



Virginia Board for
People with Disabilities

Assessment of Virginia's
**INCLUSIVE EMERGENCY
PLANNING, RESPONSE
AND RECOVERY**



“Disasters are always inclusive. Response and recovery are not, unless we plan for it”

June Isaacson, Kailes, Disability Consultant

During emergencies or disasters, people with disabilities and those with access and functional needs face increased risks due to:

- Physical and architectural barriers
- Communication limitations
- Programmatic barriers
- Social and economic factors
- Dependence on medical devices requiring electricity
- Lack of inclusive emergency management planning

To address these challenges, inclusive practices in emergency preparedness, response and recovery are essential to ensure the safety and well-being of all Virginians, particularly those with disabilities. While progress has been made, more work is needed to fully meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Assessment Key Findings:

- About 1 in 4 adults in Virginia has a disability.
- People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters, with increased risks of injury, displacement and institutionalization.

Recommendations

1. Planning & Partnerships: State and local agencies should collaborate to:

- Develop inclusive standards for planning, communications, evacuations and mass care across all levels of the Commonwealth's emergency management system.
- Establish a Disability Integration Task Force to develop a comprehensive, multi-year action plan.
- Map key resources that support inclusive emergency management.
- Develop an Extreme Heat Annex outlining a coordinated response to extreme heat events.

2. Legislation, Budget & Compliance: Virginia can take strategic actions to enhance ADA compliance, including funding infrastructure upgrades and regional pilot programs.

- The General Assembly should allocate state funds to support inclusive emergency management functions in localities.
- The General Assembly should amend the Shelter Upgrade Fund to include accessibility infrastructure upgrades for emergency shelters.
- Localities should partner with Centers for Independent Living and ADA Coordinators to assess ADA compliance.

3. Training & Outreach: The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) should integrate best practices for inclusive emergency management and volunteer support into training programs, including:

- Developing training programs that support ADA compliance and integrate best practices in inclusive planning, communication, evacuation, mass care/sheltering and cultural competence into existing training.
- Promoting inclusive Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and providing specific training on access and functional needs for volunteers.