to participants, especially what type of health insurance coverage they have. Disaster insurance?
- Advocates at the Center for Independence (CFI) conducted a telephone survey among its participants affected by the disaster. It was found that the highest level of need by their clients was for food (30%). On the moderate level, 20% of its respondents needed help with Property Damage Assistance, including utility/HVAC repairs. Only 10% needed help with non-temporary housing, clothing, and miscellaneous items.

Potential Disaster Concerns

- The FIFA World Cup 2026 games will be at the same time of the year as the 2021 heat dome event (late June/early July). Typical extreme weather needs to be considered in conjunction with large event planning based on time of the year.
- With many international visitors, there is another layer of complexity with language access. See [FIFA Planning link](#)⁹⁶

⁹⁶ <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAMILITARY/bulletins/4011ca4>

Other issues

- HHS declaration impact on public health emergency in Washington State?
- Some agency funding were redacted by state during budget cuts
- DSHS participating in the Disaster Assistance Centers in various counties
- The state is taking on more responsibility for disaster recovery.
- Salvation Army takes on disaster case management
- [Partnership for Disaster Strategies Hotline](https://disasterstrategies.org/hotline/)⁹⁷ can depersonalize caller information to track unmet needs
- Not to say promising practices but successful practices and lessons learned and applied
- AFN and CMIST help guide resource allocation
- Need to see total numbers of disabilities, broken down by county and type of disability
- Planning is useless if not directed at the community
- Needs of senior citizens often align with disability population
- Also, include folks in skilled nursing facilities and in the community
- Washington does not have large disasters often
- Hard to get data from 1135 waivers due to HIPAA laws.
- Need to track those PWDs moving from hospitals to institutions and work with them if they want to live in the community
- Volunteers of America leading Disaster Recovery Center in Sultan
- Learn your rights about ICE and make sure we are protected
- Recommend CILS join WAVOAD
- Washington State has a Good Samaritan law to protect people helping others in emergencies.
- The Governor's Office to seek FEMA Individual Assistance funds – uncertain if it will be approved
- A major disaster declaration will unlock individual assistance supports
- Will also allow DSHS to activate DSNAP

⁹⁷ <https://disasterstrategies.org/hotline/>

- The Governor's Office is submitting a request for federal Individual Assistance (IA) tomorrow. Washington is also requesting a Public Assistance declaration submission deadline extension to allow for more time to collect data from local jurisdictions.
- Appreciate the help from different agencies in flood response for northern “more rural” counties.

Recommendations:

- Improve interagency coordination between emergency management, adult living facilities, and public health to address AFN needs, especially around durable medical equipment logistics.
- Utilize the CMS 1135 Waiver for DME distribution and ensure points of distribution for supplies are accessible.
- Enhance public health monitoring and response for infectious diseases during disaster events.
- Increase volunteer and community support for mold and mildew cleanup.
- Promote power supply audits in homes to prepare for outages during extreme weather.
- Collect and use community data in a privacy-sensitive manner to guide outreach and resource distribution.
- Coordinate disaster preparedness for overlapping events like the upcoming FIFA World Cup and heat emergencies, emphasizing language access and cultural considerations.
- Maintain adequate PPE supplies and replacement DME
- Extend food benefit service waivers as needed.
- Support ongoing recovery with access to health insurance and disaster insurance information.

Resources

- [Flood Cleanup | Washington State Department of Health](#)⁹⁸
- [Mold vs. Mildew: Everything You Need to Know and How to Handle Them](#)⁹⁹
- [1135 | Severe Storms - Washington](#)¹⁰⁰
- [Press Release: HHS Declares Public Health Emergency for the state of Washington Following Recent Severe Weather](#)¹⁰¹
- As we transition into recovery: [Washington | State Health Insurance Assistance Programs](#)¹⁰²
- Insurance premiums will skyrocket [Find a local SHIBA office | Office of the Insurance Commissioner](#)¹⁰³

⁹⁸ <https://doh.wa.gov/emergencies/be-prepared-be-safe/floods/cleanup>

⁹⁹ <https://blog.commercialrestoration.com/mold-and-mildew-facts>

¹⁰⁰ <https://aspr.hhs.gov/legal/1135-Waivers/Pages/WA-Severe-Storms-Dec2025.aspx>

¹⁰¹ <https://aspr.hhs.gov/newsroom/Pages/PHE-Declared-for-Washington-Following-Severe-Weather-Dec2025.aspx>

¹⁰² <https://www.shiphelp.org/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.insurance.wa.gov/insurance-resources/medicare/get-free-medicare-help-shiba/find-local-shiba-office>

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Checklist of MAINTAINING HEALTH best practices

Accessible Shelter Protocols

- a. Is there access to non-food refrigeration for medication storage?
- b. Can the overhead lights be turned down or off at night?
- c. Can the HVAC fans be turned down or off at night?
- d. Are there multiple quiet rooms available for those who are overwhelmed by loud noises and bright lights?
- e. Are there plans for special diets, tube feedings, or formulas?
- f. Do shelters have generators, bariatric equipment and support, and accessible cots?
- g. Are the shelters pet-friendly?
- h. Are service animals allowed as defined by state/federal law?
- i. Do you have storage areas for medications, durable medical equipment, and consumable medical supplies?
- j. Do your feeding plans include a full range of dietary needs, including allergies, texture, celiac disease, etc.?
- k. Do your feedings consider those with food intolerances, some of which may be fatal?
- l. Do you have equipment for small children or infants such as cribs, diapers, formula, infant toys, hats, etc.
- m. Do you have access to pediatric medical supplies?
- n. Have you planned for disease outbreaks, including those transmitted by service animals, and mitigation?

Information & Referral

- o. Do you maintain awareness of resources to support referral to disability partners in identifying needs, resources, and services?
- p. Have you identified resources for assistive technology and other equipment?

Whole Community Collaboration

- q. Do all partners (FEMA, state, local, VOADs, and disability groups) collaborate quickly and effectively to meet the unmet needs of all survivors?
- r. Do you have plans in place to help meet the mental health needs of survivors?
- s. Do you coordinate with local Alzheimer's organizations, the Red Cross, CILs, or local homeless advocates?
- t. Do you coordinate with organizations serving veterans such as Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans Administration to identify available services?
- u. Do you coordinate plans and activities with local health jurisdictions, and public and private health and mental health agencies?
- v. Have you planned for people with airway diseases such as those living in senior centers and veteran centers?

Decontamination Protocols

- w. Do the decontamination procedures include instructions for both manual and powered wheelchairs?
- x. Do the decontamination procedures include instructions for assistive technology and equipment such as hearing aids and cochlear implants?
- y. Do the decontamination procedures include instructions for service animals with accessible materials on how to ensure the safety and well-being of animals?

Independence

In report = cover housing – aim for pre-disaster status; state agencies need to coordinate their response and recovery work in the absence of FEMA support.

Narrative:

The report focuses on housing and independence in disaster response and recovery, emphasizing the goal to restore pre-disaster housing status. State agencies must coordinate their efforts in the absence of FEMA support, while counties retain autonomy. Partnerships among agencies such as Pierce County Aging and Disability Resources, Homeless Services, and Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are active in supporting displaced individuals, including those living in RVs destroyed by floods. Long-term housing recovery involves multiple stakeholders, including the Washington Department of Commerce and the American Red Cross, with special attention to people with access and functional needs (AFN). Many affected individuals did not previously identify as homeless but are now considered unhoused due to living in vehicles or campgrounds. Data gaps persist in tracking disability types and demographics, with grandparents being a fast-growing unhoused group. The report highlights the importance of accessible housing as critical infrastructure, which often diminishes after disasters. Coordination and advocacy during non-disaster ("blue sky") periods are necessary to improve accessible housing. The AFN Program Manager deployment was delayed during the disaster response, underscoring the need for integrated AFN representation across all levels of emergency support functions (ESFs).

- Ongoing lack of clarity on shelter operations and Functional Assessment Service Teams (FAST) and FAST trailer deployment. No current requests. Requests must be made by emergency operations
- FAST service is an advantage of being in a UASI jurisdiction (UASI = Urban Area Security Initiative)

- Are shelters accessible? No response from FAST in Pierce County
- WASILC helping to develop more training opportunities
- United Way will help provide cash assistance and connections to Airbnb units.
- In Washington State, counties have autonomy, not the state.
- Washington State provided Individual Assistance for Flood Survivors on February 17, 2026, [December 2025 atmospheric river flooding | Washington State Military Department](#)¹⁰⁴
- [President Donald J. Trump Approves Emergency Declaration for Washington State](#)¹⁰⁵

Living in RVs and other vehicles

- Some live in vehicles, vans, tiny trailers, travel trailers, and recreational vehicles (RVs). For many, an RV was their final option until it got destroyed in the floods. [Elderly and vulnerable residents evacuated from Puyallup RV Park](#)¹⁰⁶
- Agencies have different definitions of homelessness. Many people did not consider themselves homeless before the disaster as they were living in a campground, but are considered unhoused by authorities
- Pierce County Aging and Disability Resources Division and Homeless Services Division partnering to support displaced RV residents in seeking permanent/interim housing solutions.

¹⁰⁴ <https://mil.wa.gov/december-2025-atmospheric-river-flooding>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20251212/president-donald-j-trump-approves-emergency-declaration-state-washington>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/elderly-and-vulnerable-residents-evacuated-from-puyallup-rv-park/ar-AA1SbPPW>

- The Department of Commerce and Housing is developing a risk map for manufactured home communities in flooded areas.
- If entire mobile home parks are closed due to flooding, residents qualify for additional support.
- High-level case management goals to create household relocation plans and connect to local service providers.
- Mobile home insurance can include flood coverage

Insurance Issues

- The Washington Insurance Commissioner issued emergency orders to allow more time for people before cutting off insurance, which can help if you have issues with insurance companies.
- People need to file insurance claims NOW!!!
- Not all damage due to flooding (trees, wind, rain, etc.)

USDA Letter of Priority Entitlement (LOPE)

- LOPE = Letter of Priority Entitlement, a letter developed by USDA that helps people with verified disabilities (chronic mental illness, developmental disability, physical disability, or 62+ years) move to the top of the waiting list due to a disaster – a state/local version recently used in Milwaukee floods. Here is a [PDF describing a LOPE letter](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-A114-PURL-gpo160401/pdf/GOVPUB-A114-PURL-gpo160401.pdf)¹⁰⁷.
- Washington State has a pilot project to do what USDA and other federal agencies used to do, but now states and counties must take upon a greater role in recovery

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-A114-PURL-gpo160401/pdf/GOVPUB-A114-PURL-gpo160401.pdf>

Long-Term Housing Recovery

- The Washington State Department of Commerce is the leading agency in Housing Recovery Service Function (RSF).
- American Red Cross now lead in housing case management
- Transitioning of households, including people with disabilities from Lewis County, begins with demobilizing shelters and giving remaining residents camping kits.
- 8 households (5 with AFN) in Lewis County and 1 household in Snohomish County received assistance.
- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development has some additional resources:
 - [Grantee Contact Information - HUD Exchange](#)¹⁰⁸
 - [HMIS: Homeless Management Information System - HUD Exchange](#)¹⁰⁹
 - [Plugging the Gap](#)¹¹⁰

SBA Disaster Loans

- In February, the [U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#)¹¹¹ announced the opening of Disaster Loan Outreach Centers (DLOCs) in King, Lewis, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties to assist businesses, private nonprofit (PNP) organizations, and residents affected by the 2025 Severe Winter Storms occurring Dec. 5 — 22, 2025 with low-interest disaster loans. The DLOCs are in Auburn, Chehalis, Fall City, Sedro-Woolley, Snohomish, and Sumas.

¹⁰⁸

<https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/contacts/?params=%7B%22limit%22%3A20%2C%22sort%22%3A%22%22%2C%22order%22%3A%22%22%2C%22years%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%22searchTerm%22%3A%22%22%2C%22grantees%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%22state%22%3A%22%22%2C%22programs%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%22coc%22%3Atrue%7D##granteeSearch>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/>

¹¹⁰ <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/plugging-gap-report.pdf>

¹¹¹ [Disaster assistance | U.S. Small Business Administration](#)

Gaps in data collection

- Need for data by area, and type of disability
- Where are the numbers increasing for houselessness?
- Need to reframe this as affecting senior citizens, not just PWD – because of baby boomers reaching retirement age and acquiring some type of disability “as part of aging” along with less income.
- Grandparents are the fastest-growing demographic of houselessness and the least able to generate income independently.
- Need to work with legislation and education.

State and National Partners

- Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition task forces out of the Commerce Department, EMD, and DOH under [Housing Recovery Support Function](#)¹¹²
- The WA [Department of Commerce](#)¹¹³ has resources such as manufactured homes to replace housing lost in disaster. We lose accessible housing in every disaster – not being rebuilt to same levels
- Great partners at [National Low-Income Housing Coalition](#)¹¹⁴ and [Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition](#)¹¹⁵
- Pierce County and King County are not part of the housing task force, as they have more than enough resources to seek help from the state
- Housing is critical infrastructure for all, especially those with AFN.

¹¹² <https://mil.wa.gov/asset/5fd3b7accac23>

¹¹³ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/housing/>

¹¹⁴ <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/washington>

¹¹⁵ https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/DHRC_FAQs.pdf

- It's best to work on accessible housing during blue-sky days, not during recovery. This will require long-term advocacy.
- DOH wanting to recreate the Housing Task Force but with a focus on public health.

WASILC Response

- WASILC taking a more organized approach during emergencies
- Help people with disabilities understand the cross-disability community
- CIEP is a great team providing situational awareness.
- Neighbors most often first responders
- WASILC will conduct a statewide needs assessment survey for the upcoming State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), including the following questions:
- **Part 4: Emergency Preparedness**
 - **11. Do you have a personal emergency plan for a natural disaster (fire, earthquake, flood)?**
 - ☐ Yes, and it is complete
 - ☐ I have started one, but it is not finished
 - ☐ No, I do not have a plan
 - **12. Would you like support getting a “go bag” or emergency supply kit?**
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - **13. If you had to evacuate your home immediately, do you have accessible transportation?**
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure
 - **14. Would you like support with creating an emergency plan?**
 - ☐ Yes (Please provide your contact info below.)
 - ☐ No

WASILC Executive Director Commentary

Bridging the Gap: Making "Independence" Work for Everyone in Washington

In Washington, living independently isn't just a goal; it's a right. But if we're being honest, there are still too many "gaps in the floor" where people in our disability community are falling through, especially when things go wrong.

Whether it's a sudden emergency or navigating a system that wasn't built for us, the **Washington Statewide Independent Living Council (WASILC)** is stepping up. Based on its latest [State Plan for Independent Living](#)¹¹⁶ (SPIL), we aren't just checking boxes; we're building a movement that looks and feels like the diverse state we live in.

Who is the "Cross-Disability" Community?

To bridge the gaps, we must show exactly who we are. Our community isn't a monolith; it's a vibrant, diverse tapestry. When we talk about "cross-disability," we are elevating the voices of:

- **Physical & Mobility:** Wheelchair users and those with chronic pain or limited motor skills.
- **Sensory:** The Blind and Low Vision community, and the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities.
- **Cognitive & Neurodivergent:** People with intellectual disabilities, autism, ADHD, or traumatic brain injuries.
- **Behavioral Health:** Those living with mental health challenges or co-occurring disabilities.
- **Invisible Disabilities:** Neighbors with chronic illnesses or autoimmune disorders that aren't always seen but are always felt.

The Power of the Cross-Disability Panel

We are leaning on our **cross-disability panel** to ensure no one is left out. This isn't just another meeting; it's a space where people with different lived

¹¹⁶ <https://www.wasilc.org/spil>

experiences lead the conversation. By bringing all these perspectives together, we make sure "access" isn't defined by just one group. If you have lived experience, your voice is the "expert" opinion we need to shape better policies.

Building Relationships Where It Counts

Advocacy only works if the right people are listening. We are busy cultivating deep roots across all levels of government to make sure your voice reaches the decision-makers:

- **The Governor's Office:** As a governor-appointed council, we bridge the gap between you and the state's executive leadership.
- **State Legislators:** We're walking through the halls of the capitol to educate lawmakers on why independent living needs funding and why Access and Functional Needs (AFN) must be a priority.
- **Local Municipalities:** Emergencies happen at home. We're working with city councils and local emergency managers to ensure they know how to support their disabled residents *before* a crisis hits.

Visibility and Real Connection

We don't just sit in boardrooms; we build engines for change like the **Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP)**. Here, advocates and emergency managers sit at the same table to solve real problems, like making sure tsunami alerts are accessible to everyone.

We're also turning up the volume on our communication. From a redesigned, fully accessible website to community town halls, we're making our work more visible. We want you to see yourself in our mission and know that when a policy is written, the disability community is at the table, not just on the menu.

Recommendations:

- Enhance coordination among state agencies and counties to support housing recovery and independence in the absence of FEMA funds.

- Ensure shelters are accessible and increase outreach to validate this through FAST.
- Continue and expand emergency preparedness training through organizations like CFI and WASILC.
- Provide tailored housing support for displaced populations, particularly those living in RVs and other non-traditional housing.
- Address debris removal challenges for people with disabilities who cannot self-haul.
- Use mechanisms like the Letter of Preferred Entitlement (LOPE) to prioritize housing for people with disabilities in disaster recovery.
- Integrate AFN specialists early in disaster response and ensure their access to all ESFs.
- Improve data collection on homelessness and disability demographics to inform targeted interventions.
- Advocate for and invest in accessible housing infrastructure proactively, not just during recovery phases.
- Prepare for long-term recovery, including coordination with national partners such as the National Low Income Housing Coalition.
- Develop formal standard operating procedures (SOPs) based on surveys and after-action reports to understand and meet unmet needs.
- Plan for overlapping crises, including major events like the FIFA World Cup, extreme weather, and pandemics, with emphasis on AFN issues.
- Strengthen state-level disaster planning and advocacy to complement or compensate for limited FEMA support.

Resources

- One gap, at least in King County, is that there are free weekends for [debris removal](#)¹¹⁷, but they only apply to self-haulers. Folks with disabilities might not be able to self-haul and may be wondering what can be done about debris on their property.
- Hotline – [The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](#) (PIDS) Disability & Disaster Hotline/Helpline Call/Text: +1 (800) 626-4959 Email: hotline@disasterstrategies.org PIDS Helpline – calls usually come in later after the disaster via voice, text, or email.
- That extends to people who receive home-delivered meals and in-home care or any other home care services.



- After-Action Report from Washington University on how St. Louis can improve its [Community Development and Disaster Preparedness](#)¹¹⁸
- READI Act introduced in Congress the [READI for Disasters Act & DRMA](#)¹¹⁹ focuses attention and funding on CILs during emergencies
- Check if individuals are eligible for [federal disaster assistance](#)¹²⁰ Be prepared to use state funding before receiving federal funding if any.

¹¹⁷ <https://kcemergency.com/2025/12/18/free-weekend-storm-debris-drop-off-at-three-locations-through-january-11/>

¹¹⁸ <https://environment.washu.edu/app/uploads/2025/12/CommunityDevDisasterPrep.pdf>

¹¹⁹ <https://reaadi.com/>

¹²⁰ <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/>

Checklist of INDEPENDENCE best practices

Whole Community Shelter Design

- a. Is there access to a family restroom?
- b. Is there access to a private room for nursing mothers?
- c. Is there access to a diaper changing room?
- d. Is there access to a room for childcare or a play area?
- e. Is there access to a room for adult day care?
- f. Are all information signs color-coded? Note: There are some who are DeafBlind or have color-blindness that cannot distinguish colors.
- g. Are shaped symbols such as triangles and circles used to distinguish men and women's restrooms?
- h. Can the floor be marked with colored tape to lead to different areas?
- i. Are there enough power outlets to charge assistive technology and medical devices?
- j. Is there a relief area for service animals?
- k. Is there an exercise area for service animals?
- l. Are there extra items available to replace lost canes or batteries?

Blue-Sky Planning

- m. Are there community meetings for all-hazards planning during blue-sky days to help identify and assess needs, and develop redundant backup plans?
- n. Have you included disability partners as part of community long-term planning and recovery groups, committees, and subcommittees?
- o. Have you included vocational rehabilitation and independent living centers in developing employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
- p. Are you promoting affordable and accessible housing, not just housing?

Electrical Power Stability

- q. Are you making community energy restoration a priority to ensure people who are dependent on life-sustaining devices, wireless

communication technology, and mobility equipment can return home with everyone else?

- r. Have you identified residences of people with battery-dependent rechargeable mobile devices and fuel where possible and to ensure inclusive planning?
- s. Have you given priority access to fuel for people who have disabilities and those who have access and functional needs?
- t. Do power restoration plans and debris cleanup allow for people who rely on electricity for life-sustaining assistive and medical devices and equipment?

Support, Safety, and Self -Determination

In report = Services, diminished AFN support on state and federal level, State AFN Program Manager was not deployed immediately as her supervisor was on leave when disaster began. The AFN Manager is best placed in Incident Command instead of Operations. FEMA wants states to take up the responsibility for AFN. Less support for regional disability integration specialists from FEMA nationwide. Safety is not always tangible.

Narrative:

The report highlights challenges in safety, security, and support for AFN populations during recent disasters. There has been a noticeable diminution of AFN support at state and federal levels, with delayed deployment of the State AFN Program Manager and limited FEMA engagement, including fewer Regional Disability Integration Specialists (RDIS) available. The report underscores the need for AFN representation at the Incident Command System (ICS) command level to improve situational awareness and decision-making. Shelter operations suffer from low situational awareness, and confusion remains around Functional Assessment Service Teams (FAST) deployment. Washington State is developing tools like GIS to better identify and support individuals with disabilities. Disaster Assistance Centers (DACs) are being established with partnerships involving the Salvation Army, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and other agencies to provide case management and resources. The state is pursuing federal disaster declarations and Individual Assistance, but with uncertainty and reduced federal staff, state and regional partners must build internal AFN networks and capacity. Communication and coordination improvements are needed to better support vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities and seniors, especially during overlapping emergencies.

AFN Experts in Incident Command Structure

- Community perception of diminishing AFN support.

- The state AFN Specialist was not deployed until several days later in the disaster because her supervisor was out on maternity leave.
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program Manager would be a great alternative during emergencies.
- The current FEMA Region 10 Regional Disability Integration Specialist (RDIS) was not deployed to support AFN work. The new policy calls for a direct request from the state emergency management agency to deploy RDIS in disasters.
- In the meantime, we need to build out our own state internal AFN networks based in counties or regions with participation by staff at Centers for Independent Living.
- FEMA will not be renewing employment for about 1,000 employees this month with a goal of a force reduction of 11,000 this year.
- This is a huge loss of institutional AFN knowledge at the federal level
- Former R10 RDIS laid a great foundation for AFN work in Washington that now includes CIEP and an [AFN Program Manager position in EMD](#)¹²¹
- A recent [State Emergency Repatriation Plan](#)¹²² (SERP) Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) operational exercise had an AFN Advisor in the upper level of the Incident Command Structure with Incident Commander, Safety Officer, Liaison Officer, and Public Information Officer.
- CIEP went on an “AFN Road Trip” in the spring of 2023, visiting KC-HELP, Deaf Resource Centers, Centers for Independent Living, and

¹²¹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/6130fcdbf3fee860dbe80d27_WASILC%20White%20Paper%20AFN%20Coordinator%20Approved%207.15.21.pdf

¹²² <https://mil.wa.gov/asset/681cdef11cca6/SERP-2-FINAL.pdf>

other disability partners in Central and Eastern Washington. The connections made were helpful later that year in August, when two major wildfires broke out near Spokane. One Deaf couple and many others lost their homes in a raging inferno, illustrating the need for a robust AFN response in major disasters.

- Cascading effects on other parts of the CMIST framework, such as Maintaining Health and Communication. AFN Specialists should have access to all appropriate ESFs and RSFs, not just ESF 6, ESF 8, and Housing Recovery Service Function (Housing RSF). Other ESFs have significant AFN issues that need to be addressed, as shown on pages 2-4 in the [Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs Emergency Operations Center Toolkit](#).¹²³
- [Improving State and Local Disaster Plans for People with Disabilities – The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](#)¹²⁴
- National partners like the idea of a rapid response “report card” type of after-action report
- CFI has conducted a survey charting and making formal SOPs and understanding unmet needs
- American Red Cross-National HQs predicted the climate crisis and housing crisis
- CILs do get some federal funding but they have an obligation to make their needs known
- CILs have different perspectives but can work together with state agencies toward a common goal

¹²³ <https://crocogct.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Disabilities-and-Access-and-Functional-Emergency-Operations-Center-Toolkit.pdf>

¹²⁴ <https://disasterstrategies.org/comments-to-ncd-on-improving-state-and-local-disaster-plans-for-people-with-disabilities/>

- We are going into a long recovery period and a period of uncertainty around future events such as the FIFA World Cup soccer games. FEMA does not support planning.
- We need to step up and do better as a state. When we demand more from FEMA, we need to do it in a way that does not contradict the state's position.
- State agencies need to coordinate their work outside of what we do together
- After-Action Report (Report Card) becomes the basis for an AFN Standard Operating Procedure
- Responsibility lies on community members being prepared, but resources are not always easy to find – need one-stop centers
- Compiling resources for short-term recovery
- Someone says evacuations can be like “roughing it” on a camping trip – used emergency kit for the first time in years and reinforces the need for ongoing community emergency preparedness training
- WASILC to establish Standard Operating Procedures for better consistency
- Washington State is developing a GIS tool that can issue reports such as locations of people with disabilities that may need services or support.
- Possible FEMA Immediate Household Needs grants
- CFI can collaborate with Whatcom DAC with WAVOAD groups with connections from previous workshop and COVID response
- The state received a Federal Disaster Declaration, including Individual Assistance on April 7, 2026.

Disaster Assistance Centers

- DSHS setting up Disaster Cash Assistance Program (DCAP)
- Disaster Cash Assistance available **Dec. 17, 2025, to Jan. 15, 2026**, for eligible households affected by flooding in specific counties. Those counties include Benton, Chelan, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, King, Kittitas, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Thurston, Yakima, and Whatcom. Read more in the [full news release](#)¹²⁵.
- Dates/times of those DACs were shared with DOH last night and may have changed – examples:
 - 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 19, 2025
Evergreen State Fair Park, Longhouse Building
14405 179th Ave. SE, Monroe
 - 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 21, 2025
Startup Event Center
14315 366th Ave. SE, Startup
- Information on five Disaster Assistance Centers (DAC) coming soon. Skagit, Snohomish, King, Whatcom Friday, Saturday, Sunday 8am to 4pm Salvation Army to begin Disaster Case Management State IA Program – Household needs grant \$375 – 1 person, \$750 – 2-4 people, \$1,125 – 5+ people. DAC will need people like us to help with set-up and providing services. We would also need to collaborate with the State Insurance Commissioner's office
- State working with Salvation Army on a disaster case management contract – hope to use Centers for Independent Living with funds, like FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers
- DAC and DRC staff should be trained in the use of accessibility kit contents.

¹²⁵ <https://mailchi.mp/dshs.wa.gov/disaster-cash-assistance-december-2025>

- Interpreters should be available at all public functions and for Deaf staff members or volunteers
- Connecting with VOAD can expedite CILs participation in disaster assistance/recovery centers with some liability protection.
- For example, CFI is deploying a team to the Auburn DAC today. We are volunteering our involvement without an official invitation to the DAC, but we wonder if CILs were omitted from the DAC coordination.
- Lessons learned during COVID can help with site selection and getting resources to the sites.
- CIEP can be a great resource for training:
 - Apartment Evacuation Role Play for CERT training
 - Thinking Outside the Box: Gesture Training for Emergency Management, Public Safety Officers, and volunteers
 - AFN Presentation for Emergency Management and Transit Professionals
 - Community Emergency Preparedness Training, including ASL
 - Other topics.

Recovery Process

- Navigating the application processes during recovery will be complex
- Sequence of delivery if we get a federal disaster declaration that includes individual assistance
- Preliminary Damage Assessment still ongoing – estimated date of completion for public assistance 1/6/2026 – pending FEMA Disaster Declaration
- State Individual Assistance is handled by Salvation Army Disaster Case Managers using tablets or iPads.
- Washington is a home-rule state, so it's the counties that make decisions, not the state.

- FEMA offers an app with resources available on [mobile devices](#)¹²⁶

Check on your people

- Some of the most serious cases have been discovered months later, including residents living without hot water or heat.
- Ask neighbors, particularly elders, if they have flood damage and if they are still being impacted by damages.

Impact of FEMA Changes

- Use lessons learned from past disasters such as Maui and the LA wildfires. FEMA Housing program had heavy grassroots stakeholder input
- Deadlines for requesting extensions are coming up. Washington State and Hawaii need to request extensions for aid.
- Still waiting for individual assistance from FEMA, but states are creating their own programs.
- The view from national partners is that states must be connected together
- The state will see fewer and less federal declarations and rely more on itself and regional partners
- It seems RDIS will be in demand during response and recovery when disasters happen
- We often expect some chaos as part of the initial disaster response. However, access to quick solutions depends on what is needed.
- Washington is fortunate not to have many large-scale disasters, but we need to take up the slack regarding our expertise

¹²⁶ <https://www.fema.gov/about/news-multimedia/mobile-products>

- We have an obligation to serve the people of Washington, and this issue will be common in other states across the country

Recommendations:

- Position AFN specialists or advisors higher up within the ICS command structure during disasters for improved coordination and visibility.
- Formalize Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for AFN response, including FAST team activation and shelter accessibility.
- Enhance collaboration and integration of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in disaster assistance centers and recovery operations.
- Develop and deploy GIS and data tools to identify and track the needs of people with disabilities regionally.
- Establish clear communication channels and one-stop resource centers to improve accessibility to disaster services.
- Increase community emergency preparedness training and outreach, focusing on AFN populations.
- Advocate for state-level AFN networks to compensate for decreasing federal AFN personnel and support.
- Promote inclusion of AFN issues in after-action reports with community stories and CMIST framework.
- Strengthen partnerships with Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) and Washington VOAD for coordinated response.
- Ensure timely filing of insurance claims and publicizing extended deadlines and emergency orders.
- Leverage lessons learned from prior disasters to improve AFN disaster planning and recovery.
- Push for federal Individual Assistance declarations while preparing state-led support programs.

- Expand AFN advocates' training and participation in disaster response to build expertise and institutional knowledge.

Resources

- Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are more aware about accessibility and are asking questions.
- [Center for Independence](https://www.cfi-wa.org/home)¹²⁷ (CFI) is a center for independent living with offices in Pierce County and Snohomish County serving Lewis, Mason, Thurston, Pierce, Kitsap, King, Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, San Juan, and Island Counties and an active participant in disaster and emergency response. Although CFI was instrumental in the establishment of CIEP, it has recently become more engaged with WASILC and other CILs in inclusive emergency planning and collaboration. Information that's being collected and verified includes but is not limited to temporary shelters, emergency fund availability, food pantries and food distribution, healing and community centers open to victims of the flood, and mutual aid contacts in each region. CFI feels that a resource for helpers would be valuable. Process and procedures are important, and CFI is joining in these meetings to glean the rhythm to identify where CILs can be most effective. CFI would appreciate a one-pager whether it's for internal use of the receiver or produced a PSA one-pager.
- The other impacted CIL in Puget Sound is the [Disability Empowerment Center](https://www.disabilityempowerment.org/)¹²⁸ serving King County. [Central Washington Disability Resources](http://mycwdr.org/)¹²⁹ (CWDR) is covering the flooding in Yakima County. There is one other CIL, [Disability Action Center](http://dacnw.org/)¹³⁰ (DAC), in Spokane serving Eastern Washington.

¹²⁷ <https://www.cfi-wa.org/home>

¹²⁸ <https://www.disabilityempowerment.org/>

¹²⁹ <http://mycwdr.org/>

¹³⁰ <http://dacnw.org/>

- There are no in-state CIL coverage in Southeast and Southwest Washington, although some residents may qualify for services in bordering states of Oregon and Idaho.
- Accessibility works both ways
- The Independent Living (IL) network has been doing this for 20 years and not having anything, but a one-pager is the reason why there's nothing formally put in place, and to knock on wood, Washington hasn't been tested as much as other states and other localities. So, this is something that we're building a plane while it is on the runway.
- Here's why these questions: Reacting to these issues is necessary, because... There was nothing else that you've relied on in your 20 years. And then you brought up the longevity you've had in this industry. And here's where the experts who've been doing this for decades are. Some of us are not one of them. Um, this is where we can perhaps begin creating some sort of system to help individuals who are very green. Um, and making things consistent. But for folks who need more information so that we can do the due diligence and ensure we are prepared, um, I need structure. I need systems in place, and um... Sometimes I think, well, our one-pager is accessible. But what if we did, like, team exercise? On this issue, perhaps we will seek out a team facilitator so that we can help. Like, you all know all the moving pieces, and there's more to be included in this conversation; let's be real. Not everyone is at this table right now. Um, and it's not to say you haven't invited them, um, but it's to say they need to get to the table. And what if we had, like, this lean facilitation where we're like, "All the experts who've been in this field for a long time, the green beans, like me, are coming up with something that makes sense"? That we're learning, um, and that we come to a resolution, um, in addition to the reacting and the need to get emerging information out. But a solid start, or a solid guiding print tool.

- WASILC had an SOP on how to stand up during a disaster. Now, it's probably three and a half years old now, but we do need to revisit it. Uh, you know, we need to see how it works. Whenever there's a fire, or a flood, or any other type of disaster, we need to revisit. to make sure that the things that have been written in the past are still applicable. So that is something that we need to convene and have a discussion on. So, we can develop something. And a one-pager would be something that we could test out. That could be done potentially in the fall. And we could see, well, how that works, and we can adjust from there, but I think it would be good to have that SOP. As well as having something in something that's long-term for 2026 and beyond
- We must be sure that we have D-AFN experts/advocates in the process of this rapidly developing program and its ripple effects. This will require a bit of "just-in-time" training by our partners at the National Low-Income Housing Coalition's Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (NLIHC/DHRC) and the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies (PIDS) with the [World Institute on Disability](#)¹³¹ (WID).
- CILs have MOU contracts with local county social service agency and get client referrals
- VOAD = Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters – a coalition of NGOs that help with disaster relief
- Recommend connecting with local WAVOAD for networking with organizations during disasters
- Multi-agency Resource Center being set up in Sultan
- [Flood recovery - King County, Washington](#)¹³²

¹³¹ <https://wid.org/disaster-services/>

¹³² <https://kingcounty.gov/en/shared-topics/about-king-county/flood-recovery>

- [Hopelink's Sno-Valley Center](#)¹³³ in Carnation has reopened at its regular hours
- [Community Resources | Pierce County, WA - Official Website](#)¹³⁴
- [Pierce County Ready | Pierce County, WA - Official Website](#)¹³⁵
- [Disaster Recovery | Pierce County, WA - Official Website](#)¹³⁶
- [Report Damage | Snohomish County, WA - Official Website](#)¹³⁷
- Lewis County: [December 2025 Flood Event](#)¹³⁸
- [Historic Flood Emergency: Financial Resources and Recovery for Washingtonians | WA.gov](#)¹³⁹
- [FEMA One-Pager - IA Reform FINAL.pdf](#)¹⁴⁰
We need to understand the IA Assistance process, including recent changes.
- WASILC's [Washington State Disaster Recovery AFN Resource List](#)¹⁴¹
- "Affected residents will also be able to apply online if they are unable to make it in person to these DAC events. This post was updated with additional details as they became available."

¹³³ <https://www.hopelink.org/locations/sno-valley/>

¹³⁴ <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/8945/Community-Resources>

¹³⁵ <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/ready>

¹³⁶ <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/ReportDamage>

¹³⁷ [Report Damage | Snohomish County, WA - Official Website](#)

¹³⁸ <https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/emergency-management/december-2025-flood-event/>

¹³⁹ <https://wa.gov/how-to-guides/historic-flood-emergency-financial-resources-and-recovery-washingtonians>

¹⁴⁰ [ia-changes-one-pager_april4](#)

¹⁴¹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e20bef357d90e4e47de7965/6812a5db365cb8e84ec5fb17_WA%20State%20Disaster%20Recovery%20D-AFN%20Resource%20List%20-%20updated%20April%202025.pdf

- Beneficial resources for disability and AFN inclusion: [Introduction to Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action - Disability Reference Group](#)¹⁴²
 - [YouTube Video: Humanitarian-Hands-on-Tool \(HHoT\)](#)¹⁴³
- [Home - Washington Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters](#)¹⁴⁴
- [FYSA - Washington VOAD](#) – has a page with info on a Multi-Agency Resource Center opening on Sunday the 11th¹⁴⁵
- [Exclusive: DHS begins slashing FEMA disaster response staff as 2026 begins | CNN Politics](#)¹⁴⁶
- The [Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion \(READI\) for Disasters Act](#) introduced in Congress.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² <https://disabilityreferencegroup.org/portfolio-items/introduction-to-disability-inclusive-humanitarian-action/>

¹⁴³ YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d38fq8hPczU>

¹⁴⁴ <https://washington.wavoad.org/>

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.wavoad.org/situational-awareness/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/01/politics/dhs-cutting-fema-disaster-response-staff>

¹⁴⁷ <https://reaadi.com/>

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Checklist for SUPPORT, SAFETY, and SELF-DETERMINATION best practices

Recovery Partners

- a. Are there critical Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) support agencies for inclusion in emergency recovery networks such as
 - i. Protection and Advocacy offices
 - ii. Centers for Independent Living
 - iii. UW Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
 - iv. WATECH for Assistive Technology
 - v. Northwest ADA Center
 - vi. American Red Cross or Salvation Army
- b. Do you use these NGOs as core advisory groups and identify group members to help staff local EOCs to serve as disability advisors?
- c. Do you use disability advisors or AFN experts in all planning meetings and immediately when a state of emergency is declared?
- d. Do you ensure appropriate support for individuals who may be hospitalized or placed in nursing homes but lived independently or with personal care services prior to the disaster?
- e. Do you engage with and embed WAVOAD partners and collaborate on identifying resources and plans for meeting unmet AFN needs?
- f. Do you engage with local disability resources to do an assessment of impacted areas and report on mitigating accessibility needs?

AFN Role during Emergencies

- g. Is there a Disability/AFN advisor at the Incident Command level?

- h. Are there plans to do rapid assessments of spontaneous shelters and relocation of individuals to appropriate temporary shelters or short-term/long-term housing?
- i. Are local disaster relief agencies familiar with disability partner networks?
- j. Do you ensure that appropriate resources such as durable medical equipment, consumable medical supplies, universal cots, and assistive technology are available for shelters and disaster assistance centers and other public spaces?

Mental Health and Disabilities

- k. Are there providers who are familiar with people who have cognitive, intellectual, and/or behavioral issues, including mental health and aging-related disabilities such as dementia?
- l. Have you assessed the use of electronic monitoring devices for patients with dementia, and if necessary, advised the search and rescue response team?
- m. Do you conduct on-scene staff briefings about behavioral and disaster mental health manifestations?

Support Services

- n. Do you collaborate across all departments to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities and other access and functional needs are met, and all programs, goods, and services are fully accessible?
- o. Are there procedures in place for interpreters, co-navigators, caregivers, and personal care service providers to access people in disaster areas?
- p. Is the contact information for disability service providers, social workers, and/or mental health staff available to shelter workers?

- q. Do you include people who have disabilities and other access and functional needs when conducting pre-incident planning sessions?
- r. Do you put emphasis on multiple backup plans and on adequate sheltering-in-place capabilities?

Training

- s. Do you conduct ongoing disability/AFN training for new staff with reviews conducted each year?
- t. Do you conduct ongoing communication training such as emergency gestures or DeafBlind guidance and other types of continuing education?
- u. Do you provide ADA training for human resource specialists and connect with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for hiring people with disabilities?
- v. Do you train disaster survivor staff with an emphasis on how to connect survivors with disability service providers?
- w. Have you identified resources for assistive technology and other equipment to support inclusion and accessibility?
- x. Do you provide general and specific training and/or technical assistance across departments as needed?

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Transportation

In report = Highways, evacuation, transporting people. Allow more time for evacuation with accessible vehicles.

Narrative:

The report addresses transportation challenges related to evacuation and recovery during recent flooding events. Evacuation protocols recommend that people with disabilities evacuate at Level 2 (GET SET) rather than waiting for Level 3 (GO NOW) to allow more time and reduce risk. Transportation was severely impacted by multiple closed and flooded highways, causing extreme delays, such as a seven-hour trip on I-5 from Tacoma to Everett during evacuation. Updated evacuation zones for cities like Pacific and Auburn reflect changing flood conditions with varying levels of evacuation orders. Disaster Assistance Centers (DACs) face challenges ensuring accessible public transit options given damaged infrastructure. Non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) services are critical for displaced Medicaid beneficiaries needing rides to medical appointments. Tools like Hopelink's "Find a Ride" trip planner assist evacuees and displaced people in navigating available transportation options post-event, especially for those with disabilities. Transportation planning and communication require advanced coordination, especially for accessible vehicles, interpreters, and personal support services. Transit agencies and nonprofits contribute resources such as retired accessible vans to support mobility needs during recovery. High wind and blizzard warnings further complicate transportation services during evacuation, with bus services halting at Level 3 evacuations.

RARET Summary

What happened from RARET's perspective?

- RARET was monitoring the flood risk from when the NWS Seattle office issued a hydrologic outlook bulletin in the lead-up to the event; looking at the river gauge tool, there was a clear risk that some rivers in our

region would see major flooding. When this evolved into flood warnings from NWS Seattle, RARET issued situational awareness on the topic.

- RARET would see transportation providers impacted at different levels based on the geography of the flooding and the level of preparation for the providers. Providers accustomed to flooding, like Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, had experience and processes in place to be proactive about service adjustments during the flooding despite being in a more severely impacted area due to their service area. Providers who were hit by heavy flooding unexpectedly, or those who did not have flood-specific triggers in their emergency plans, found themselves being more reactive.
- The levee breaks were the biggest challenge faced in the tri-county area from a transportation perspective because the impact was sudden and less predictable. Suddenly AFN-related transportation needs that were brought to RARET's attention during this event were concentrated around levee breaches.
- Specifically, KCOEM reached out to RARET about a south King County client while RARET was out of office related to a levee breach; RARET was not in-office to respond. KCOEM was able to coordinate a response by the time RARET returned to the office.

Some best practices

- Snohomish County Human Services working with SnoTrac, with some support from RARET, to ensure mobility management had a presence at their Sultan Disaster Assistance Center was a trailblazing move in ensuring disaster survivors have in-person transportation guidance post-emergency. This was also facilitated by SnoTrac also having enough resources to have a new staff member who could conduct outreach work; some mobility managers are single staff members stretched too thin for additional responsibilities.

- Transportation providers with established plans for flooding and who had staff members critical to making service decisions during emergencies in an internal taskforce fared best during this event.

AFN Gaps on the transportation front

- NEMT brokers and their contracted providers demonstrated their critical role in serving the community, particularly the AFN community, during this event. However, these brokers lack some of the direct connections to emergency management that transit agencies leverage to great success. NEMT situational awareness is limited to public information from a scattershot of sources; integrating a broker staff member into something like the NWS Slack, for example, could make them nimbler in preparing for and adjusting to events. Additionally, given that NEMT service areas across the state functionally include any public road a Medicaid beneficiary lives on, their ability to contribute to situational awareness via what their contracted providers see is underexploited. NEMT broker and provider staff were also directly impacted by the disaster. In some cases, preparation training, and recovery resources for these staff members would help their organizational resiliency in future disasters.
- In cases of those being displaced at a large scale, it is worth noting that anyone who relies on NEMT for medical appointment transportation needs to update their address if they are displaced, even temporarily, if it overlaps with scheduled transportation to Medicaid-billable appointments. This communication is not typically highlighted, but when left unaddressed, it can lead to missed medical appointments and misallocated transportation resources. The scale of pressing needs for those displaced by flooding can lead to this falling through the cracks among other high-priority needs, which underscores the positive roll mobility managers can have collaborating on recovery efforts.

- The central Puget Sound Region has atypically well-staffed mobility management teams in Hopelink Mobility in King County and growing capacity with Sno-Trac. Other counties are understaffed to be able to assist in similar events. The collaboration of Snohomish Human Services and Sno-Trac at their Sultan DAC highlights that more use can be made in King County of the mobility education and outreach capability of the Hopelink team and outlines the importance that other counties have the resources for their mobility managers to retain outreach capabilities. Mobility management, having multilingual staff working on their outreach team, was also a clear benefit in Sno-Trac, for example.
- For transportation, RARET's services only extends as far north as Snohomish County. Skagit impacts were not captured as a result. So, while there are general takeaways that still apply, if there are unaddressed perspectives on access lessons learned, they would most likely be from their outreach to an organization, like Skagit Council of Governments and/or Skagit Transit, might identify any missing transportation takeaways
- Recommendations with the understanding that some solutions can be quickly implemented, while others will require more time.
- Transportation providers should identify flood-prone areas within their service regions and develop flood action plans where risks exist.
- Emergency management agencies should strengthen relationships with NEMT brokers to improve regional resilience.
- Transportation providers should maintain current, printable transportation resources that can be distributed as physical materials during disasters, in multiple languages.
- Transportation providers should understand which tools are available to assess flood risk, how to access them, and how to use them

effectively. Response plans should clearly define risk thresholds that trigger specific actions.

- Transportation providers should identify key personnel responsible for monitoring developing flood conditions and supporting timely, informed operational decision-making.
- Mobility management can serve as transportation subject matter experts when establishing recovery resource hubs. Statewide support for mobility managers to employ staff for outreach efforts so they have the capacity to be present at those hubs.
- Clearly identifying and communicating priority languages in impacted zones for transportation materials enables mobility managers and transportation providers to collaborate on producing and distributing accessible resources. Given limited resources, if external funding could be sourced to support their production and translation, that could expedite the process.
- Following an event, the one-call, one-click tool [Find a Ride](#)¹⁴⁸ can be useful to non-drivers displaced from their homes by helping them understand transportation options available to them in their temporary or permanent housing locations.
- [RARET 2025 Flood Report](#)¹⁴⁹ for lessons learned elsewhere about transportation during recent emergencies in Washington, especially relevant is the emphasis on bolstering NEMT & emergency management relations:
- For LEP access, maybe look at programs like the [Community Transportation Navigator](#)¹⁵⁰ (CTN) Program in King County:

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.findaride.org/tripplanner>

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.kcmobility.org/raret-flooding-2025-transportation-report>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.kcmobility.org/community-transportation-navigators>

- On expanding access to accessible vehicles for communities, consider looking at the [King County Metro Community Van Program](#)¹⁵¹:
- For making systems more accessible, consider the [Pierce Transit Accessible Bus Stop Signage Project](#)¹⁵²:

Evacuation Protocols

- People with disabilities should evacuate at Level 2 and not wait for Level 3 – plan for short-distance evacuation to the nearest safe place.
- Transportation issues from multiple closed/flooded highways
- Logistics – it took someone seven hours to drive 73 miles from Lakewood to Marysville on I-5 while people were evacuating during the first Green River levee break. On a good day, that drive would have been an hour and twenty minutes.
- There were numerous news reports about evacuations from a second levee breach on the White River that impacted a residential area, including a senior citizens center. Some local news video clips show senior citizens and families using power wheelchairs and various durable medical equipment while evacuating.
- Senior housing and similar facilities will have a high number of people with disabilities needing assistance during evacuations.
- Updates on the evacuation zone for Pacific
UPDATED: December 18, 2025 – 6:45 a.m.
 - An evacuation notice issued December 16 remains in effect for portions of the City of Pacific, but the affected area has been significantly reduced.

¹⁵¹ <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/metro/travel-options/community-van>

¹⁵² <https://piercetransit.org/accessible-bus-stop-signage-pilot-project/>

- Level 3 (GO NOW) areas that remain:
 - White River Estates
 - Park View
 - Megan Court Apartments
- Residents are being allowed to return to other areas near the evacuation zone but may be delayed by heavy equipment or flood response workers, and officers may be checking residency.
- Updates on the evacuation zone for Auburn

UPDATED: December 18, 2025 – 6:45 a.m.

 - Water levels have continued to decrease in parts of Auburn, allowing evacuation levels to be downgraded in some areas. However, some locations remain under a Level 3 (GO NOW) evacuation order and are not safe for re-entry.
 - Now at Level 2:
 - Copper Gate Apartments, 4750 Auburn Way N., have been downgraded to Level 2 (GET SET).
 - The following area remains under a Level 3 (GO NOW) evacuation order and is not safe for re-entry:
 - Homes, businesses, and areas between B Street NW and Auburn Way North
 - Staples Fulfillment Delivery Center along Frontage Road NW
 - **Level 1 – GET READY** Have your emergency go-bag stocked and ready to go. Update your communications and evacuation plans

with a personal support team and designated local and distant contacts.

- **Level 2 – GET SET** (Return with Extreme Caution) means some residents and businesses may return but must remain ready to leave again if conditions change.
- **Level 3 – GO NOW** (Do Not Return) means some areas remain unsafe due to flooding, standing water, and limited access. Re-entry is not permitted. River and dam conditions remain dynamic, and levels can rise quickly due to dam releases, rainfall, and levee conditions.
- When evacuations reach Level 3, buses stop running regular services. Some of these buses could pivot to emergency evacuation services.

DAC Site Considerations

- DAC Site considerations for public transit access
- Transportation to DAC – highways flooded or damaged
- Apply lessons learned from previous mass COVID testing and vaccination responses.
- For any shelters in the Snohomish, King, or Pierce County region, [Find a Ride](#) might be a potentially useful tool for the staff and clients. Created with input from groups like CFI, this is a multi-modal trip planner and service discovery tool that also has a phone line (1-888-697-9080 Voice/Text or FindARide@hopelink.org) for those who do not wish to use the digital tool. While I would not suggest the tool for evacuations, since it does not have real-time updates to services impacted by disaster, it is potentially very useful for those in shelters post-event with travel needs trying to figure out their transportation next steps.

- Think of the tool a bit like Google Maps but instead of just walking, driving, or fixed-route buses, it has ~100 transportation providers across the region of various sizes and capabilities. This can help those recovering from being displaced, perhaps after losing their personal transportation, discover what options are out there for them.
- The Hopelink Find a Ride team [wrote a blog post about the communication toolkit](#)¹⁵³ for Find a Ride with links to flyers for the tool in 16 languages and pre-written translated blurbs.
- [US 2 Updates from WSDOT](#)¹⁵⁴
- [A New Trip Planner for King, Pierce, & Snohomish](#)¹⁵⁵
- The lead times with transportation providers are often inflexible, as the logistics of organizing rides at scale can be rigid. What I wonder is if the notice about the openings of DACs can be done any earlier at all and if there are other methods. I think we need to make that clear to non-drivers, so they do not panic.
- Concerns about limited lead time are critical for accessible transportation and personal support and interpreters!!!!
- Typical Information requests for transportation lack useful information such as number of people, mobility needs, time of departure and destination
- Folks need to plan with their providers during blue-sky time
- Sno-trac has new employees focused on transportation – now focusing on transition from shelters to non-congregate shelters

¹⁵³ <https://www.kcmobility.org/help-promote-find-a-ride-trip-planner>

¹⁵⁴

<https://www.facebook.com/WSDOT/posts/pfbid02UPAcoTWddJ1fSKWbHdUB7wa6E6gpQL4GUFNhsnC4WDZ9bRKd89pDXGCscF4Y4HyEl?rdid=4xx0QUZ9Q6s4wzr8>

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.findaride.org/tripplanner>

- "Regarding transportation topics, there was strong interest related to teenagers, especially learning how to travel independently to Seattle for school, as well as applying for reduced fare ORCA programs using the [ORCA Reduced Fare Portal](#)." ¹⁵⁶
- Federal Transit Administration [What is Mobility Management](#): ¹⁵⁷
- In the previous flood, people were still in hotels nine months later. Cars may have been damaged or destroyed.
- There are a lot of resources from NGOs for transportation requests
- CFI offers training – discussing evacuation options
- Snohomish County Human Services and SnoTrac seeking transportation resources at Disaster Assistance Centers
- Three kidney centers reached out to NEMT for assistance in evacuating dialysis clients – a good example of why NEMT should be integrated in emergency planning. Lots of capabilities and specialized experience in moving folks with mobility needs.
- In the recovery phase – engage with nonprofits, as they often have transportation assets such as retired wheelchair-accessible vans. Transit agencies donate retired vehicles to nonprofits that apply. [Van GO | Community Transit](#) ¹⁵⁸
- Mobility Management is a great resource. Mobility Managers are great for information and collateral with NEMT and RARET
- CFI uses an accessible van provided by faith-based organizations and just needs a copy of the driver's license for insurance purposes.

¹⁵⁶ <https://reducedfare.kingcounty.gov/en-US/>

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ccam/mobility-management>

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.communitytransit.org/van-go>

- RARET provides transportation-related information and brochures to Disaster Assistance Centers
- [RARET's Flooding 2025 Transportation Report](#)¹⁵⁹
- High Winds and Blizzard Warnings impact transportation options
- [DSHS Mapping tool](#) – In the top right corner, the first button is the mapping overlay UI. Turn off all overlays and then turn on residential and nursing. then you can zoom in and look around the map¹⁶⁰

Resources

- What is the Nonemergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)?
[Transportation services \(nonemergency\) | Washington State Health Care Authority](#)¹⁶¹
- "Some individuals impacted by the recent flooding may be Medicaid beneficiaries who rely on NEMT. For those who are unable to use public transit due to a disability or living in an isolated area, they may be considered higher-mode NEMT clients and receive transportation to and from Medicaid-billable medical appointments."
- "For clients who have been displaced by flooding and already have upcoming medical appointments scheduled, it is critical that their NEMT broker be informed of their updated pickup address so transportation can be arranged correctly. Additionally, if someone who has been displaced is scheduling a new NEMT ride, they should be reminded to update their address during the reservation call."

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.kcmobility.org/raret-flooding-2025-transportation-report>

¹⁶⁰ <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/6aaf68405c644bc29949771f5101934d>

¹⁶¹ <https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/transportation-services-nonemergency>

- If a person has been displaced over a county line and is not sure who their new NEMT broker is, the HCA has a guide here: [HCA contracted NEMT transportation brokers](#)¹⁶²
- And I think there is a lot of confusion around NEMT having "non-emergency" in the name and their role in emergency situations. The non-emergency refers to the type of medical trips they can facilitate as there are no trips to a hospital emergency department, they still operate during emergency events
- If a Medicaid client qualifies for NEMT higher mode service (this is an NEMT term for door-to-door transportation), this usually means they have had a doctor attest that they have a medical reason for not being able to take fixed-route transit to their medical appointments. Thus, there is a lot of cross-over with the NEMT higher-mode rider pool and low-income individuals with access and functional needs.
- NEMT's "higher mode" clients are those who are relatively low income (being Medicaid eligible) and qualify for Medicaid-funded rides to medical appointments due to an access need that prevents taking fixed-route transit, their age, or living in an isolated location. The client base sits squarely within this group's areas of focus.
- Hopelink's NEMT was called upon to facilitate the evacuation of clients from three kidney centers in south King County.
- NEMT was leveraged in King County by medical sites in need, taking advantage of NEMT's full-county footprint, accessible vehicles, and high degree of crossover with their clientele. Kidney centers having strong partnerships with NEMT brokers is a must in emergent situations.

¹⁶² <https://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/billers-and-providers/ContractedBrokers.pdf>

Recommendations:

- Recording of a webinar on emergency evacuation using CMIST led by [June Isaacson Kailes](https://juneikailes.com/)¹⁶³ via The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies (PIDS) [Strengthening Transit Evacuation Plans Webinar – The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](https://disasterstrategies.org/recording-available-strengthening-transit-evacuation-plans-webinar/)¹⁶⁴
- Encourage people with disabilities to evacuate early at Level 2 to allow sufficient time and reduce evacuation risks.
- Improve communication and advance notice regarding openings of disaster assistance centers and transportation options.
- Integrate Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) brokers into emergency planning to ensure continuity of medical rides for displaced clients.
- Promote multi-modal trip planners like Hopelink's "Find a Ride" for shelter residents and displaced people to find transportation options.
- Develop clear channels for transportation requests during emergencies, including accessible vehicles and interpreter services.
- Engage nonprofits and transit agencies in recovery phase transportation efforts, utilizing donated accessible vehicles.
- Train community members and emergency staff on evacuation options and accessible transportation resources.
- Utilize transportation mapping tools to identify vulnerable populations and nursing/residential facilities in need of transport support.
- Plan for transportation service disruptions during severe weather and Level 3 evacuations, including alternative mobility solutions.

¹⁶³ <https://juneikailes.com/>

¹⁶⁴ <https://disasterstrategies.org/recording-available-strengthening-transit-evacuation-plans-webinar/>

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Checklist of TRANSPORTATION best practices

Evacuations

- a. Is there a plan for emergency mass transportation for evacuation when public systems are shut down?
- b. Are there enhanced shelter-in-place (SIP) initiatives for people with disabilities with clear directions on when to SIP vs when to evacuate as a way of reducing transportation and/or travel impact?
- c. Have extrication and/or evacuation chairs on each apparatus, including brush and wildland pump apparatus?

Accessible Service Alternatives

- d. Are there alternative forms of accessible transportation, especially in rural areas?
- e. Are there options for accessible transportation such as bariatric transportation services?
- f. Are there inclusive plans for restoration of accessible services?
- g. Are there inclusive plans for disruption of accessible services and have alternatives and options to maintain flow of accessible services?

Transportation Planning

- h. Is the facility located on a public transportation route?
- i. Have vehicle types been identified and registered for use of accessible parking?
- j. Are there MOUs/MOAs developed with local entities for accessible transportation in emergencies and disasters?
- k. Are you including individuals with disabilities and/or disability support and service providers with local jurisdiction planning to assure full

inclusion in all plans addressing whole community access and alternatives?

Infrastructure Readiness

- l. Have road conditions near medical facilities and shelters been analyzed for impact on people with disabilities with alternative plans?
- m. Do infrastructure repairs include public accessibility throughout the community such as sidewalks, curb cuts, wheelchair ramps, railings, and other ADA requirements?
- n. Have emergency thoroughfares been identified with alternative routes?
- o. Are you improving and promoting accessible transportation routes to ensure ready access to public transportation from newly restored housing?

The Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning¹⁶⁵

The Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP) is a statewide advisory group, led by the [Washington Statewide Independent Living Council](#)¹⁶⁶ (WASILC), that advises on how to help people with disabilities prepare for and respond to emergencies.

The Coalition works to ensure accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities and other marginalized populations is built into all aspects of emergency management.

*CIEP's work is critical, because people with disabilities or other access or functional needs are **4 times more likely** to be severely injured or die from a disaster. Being prepared is key.*

Our Partners

We collaborate with and advise government agencies, nonprofit organizations, emergency managers/planners, businesses, individuals, and community groups.

Get Involved

Participation in CIEP is open to all organizations and individuals. Weekly calls are on Wednesdays from 11am to 12 noon on Zoom. For news, meeting notices, and alerts, sign up to be on the [CIEP email list](#).¹⁶⁷

Who's Who at WASILC & Contributors

This document was written with the help of AI tools and rechecked before publication. Below are the names of individuals who contributed to this report and their affiliations.

WASILC Leadership:

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¹⁶⁵ <https://www.wasilc.org/coalition-on-inclusive-emergency-planning>

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.wasilc.org/>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.wasilc.org/newsletter>

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*(Credit for content in MAINTAINING HEALTH)

** (Credit for content in TRANSPORTATION)