

# Age-Friendly Public Health Systems

## Protecting Older Adults During Extreme Heat

**Older adults require additional support before, during, and after extreme weather events. The public health sector can ensure the needs of older adults are met through comprehensive and coordinated emergency management planning.**



Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more intense, sometimes occurring in places that lack the infrastructure to adequately respond to such events, particularly those related to heat. Older adults may be at higher risk of experiencing negative health outcomes during instances of extreme heat because of biophysical changes, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and equity-related issues, as well as the combination of these factors. Limited English proficiency, health literacy, and even geographic setting may be additional risk factors that jeopardize the health of older people.

One way that public health professionals and organizations can protect older adults' health during extreme weather events is by knowing and planning for their needs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all localities have comprehensive heat response plans, which should include identification of at-risk populations, relevant community considerations, and delineated roles and responsibilities, as well as other heat planning and response actions.

Some jurisdictions around the country have developed promising ways to support older adults' health needs during extreme heat events. The Public Health Department of Seattle and King County in Washington developed an Extreme Heat Response Plan, which includes a new warning system, increased collaboration with local emergency management, and more effective communication strategies for reaching older adults. Additionally, multiple county health departments in Florida conducted walk-throughs of their jurisdiction's emergency needs shelters to mitigate fall risks, as well as to ensure adequate space for caregivers of older adults and necessary medical equipment.

**Trust for America's Health's 6Cs Framework for Creating Age-Friendly Public Health Systems (AFPHS) organizes public health roles in aging services. Public health can enhance public health emergency preparedness for older adults by:**

- ✓ Creating and leading efforts to prioritize older adults' health during emergencies by including older adults in emergency preparedness policies and plans.
- ✓ Connecting and convening key partners across aging services, emergency services, and healthcare to build a coalition committed to optimizing emergency preparedness systems and support for older adults.
- ✓ Coordinating existing emergency preparedness supports and tools to produce a centralized hub of resources for older adults and their caregivers.
- ✓ Collecting, analyzing, and translating data on shortcomings of existing emergency systems, as well as pathways for strengthening emergency resiliency.
- ✓ Communicating the heightened risk older adults face during emergencies and ensuring that this population is well-informed on available resources during an emergency.
- ✓ Complementing general support systems for older adults by distinguishing and addressing the additional needs of certain groups among older adults.



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