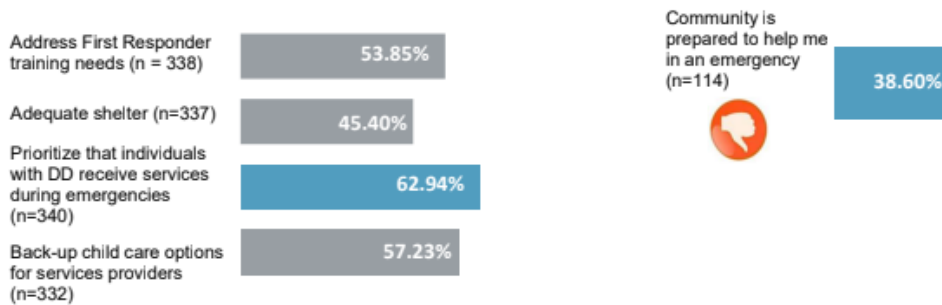


LB 1104

Changes provisions of the Emergency Management Act to include persons with disabilities and/or functional needs in emergency and disaster planning and recovery

Emergency Preparedness Needs Assessment

In response to natural disasters in 2019 and issues with disaster and emergency preparedness, the Nebraska Developmental Disabilities Council published a Needs Assessment Report in 2020. The report assessed the adequacy of addressing the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities during times of crisis. The results showed that 62.94% of family members and care providers believed it was crucial to prioritize services for disabled individuals. Many self-advocates did not feel their community was prepared to help them in an emergency[1].



Information gathered from interviews, surveys and focus groups shed light on specific needs related to emergency preparedness. Participants indicated that they wanted individual and community plans to be in place for emergencies, and for those plans to include how to access services.

The Gaps in Nebraska's Pandemic Response

People with disabilities are disproportionately at high risk of contracting COVID-19 due to social, economic and health factors. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities are also those most likely to die from a COVID-19 infection. For instance, an adult with Down Syndrome is 5x more likely to be hospitalized and has 10x the risk for death related to the virus[2]. Despite widespread knowledge of this population's vulnerability, our pandemic response failed to make life-saving services and programs accessible to people with disabilities.

The Nebraska Emergency Management Act strives to "reduce the vulnerability of people and communities of this state to damage, injury and loss of life and property resulting from nature, technological, or manmade disasters or emergencies"[3]. Unfortunately, there is currently no requirement that entities include planning for people with disabilities[4].

Other States Are Addressing the Need for Inclusive Planning

In recent years, several other states have sought to expand emergency planning for people with disabilities and functional needs.

Two examples of progressive models in other states are:

1. New Jersey's Group for Access and Integration Needs in Emergencies and Disasters (NJ GAINED) acts as an advisory board to the Office of Emergency Management and the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness[5].
2. Missouri established a Special Needs Task Force which provides inclusive planning for functional and access needs which continues to gain momentum[6].

[1] Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities, *Needs Assessment Report*, 2020

[2] Disability Rights Nebraska, *A Widening Divide*, 2020

[3] Neb. Rev. Stat. 81-829. 37(1)

[4] Disability Rights Nebraska, *Second Class During the Pandemic*, 2021

[5] New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, <https://www.state.nj.us/njoem/plan/special-needs-njsnap.html>

[6] Missouri State Emergency Management Agency, *Access and Functional Needs Planning in Missouri*