



Emergency Readiness and Response

Area Agencies on Aging Survey

June 2009



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

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GERONTOLOGY CENTER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Copies of the report along with other project materials can be found at:

<http://www.n4a.org/programs/annual-survey/>

<http://www.units.scripps.muohio.edu/research/publications/emergency.html>

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BACKGROUND

Each year natural disasters and major emergencies place unique challenges and strains on local communities and their capacity to respond. In the event of an emergency or disaster, the role of the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is particularly crucial due to their extensive experience meeting the needs of older adults and their established role as a trusted community resource. Through the provision of information, established partnerships, communication links, outreach and continuing services in the event of a disaster, AAAs are poised to participate on every level of emergency preparedness planning and meet the distinct needs of the communities they serve in times of crisis.

With a grant from the Administration on Aging (AoA), the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) partnered with Scripps Gerontology Center to conduct a brief survey to obtain a broad understanding of the role of AAAs in planning for and assisting with emergency preparedness and response in their local areas. The survey was conducted online and was available for approximately three weeks. A total of 369 AAAs (58.6 percent) responded.

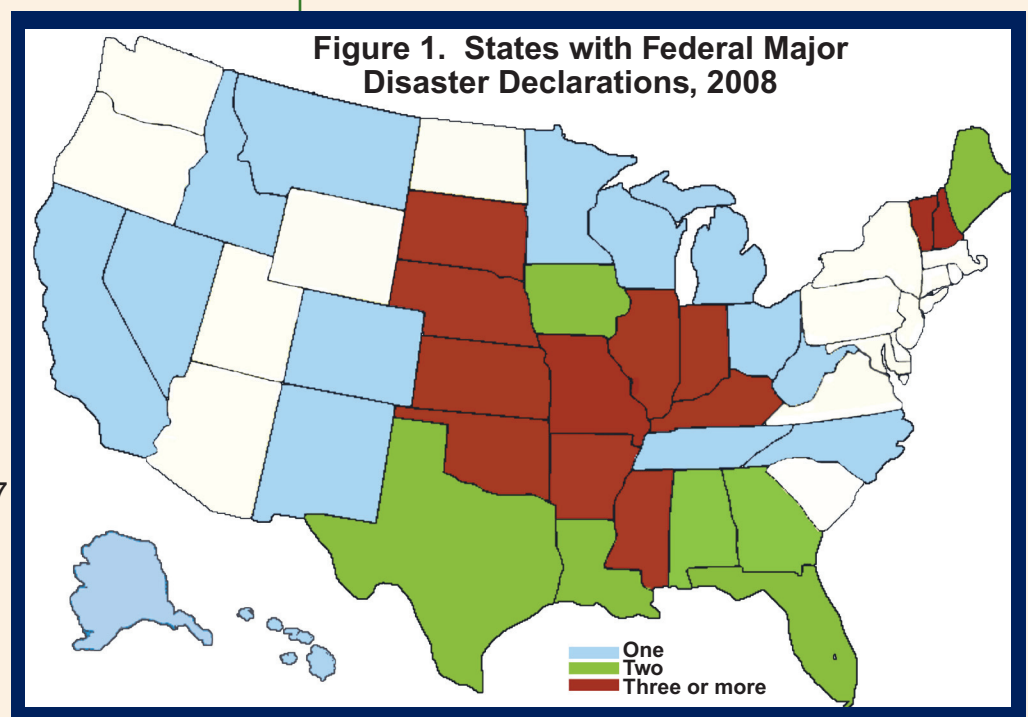
The following statistics illustrate the relevance of AAA participation in emergency preparedness and response:

- Of the confirmed fatalities that resulted from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, 64 percent were 65 years or older and 47 percent were 75 or older.^{1, 2}
- Among Americans surveyed regarding personal preparedness, the least prepared group was persons age 55 and older. They perceived many barriers to being prepared. They also indicated high

reliance on emergency first responders but expressed little confidence in their ability to respond early in a disaster.³

- Among persons with a disability and those caring for someone with a disability, 32 percent are likely to need extra help in a disaster for themselves or for the person they care for.³
- In 2008 alone, major disasters were declared in 36 states and territories as shown in Figure 1.⁴

It is critical that AAAs and the Aging Services Network continue to play and expand their pivotal role in coordinated preparedness and response planning for older adults between Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments. This report illustrates the capacity of the AAAs when faced with an emergency or disaster, and how they are the key community resource working to fulfill the needs of older adults when disaster strikes.



CAPACITY OF AAAs WHEN FACED WITH AN EMERGENCY OR DISASTER

Of the agencies that responded to the survey, 24.8 percent were located in a Planning and Service Area (PSA) that had been part of a federally declared disaster. Of those, 52.4 percent rated the emergency plan they implemented during the disaster as effective. An additional 2.4 percent said their plan was most effective, 41.7 percent rated their plan somewhat effective, and 3.6 percent said their plan was least effective.

Agencies that rated their plans in the two lower categories (45.3 percent) were asked to identify the areas that required improvement. Communication was the most frequently mentioned area. Maintaining communication when cell phone towers and land lines are out of service has a major impact on the ability to administer an emergency plan. Other areas identified as needing improvement were accessing critical information about services and clients, having a backup plan if vendors are unavailable, and clearly defining expectations for providers.

Agencies rated their confidence level in their capacity to respond to a disaster (e.g., having enough staff and supplies). The majority (53.0 percent) said they were somewhat confident, 7.4 percent were very confident, 28.1 percent were confident, and 11.5 percent were not confident at all.

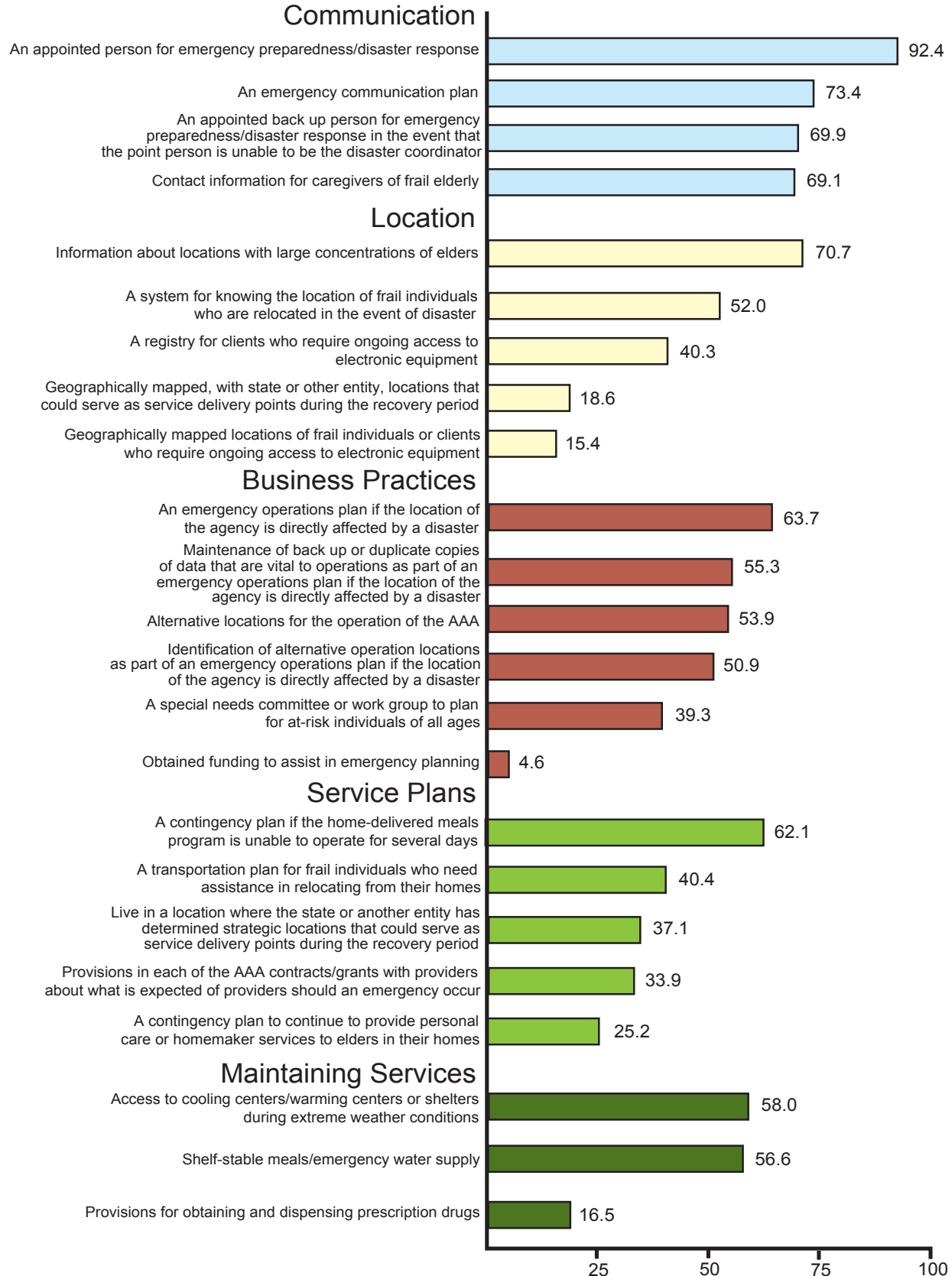
CONTINUING OPERATIONS IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY OR DISASTER

Agencies responded to a number of questions about the provisions, plans, and practices they have developed to provide services and assistance to the aging population in the event of a disaster. AAAs have developed significant activities/plans in fields related to maintaining communication, identifying a back-up location to conduct business, developing business practices, and continuing and maintaining services and service plans. Figure 2 shows the proportion of AAAs that have contingency plans to meet the unique needs of older adults during a disaster.



Figure 2

Proportion of AAAs That Have the Following Provisions in Place to Continue Operations in the Event of a Disaster

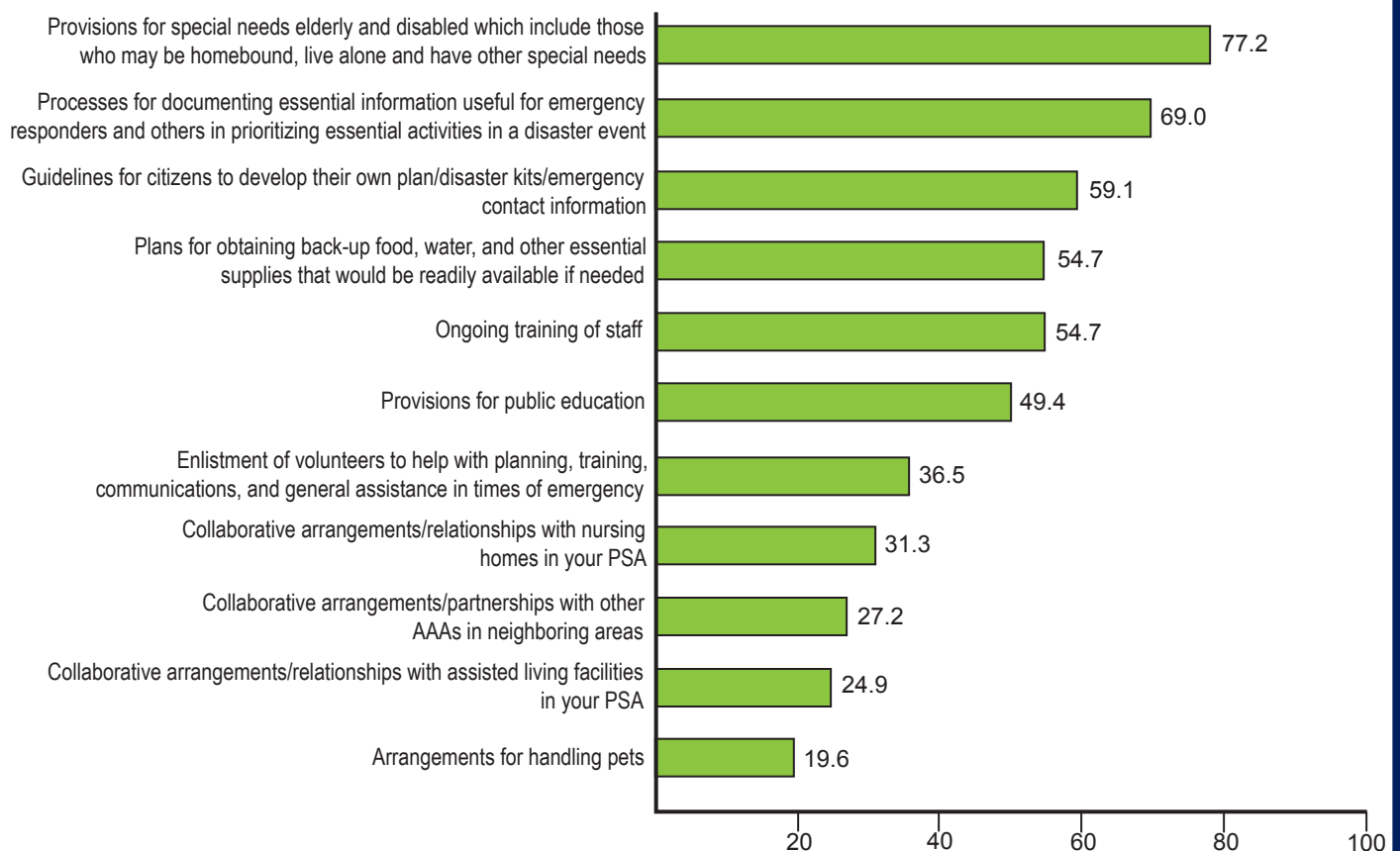


HOW AAAs ARE PLANNING FOR EMERGENCY AND DISASTER RESPONSE

AAAs vary in their approach to emergency response planning. About two-thirds (64.5 percent) have an emergency preparedness/disaster response plan that is part of a local (city/county/regional) plan; 33.9 percent are part of a State Unit on Aging plan; 9.8 percent are part of a governor's or other statewide plan; and 17.9 percent have a plan that is described differently, such as a stand-alone plan specifically for the agency. Some agencies participate in multiple plans—25.8 percent said they are part of two or three plans. A small proportion (7.3 percent) of AAAs had not completed a plan.

While the location or approach to developing emergency response plans varies, AAA plans typically have specific or special provisions for individuals with disabilities or older adults with other special needs, including those who are homebound or live alone. The plans also have processes for documenting information that helps emergency responders and others prioritize essential activities in a disaster (see Figure 3). Of the AAAs that have plans, 83.4 percent review or revise their plan annually; 8.9 percent do so bi-annually; and 5.2 percent do so each quarter. Only 2.5 percent have never revised their plan.

Figure 3
Proportion of AAAs With the Following Items Included in Their Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response Plan



SUMMARY

AAAs have found that in disasters, older adults have distinct needs that present challenges to community-wide emergency planning and response efforts. Each stage of an emergency—during evacuation, at emergency shelters or when returning to the community—needs to be handled differently when dealing with frail, older adults. The involvement of Area Agencies on Aging is crucial in order to keep older adults safe and connected in these times of crisis. AAAs establish communications links, deliver critical services, and implement evacuation and recovery plans working in partnership with other key stakeholders at the local, state, regional and Federal levels. Area Agencies on Aging are fundamental partners for communities to be prepared to face the challenges of the growing aging population during disasters.

HELPFUL RESOURCES AND LINKS

Administration on Aging: www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/preparedness/index.aspx

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://emergency.cdc.gov>

Citizen Corps: www.citizencorps.gov; www.serve.gov

Department of Homeland Security: www.dhs.gov/index.shtm

Disaster Assistance: www.disasterhelp.gov; www.ready.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): www.fema.gov/index.shtm

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging: www.n4a.org

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