

80% of US population live in counties that have been affected by disasters.¹ But less than 25% of older adults had emergency plans.²

To protect our vulnerable populations, preparedness efforts that incorporate both public and personal emergency plans are needed.

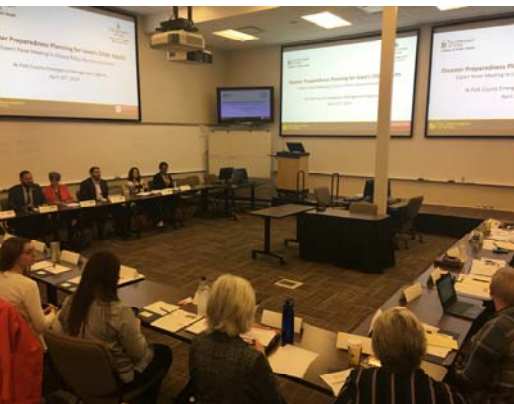
FEMA defines “**Special Needs Population**” as those who may have additional needs before, during, and after an incident in functional areas, including but not limited to: maintaining independence, communication, transportation, supervision, and medical care. This includes those who have disabilities and are elderly.

It is recommended that individuals be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 3 days in case emergency responders are not able to reach them. Disruption in services such as electricity, meal/home care, and access to medication can cause a quick decline in older adults’ health during and after a disaster. Older adults in rural areas also have limited access to resources. In order to improve the outcomes of disasters among older adults in rural areas, plans to mobilize and sustain personal emergency support systems need to be in place.

Disaster PrepWise is an online program that allows older adults and their families to develop personal emergency and disaster plans. The plans include information critical in disaster management such as medical care and medication needs, emergency support network members, functional limitations, cognitive difficulties, service animals, and other important health and social needs. It was developed through a series of research conducted at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.



What we did: Expert Panel met to discuss how best to prepare older Iowans



The group comprised state agencies and county experts in emergency management, as well as community-based organizations that serve older residents in Iowa. This group reviewed current public efforts within the state to explore dynamics needed to implement a statewide policy that allows incorporating personal emergency plans into existing disaster management infrastructure.

Specific discussions centered around identifying (1) policy barriers to incorporating personal disaster plans to larger public plans using a tool like *PrepWise*, (2) resources within communities that can facilitate such efforts, (3) potential stakeholders who can engage in such efforts, and (4) laws or policies needed to implement such efforts.



The Expert Panel told us that:

- ◆ Public agencies and non-profit organizations see a great value in incorporating personal emergency plans like *Disaster PrepWise* into existing infrastructure.
- ◆ There are numerous policy barriers in incorporating personal plans to public infrastructure, including:
 - 1) identifying the host and holder of the personal emergency plan information
 - 2) sharing data between agencies and organizations to facilitate management
 - 3) creating access to the program through a secure (HIPAA compliant) and trusted portal
 - 4) identifying sustainable funding of a portal—subscriptions may be necessary to allow for upkeep and maintenance of the program
- ◆ Trusted entity to host the program and store data is needed for older adults and family to feel secure.
- ◆ Various service systems are already working with this population on a personal basis, such as in case management or meal delivery programs. Perhaps a pilot could begin in one of those sites to determine use, feasibility, and best practices for implementation.
- ◆ Increasing awareness of policy-makers and agency directors is important: possibly a new state initiative.
⇒ Highlight the importance of personal preparedness especially for areas with limited resources.

Moving forward:

- ◆ **A long term sustainability plan must be developed.** This likely will involve identifying a small amount of continuous funding to be allocated to maintain the web portal; or developing a subscription process to assure that the portal can operate into the future.
- ◆ **Implementation research** to develop and test disaster management strategies that incorporate both public and personal emergency plans need to be conducted.
 - 1) Identify agencies open to collaboratively developing such disaster management strategies.
 - 2) Collaboratively develop implementation plans that work for all agencies and groups.
 - 3) Test and evaluate the impacts and benefits of these strategies.

The benefits of the emergency management strategies that incorporate both public and personal plans should be documented and presented to policy-makers, key stakeholders, and the public to facilitate policy guidelines that will result in a wider dissemination.



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