

## **Federal civil rights laws, mandate integration and equal opportunity for people with disabilities in general population shelters.**

To comply with Federal law, those involved in emergency management and shelter planning should understand the concepts of accessibility and nondiscrimination and how they apply in emergencies. The following are key nondiscrimination concepts applicable under Federal laws, and examples of how these concepts apply to all phases of emergency management.

1. **Self-Determination** – People with disabilities are the most knowledgeable about their own needs.

2. **No “One-Size-Fits-All”** – People with disabilities do not all require the same assistance and do not all have the same needs.

- Many different types of disabilities affect people in different ways. Preparations should be made for people with a variety of functional needs, including people who use mobility aids, require medication or portable medical equipment, use service animals, need information in alternate formats, or rely on a caregiver.

3. **Equal Opportunity** – People with disabilities must have the same opportunities to benefit from emergency programs, services, and activities as people without disabilities.

- Emergency recovery services and programs should be designed to provide equivalent choices for people with disabilities as they do for people without disabilities. This includes choices relating to short-term housing or other short- and long-term disaster support services.

4. **Inclusion** – People with disabilities have the right to participate in and receive the benefits of emergency programs, services, and activities provided by governments, private businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

- Inclusion of people with various types of disabilities in planning, training, and evaluation of programs and services will ensure that all people are given appropriate consideration during emergencies.

5. **Integration** – Emergency programs, services, and activities typically must be provided in an integrated setting.

- The provision of services such as sheltering, information intake for disaster services, and short-term housing in integrated settings keeps people connected to their support system and caregivers and avoids the need for disparate services facilities.

6. **Physical Access** – Emergency programs, services, and activities must be provided at locations that all people can access, including people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities should be able to enter and use emergency facilities and access the programs, services, and activities that are provided. Facilities typically required to be accessible include: parking, drop-off areas, entrances and exits, security screening areas, toilet rooms, bathing facilities, sleeping areas, dining facilities, areas where medical care or human services are provided, and paths of travel to and from and between these areas.

7. **Equal Access** – People with disabilities must be able to access and benefit from emergency programs, services, and activities equal to the general population.

- Equal access applies to emergency preparedness, notification of emergencies, evacuation, transportation, communication, shelter, distribution of supplies, food, first aid, medical care, housing, and application for and distribution of benefits.

8. **Effective Communication** – People with disabilities must be given information that is comparable in content and detail to that given to the general public. It must also be accessible, understandable and timely.

- Auxiliary aids and services may be needed to ensure effective communication. These resources may include pen and paper; sign language interpreters through on-site or video; and interpretation aids for people who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing or have speech impairments. People who are blind, deaf-blind, have low vision, or have cognitive disabilities may need large print information or people to assist with reading and filling out forms.

9. **Program Modifications** – People with disabilities must have equal access to emergency programs and services, which may entail modifications to rules, policies, practices, and procedures.

- Service staff may need to change the way questions are asked, provide reader assistance to complete forms, or provide assistance in a more accessible location.

10. **No Charge** – People with disabilities may not be charged to cover the costs of measures necessary to ensure equal access and nondiscriminatory treatment.

- Examples of accommodations provided without charge to the individual may include ramps; cots modified to address disability-related needs; a visual alarm; grab bars; additional storage space for medical equipment; lowered counters or shelves; Braille and raised letter signage; a sign language interpreter; a message board; assistance in completing forms or documents in Braille, large print or audio recording.

Source:

Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters, FEMA, November 2010