

## **HOW TO HELP PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDS) & OLDER ADULTS BEFORE & DURING AN EMERGENCY**

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### **DURING A NATURAL DISASTER OR EMERGENCY, WE NEED TO BE MORE AWARE OF PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE VULNERABLE OR LIVING WITH DISABILITY/IES, WHO MAY NEED EXTRA SUPPORT DURING A CRISIS.**

- If you are aware of a person with disabilities, or older adult who may be more vulnerable for some reason, reach out to them and make sure they have a plan and a GO BAG packed.
- Often people with disabilities are not visible to you because of issues of accessibility hampering their participation in neighbourhood events.
- Be especially vigilant at identifying those who live alone who may not have family close by. For the first generation in Canadian history, many older adults live far from their families, and are quite isolated because they are not “out and about”.
- Don’t assume people are ok because of their previous professional work.
- Don’t assume they have family or Homecare help, or help from another source. Many older adults are overly proud and hide disability and impairment, and many supports disappear in an emergency or disaster.
- Be conscious of invisible disabilities like cognitive impairment.
- Often families and friends are the most likely at taking their other’s word that they are okay and don’t need help. This happens because they have trouble accepting that someone they have loved or known for a long time would have difficulty with tasks that once were easy for them to do, or because of denial about disability.
- Many invisible disabilities, especially cognitive impairment, become worse with the stress and anxiety of an emergency or disaster.

### **COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT & DEMENTIA ARE A BIG RISK**

- Cognitive impairment is not just about memory loss, but includes challenges in solving problems and planning. This means that someone you think of as competent may actually be struggling before, or during an emergency or wide scale disaster and need assistance planning and problem solving.
- 17% of Canadians aged 65 and older have mild cognitive impairment (MCI). 22% of Americans over age 71 have CIND cognitive impairment no dementia)? Some studies say it is as high as 35% ( there are varied stats on this).
- Almost 62% of those currently living with dementia are women.
- 17%of people age 75-84 have some form of dementia.
- 25-30% of adults over 85 will have some form of dementia. Over 90, this number jumps higher.
- About 3% of people with dementia are under 65.

## **Ensure the person has a plan and is prepared for a natural disaster or emergency**

- Ask before an emergency to meet to discuss emergencies. Find out gently if they have a plan. If they seem confused, start by asking them if they know what a GO BAG is. Have a meeting to show them your GO BAG.
- Organize a group in a neighbourhood or building to get together to plan with each other. Disasters are usually neighbourhood-based, so plans can be shared and people can help one another. In our community emergency plans should include a power outage plan where a different list is required (egs: headlamp, power bank, wind-up radio, non-perishable food).
- Heat and cold are huge risks during a power outage.

## **In an emergency, help PWDS & Older Adults activate their plan & evacuate quickly**

**Check if they need transport or any extra support**

**Check and ensure they are being evacuated in plenty of time by others**

**Stay in touch with them after an evacuation**

**Make sure they have what they need until they can go home, or if at home until the emergency (example power outage) is over.**

## **OTHER TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND**

- Ask, rather than assume what a person's difficulties are.
- Ask, rather than assume they need help.
- Keep in mind PWDS need more time to do everything, especially prepare to evacuate.
- Be a source of emergency information especially if know someone who is visually or hearing impaired and may have difficulty seeing or reading alerts.
- Speak slowly and reassuringly.
- Never touch a person, their mobility device, equipment, or service animal without getting consent first.
- Persons with mobility issues are concerned about being carried due to issues with pain and fear of being dropped. Never pick a person up without asking.
- **Never separate a person with a disability from their assistive devices unless it's an issue of life and death. This means, wherever possible, to evacuate the person with their mobility device.**
- Some people with emotional disability or cognitive impairment may be unable to fully understand the emergency and can become disoriented and confused about how to react. Remaining calm yourself is very important.
- **Regard a person with a disability as the best expert in their disability/ies.**