



# NCR disability preparedness

*Emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities and other special needs*

## National Capital Region Disability Preparedness Initiative

# NCR Needs Assessment On Disability Preparedness

### Executive Summary



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## **National Capital Region Disability Preparedness Initiative NCR Needs Assessment on Disability Preparedness**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Disability Preparedness Center started activities under the National Capital Region Disability Preparedness Initiative in January 2005, including the NCR Needs Assessment on Disability Preparedness. The initiative is designed to implement a series of activities that will enhance current UASI emergency planning in the National Capital Region by integrating into existing plans new preparedness planning focused on individuals with disabilities and persons with other special needs. Nearly 20 percent of all people in the NCR have disabilities that may limit their ability to hear or see warnings, to leave their home, or to care for themselves. This needs assessment is a key step in the series of activities that will address the needs of this population under existing UASI objectives.

For the assessment, DPC conducted telephone interviews during February 2005 with 58 participants who were individuals with disabilities and/or officials of emergency or disability-related organizations throughout the NCR. Participants included emergency planners, emergency responders, elected officials, governmental agencies involved with disability programs, service providers, businesses and advocacy organizations. Family members of persons with disabilities also participated.

The NCR Needs Assessment on Disability Preparedness revealed the following:

- There is strong agreement among all participants that more should be done to improve emergency preparedness for NCR residents with disabilities.
- Some disability-focused preparedness efforts already exist in the NCR, and should be coordinated with each other, expanded and strengthened.
- Survey participants want more information about how to include people with disabilities in emergency preparedness.
- Emergency planners and responders and disability-oriented organizations approach the problem of inclusive emergency preparedness in noticeably different ways. Emergency planners and responders favor adapting general plans and processes that are already in place to include people with disabilities. Disability advocates and service providers tend to favor disability-specific approaches. For our region to improve emergency planning for people of all needs, these approaches need to be better integrated.

When asked how we can move forward emergency planning for persons with disabilities in this region, participants identified the following top three priority areas:

- ***First, communication among key groups (people with disabilities, disability advocates and service providers, emergency planners and responders) should be facilitated, and what is learned from that widely publicized.*** People with disabilities, emergency professionals, and the public need to know about easily accessible ways to receive and initiate communications about emergencies and about inclusive emergency preparedness. In the NCR we need training, education and public awareness campaigns about including persons with disabilities in emergency plans and planning processes.
- ***Second, survey participants want coordinated emergency planning that includes persons with disabilities.*** Persons with disabilities should be included in coordinated planning processes, whether that means modification of general plans to be inclusive of everyone's major needs, or persons with disabilities making their own plans and then reaching out to connect with more general public plans.
- ***Third, for both planning and communication to be effective, more information is needed on what persons with disabilities should do in emergencies and in preparing for emergencies.*** Relevant information has been gathered by emergency professionals and by disability advocates and service providers throughout the region, but it needs to be shared more effectively and further developed.

Results from this needs assessment indicate that there are various activities related to emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities already occurring in the National Capital Region, and widespread interest in developing emergency plans that are more inclusive of people with disabilities. There is broad agreement that more should be done to make emergency preparedness, response and recovery in the NCR more inclusive of people with disabilities or other special needs.

Through our snowball sampling technique we were able to identify a network of organizations and individuals throughout the region working on emergency and disability preparedness. What we find in surveying the participants is a great deal of expertise and enthusiasm. People appear to know a lot, but have just begun to communicate their knowledge and expertise among themselves and to others who would most benefit.

Major findings suggest that different groups in this region have much to offer. Persons with disabilities or with relatives with disabilities have experience learning about emergency preparedness and in teaching other people with disabilities about emergency preparedness. Disability advocates and service providers have experience in developing emergency plans specifically for people with disabilities. Emergency planners and responders have experience in planning and responding to the general population.

For our region to move forward emergency planning for people of all needs, these approaches should be combined. Plans that are already in place should be reviewed to see how they can be adapted for people with disabilities in the NCR, and, at the same time, disability-specific plans need to be integrated with broader, community-wide plans.