

## Appendix B. Emergency Preparedness

The US Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the primary response agency in the event of a disaster. Updated in May of 2013, FEMA's *National Response Framework* (<http://www.fema.gov/national-response-framework>) defines an emergency as

*an event that causes, or threatens to cause, loss of life, human suffering, public and private property damage, and economic and social disruption. Disasters and emergencies require resources that are beyond the scope of local agencies in routine responses to day-to-day emergencies and accidents, and may be of such magnitude or unusual circumstances as to require response by several or all levels of government—federal, state and local.*

Emergency planning and preparedness is critical for all citizens. For individuals with disabilities who often have more complex support needs, emergency planning is even more important to ensure individualized supports will be available. As more individuals with all types and levels of disabilities are living in the community and the Commonwealth's aging population increases, it is critical that individuals and their families be prepared for emergencies. It is equally critical that those charged with emergency preparedness planning ensure that there are adequate provisions in place to support persons with disabilities both in shelters and in place. This includes considering such factors as the accessibility of shelter sites, transportation needs, and medical and other support needs for a diverse population.

### Disaster Planning

The **Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)** continues to be the lead disaster-planning agency in the Commonwealth. The VDEM website, <http://www.vaemergency.gov/>, provides information on multiple types of preparedness planning and updates for citizens regarding current threats, whether they be natural disasters, inclement weather, hurricanes, violent storms, or a manmade disaster such as terrorism, an active shooter, or bio hazards related to chemical spills or nuclear disasters. VDEM also has a course catalogue that contains options for preparing professionals to include individuals with disabilities and aging populations in planning processes. It is available at <http://www.vaemergency.gov/em-community/training/course-catalogue>.

VDEM's website provides important information and resources to help individuals with and without disabilities make a plan to prepare for an emergency. This includes information related to specific types of emergencies (like a tornado), how to decide whether to evacuate or shelter in place, how to plan for pets, and other relevant factors. The planning pages begin at <http://www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia/makeaplan>. The VDEM also maintains Listo VA, which contains all relevant information in Spanish and is available at <http://www.vaemergency.gov/listoVirginia>.

The **Ready Virginia** link on VDEM's website gives specific information on how to make a plan, get a kit, stay informed, and get access to resources for special needs populations. According to VDEM, emergency kits should contain supplies such as food that won't spoil, water, a working battery-operated radio, extra batteries, and a written emergency plan. Some grocery and department stores and the Red Cross may offer kits to citizens for a charge. VDEM recommends that after obtaining essentials, an individual should add flashlights; a first aid kit; extra contact lenses or glasses; a written list of medications and prescriptions; sanitation supplies such as toilet paper, soap, a change of clothing, and sturdy shoes; and a blanket or sleeping bag.

Special items for pets, infants, and elderly family members or individuals with disabilities are also recommended. VDEM recommends a plan that includes an agreed on family meeting place in case family members are unable to return home, an out-of-town friend or relative as a point of contact, and to be sure every family member has such information. Evacuation orders and shelter locations may be broadcast on local media along with information such as where to find medical help during an event. For more information, visit <http://www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia>.

For older Virginia residents and individuals with disabilities, VDEM has additional recommendations and posts a list of important considerations for each of these populations. For example, for older Virginians, VDEM specifically warns that, following a disaster or emergency, there may be people who try to take advantage of those affected by the disaster. They advise that if seniors suspect someone is trying to take advantage of them, to report it to the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-382-4357 or to the Better Business Bureau in Virginia at <http://www.usa.gov/directory/bbb/virginia.shtml>.

For individuals with disabilities and those who rely on care providers, VDEM recommends creating a support network to ensure there is help to operate special equipment during an emergency. Further, they recommend that there be a trusted friend who has a house key, and a person who knows what evacuation plans are in place. For individuals who may need special, accessible transportation, plans need to be made in advance and include communications regarding where to locate emergency supplies for the individual with disabilities.

There is also specific information for individuals who have pets. Foremost, some shelters do not allow pets, except for service animals. VDEM advises individuals to contact a local veterinarian, pet shelter, or pet hotel to find out if they are prepared to assist during an emergency. Furthermore, VDEM recommends families plan for their pet's needs and have on hand a kit for their pet's own needs. There may be a relative or friend who needs to be contacted to care for the specific needs of the pet in the local or broader community.

Virginians with and without disabilities and their families are largely responsible for educating themselves about emergency and disaster preparedness, resources, and training in their communities. Local police, fire, and other emergency services, as well as the Virginia Citizen Corps (<http://www.vaemergency.gov/volunteer/va-cit-corps-councils>) are sources of

information and training, typically provided at no cost. **Volunteer opportunities** are provided to ensure individuals can learn and practice implementing the plan, its response strategies, and recovery plans. Organizations that provide these opportunities include Citizen Corps, Neighborhood Watch, Citizen Emergency Response Training, Fire Corps, and Volunteers in Public Service.

Planning processes vary throughout the Commonwealth. For more information on emergency preparedness plans in a particular jurisdiction, individuals should contact their local agencies and organizations directly. The VDEM website contains a list of local emergency planners at <https://lemd.vdem.virginia.gov/Public/Default.aspx>. This list includes local contacts, where shelters are located, and more information regarding local emergency planning.

### **Additional State and Local Resources**

Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their family members can visit **the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard Hearing (DDHH)** online at <http://www.vddhh.org/video.htm>. The site features several emergency and disaster planning videos with closed-captions and a sign language interpreter. It provides information on why it is important to be prepared, how to make a plan, where to find training, how to build an emergency kit, where to go to volunteer, how to locate a shelter, and also includes a video that specifically addresses planning for people with disabilities, and what to do in the event of an evacuation.

The **Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)** is a key agency involved with emergency preparedness for individuals with intellectual, behavioral health, and substance abuse disabilities. DBHDS Policy 1043 (SYS) 08-1 states

*The Department, state facilities, and CSBs [Community Services Boards] shall, to the greatest extent possible, assure that emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and post disaster planning is undertaken by state agencies, local governments, and other organizations to integrate mental health into physical health and medical support functions.*

The DBHDS policy manual covers specific action steps for educating policy makers, establishing liaisons between service staff, ensuring participation in state and local emergency services planning, and advocating for more funding and human resources to respond to and recover from emergencies/disasters.

DBHDS is responsible for ensuring that the **state-operated institutions** (behavioral health facilities and Training Centers) have up-to-date emergency plans. DBHDS is also responsible for ensuring that its licensed providers comply with state and federal laws, and regulations and policies with respect to emergency preparedness. Agencies that license other types of facilities (e.g., assisted living facilities) are also responsible for ensuring that their licensees comply with federal and state mandates regarding emergency preparedness. DBHDS developed a **family**

**preparedness guide** that is intended to help families prepare, respond, and recover from a disaster. It is located at <http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/CWD-HelpingToHeal.htm>.

**The Virginia Department of Health (VDH)** provides educational materials to help individuals and families prepare to take specific actions related to various scenarios such as bioterrorism or quickly spreading viruses at <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEP/>. They also provide information on how to talk to children about disasters. VDH offers a separate resource page on what to do in the event of natural disasters at <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/oep/disasters.htm>. It includes tips on how to prepare your family and pets should a natural disaster take place.

**Centers for Independent Living (CILs)** provides information and resources to individuals on how to become involved in emergency preparedness planning and learn more about what to expect during and after an emergency. To find the list of Centers for Independent Living, go to <http://www.vadrs.org/cbs/cilslisting.htm>. Other helpful agencies include the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and faith-based organizations. The listings of AAAs in Virginia are located at <http://www.vaaaa.org/agencies/>.

## Emergency Response

Often an emergency will require the use of shelters. If local shelters are full following an emergency/disaster, the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) is responsible for oversight of the **State Managed Shelter (SMS) Program**. This program is administered and operated by the State to support mass evacuations across jurisdictional boundaries when ordered by the Governor. SMS facilities are open only when they provide an appropriate response to catastrophic events. Messages regarding those sites are communicated by various media to the public. They are designed to keep family units together by providing rapid registration, tracking, and reunification of individuals and families and by co-locating persons with special medical needs, seniors, or individuals with disabilities within general population shelters. If your local shelter is overwhelmed and SMS sites are activated, citizens can monitor the VDEM website to determine where state shelters are activated.

SMS sites are at 19 locations across the Commonwealth. Most are located in campuses of higher education; however, a few are on private, nonprofit properties. Sites are assessed by a multi-disciplinary team with representatives from the SMS facility itself, local government, State Police, VDSS, VDH, the Department for the Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Virginia Department of Agricultural Services, (VDACS), and the Red Cross. DARS assesses the site for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and those areas needing modification are addressed. VDACS acts as the lead agency for sheltering pets in an emergency. Plans are being developed to shelter pets and service animals in close proximity to certain State Managed Shelters.

If an emergency evacuation is ordered, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) offers several methods to access information on the conditions of traffic and roads. This includes their website (<http://www.511virginia.org/>), which includes information on travel congestion and alternate routes. VDOT updates road conditions and traffic via its 24-hour

telephone service, available by dialing 511 and through its mobile telephone app, which can be downloaded at <http://www.virginiadot.org/travel/511.asp>. Staying informed about road accessibility and driving time is important should an evacuation being necessary.

Following an emergency declaration by the President of the United States, federally funded assistance is typically distributed through state and local agencies to affected individuals and businesses within specifically designated areas. For all families in Virginia seeking emergency relief in the form of a disaster related to the loss of their home, the **Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS)** is the state agency to contact. Once the Governor has requested, and the President has approved, a federal disaster declaration for Virginia, DSS and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) jointly administer the Individuals and Households Program (IHP). Individuals and households within the disaster area can access IHP's two components, **Housing Assistance** and **Other Needs Assistance**, for necessary disaster-related expenses and serious needs that cannot be met through other means. IHP funds are not intended to cover disaster losses or to purchase items or services that may be considered nonessential, luxury, decorative, or improvements. The current maximum for all forms of assistance under IHP is \$27,200. This program and two other programs, Other Housing Assistance Grants and Other Needs Assistance Grants, are detailed on the DSS website at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/benefit/disasterasst.html>.

**FEMA Housing Assistance** is 100 percent federally funded and is available to applicants displaced from their primary residences. It can be used to cover the cost of temporary housing or for permanent housing construction, repair, or replacement in situations where pre-disaster housing has been deemed uninhabitable and no insurance is available to cover those expenses. To explore the many disaster-assistance programs available through FEMA and find out how to access such services, go to <http://www.fema.gov/grants-assistance-programs-individuals>. Though FEMA does respond once local and State resources have been activated and a declaration has been made, for all citizens of the Commonwealth, it is also important to be familiar with several state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations. In this way, a person may better understand the interrelationship between agencies and how to access the service most appropriate to their needs during an event.