

## **NJ SPECIAL NEEDS ADVISORY PANEL**

### **1<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL REPORT**

*For the time period covering October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The New Jersey Special Needs Advisory Panel (NJSNAP) acts as an advisory board to the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) and the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP) regarding issues affecting special needs populations in New Jersey before, during and after an emergency or disaster.

The NJSNAP identifies issues likely to affect special needs population as they prepare to respond to an emergency, or issues likely to affect emergency management personnel as they attempt to assist persons with special needs before, during and after adverse conditions. The advisory panel may also make recommendations, develop solutions, draft proposed legislation, formulate memos of understanding, and devise products and programs to address identified issues, if so directed by NJOEM or OHSP.

The New Jersey Office of Emergency Management performs administrative responsibilities for the SNAP. Project Freedom, a developer of accessible housing for people with disabilities, is the host site for meeting locations.

The 1st NJ SNAP Annual Report reflects projects which have been completed or projects ongoing by SNAP member organizations and their strategic partners. It does not intend to capture *all* activity regarding disaster preparedness for special needs populations throughout the state. There is evidence - anecdotal and otherwise – that county and municipal OEM's, human service and health care providers, community-based organizations, voluntary agencies active in disaster and persons with special needs are involved in planning initiatives and working together to reduce risk to these populations during adverse conditions.

#### **NJ DEFINITION OF SPECIAL NEEDS**

People with special needs (PSN) are individuals who have a physical or mental disability and/or medical care needs who, after exhausting all other resources (family, neighbors, public transportation, etc.) still need assistance for evacuation and/or sheltering before, during, and possibly after a disaster or emergency. These individuals typically reside in single homes or multiple-family dwellings in the State and are not residents of hospitals, residential health care facilities, or any State or Federally-funded community-based residences or services that are already subject to emergency planning requirements. The NJ SNAP further acknowledges that there are many important but often marginalized populations in the state which may require extra support and assistance during adverse

conditions. These can include ethnic and/or linguistic minorities, low-income persons, concentrations of homeless persons, transit dependent persons, etc.

## **SNAP MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS**

American Red Cross of NJ  
City of Atlantic City  
Brain Injury Association of NJ  
Catholic Charities Disaster Response Program, Diocese of Trenton  
Family Support Center of NJ  
Health Care Association of NJ  
Home Care Association of NJ  
New Jersey Office of Emergency Management  
NJ Association of Community Providers  
NJ Association of Homes and Services for the Aging  
NJ Citizen Corps Program  
NJ Council on Development Disabilities  
NJ Department of Community Affairs  
NJ Department of Health and Senior Services  
NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health  
NJ Department of Human Services Office of Emergency Management  
NJ Hospital Association  
NJ Protection and Advocacy  
NJ State First Aid Council  
Mercer County Division of Public Health  
Mercer County Office for the Disabled  
Mercer County TRADE Transportation  
Miss Wheelchair New Jersey  
Progressive Center for Independent Living  
Project Freedom  
Salem County Office for the Disabled  
Salvation Army  
Total Living Center  
Trans-Atlantic Renal Council

## **SNAP STRATEGIC PLAN:**

The multi-year NJ SNAP Strategic Plan is on file at the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management.

## **2006-2007 SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES:**

### **PLANNING**

In November 2006, the NJSNAP held a multi-agency kick-off meeting to begin development of a **Special Needs Annex** to the NJ State Emergency Operations Plan. The annex remains under development, with initial attention being devoted to the establishment of and funding for medical needs shelters in various areas of the state. Currently, the NJ Office of Emergency Management, the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services, the NJ Department of Human Services and the NJ Department of Transportation are committed to this endeavor. It is expected that additional stakeholder groups will be brought into the process as it unfolds.

Final review of new NJOEM **Special Needs Planning Guidance for county and municipal offices of emergency management** took place in July 2007. The guidance consists of a standardized checklist which can be used by municipal and county OEM's in the development of a Special Needs attachment to the Health and/or Social Service Annex of the local Emergency Operations Plan.

*Note: The above projects are being carried under a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Technical Assistance Grant, in partnership with a consulting firm, CRA and Associates.*

### **TRAINING**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's "**Emergency Planning for Special Needs Populations**" (G197) course was held:

February 26-27, 2007 - Rutgers University Inn and Conference Center, New Brunswick  
May 8-9, 2007 - NJ Emergency Preparedness Association Conference, Atlantic City  
October 23-24, 2007 – Gallo Center, Hudson County

The NJOEM served as course sponsor. Approximately 75 students were trained during these sessions; ninety-five percent of the students rated the course excellent or better in the following areas: presenters' preparation, course content and on-the-job relevance.

Social service and community health care providers, voluntary organizations active in disaster and community-based and faith-based organizations have unique knowledge, skills and experiences which can inform planning, improve response, and help insure that special needs populations have access to emergency facilities, communication and

programs. The SNAP intends to increase these organizations' level of disaster resilience through business continuity planning.

Catholic Charities (which also represents the NJ State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster on the SNAP) sponsored three awareness-level workshops under its Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD) initiative - **“Special Needs Populations and Disaster – Why All Providers Need to Know How to Help”** - in the following locations:

Monmouth County, NJ Natural Gas Conference Room, March 1, 2007  
Burlington County Emergency Services Training Center - May 15, 2007  
Mercer County, Project Freedom Community Room - September 27, 2007

Approximately 75 persons attended the sessions. Participant ratings concerning job relevance, usefulness and content were very positive.

During this annual report period, the NJ SNAP launched the **“Business Continuity Planning for Human Services Organizations”** course. Two programs were held in the following locations:

Burlington County Department of Human Services – July 18, 2007  
Tony Canale Training Center, Atlantic County – October 4, 2007

Approximately 60 participants attended these sessions. They were rated very good or excellent by ninety-five percent of the attendees.

## **NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES**

The emergency preparedness work of health, human service and emergency management agencies is intrinsically linked to the survival of persons with special needs during adverse conditions. During the reporting period, the NJ DHSS funded and/or implemented the following projects:

- Funding to the NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health Services, Disaster and Terrorism Branch to deliver, statewide, behavioral health preparedness services to at-risk population. At-risk population is defined broadly and may include, but not be limited to, children, senior citizens, pregnant women, people with a history of substance abuse/addictions, ethnic minorities who are disenfranchised, populations with special health needs, people with a history of serious mental illness, people who are physically disabled, first responders and other health/social service professionals.
- Funding to 18 long-term care facilities to improve their technology and preparedness communication capabilities within the health care system.

- Funding to 5 health care associations (NJ Hospital Association, NJ Primary Care Association, Home Care association, NJ Association of Homes & Services for the Aging and Health Care Association of New Jersey) to support their members' emergency preparedness efforts.
- First-time funding to 11 home care agencies statewide to improve information technology and preparedness communication capabilities across the health care system.
- Developed and released an assessment survey to 22 LINCS Agencies statewide. The assessment will elicit critical baseline information on the current state of preparedness planning for special health needs populations among LINCS Agencies, and establish preparedness planning priorities for special health needs populations.
- "LINCS Agencies" are designated lead county or municipal health preparedness agencies. During the report period, the NJ DHSS conducted ongoing emergency preparedness community outreach/engagement activities targeting at-risk populations and/or their advocates. LINCS Agencies are reviewing their mass prophylaxis and risk communication plans to identify special populations with needs that may not be covered through traditional existing plans and then as appropriate, updating plans to incorporate populations with special health needs.

## **COASTAL COUNTIES REGISTRY PROJECT**

The coastal counties of New Jersey are experiencing rapid change, with tremendous development and population increase occurring over the past few decades. Officials at all levels of government are striving to improve the ability of special needs populations in coastal counties to respond to disasters, natural or man-made.

Registries are often cited as "best practices" planning tools for assisting populations with special needs. In August of 2006, the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, in partnership with the NJ SNAP, embarked on a pilot project involving a demographic study, an outreach and communications plan, a shelter analysis, technical guidance review and deployment of technology applications for the counties of Atlantic, Cape, May, Monmouth and Ocean. A successful final result will benefit special needs planning efforts statewide.

An RFP was advertised on December 26, 2006; and the final bid was awarded to Delta Development Group Inc. of Mechanicsburg PA on May 19, 2007. The project kick-off meeting was held May 25, 2007. Task completion remains on target. The demographic study is complete. A host server location has been determined for the deployment of Delta's "Total Visibility Software" application at [www.registerready.nj.gov](http://www.registerready.nj.gov). Template registry communications and marketing materials are under development. Meetings concerning the project have been held with 120 stakeholder groups, including testimony

before the NJ Coastal Evacuation Task Force. The shelter analysis and technical review portion of the project is ongoing and will be delivered 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2008.

## **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**

### **ATLANTIC COUNTY/CITY OF ATLANTIC CITY**

During the summer of 2006, Atlantic County launched its Special Needs Registry ([www.ac-evac.org](http://www.ac-evac.org)). The City of Atlantic City is active in supporting this effort, using direct and indirect methods to reach target populations.

Local university students, Fire Department personnel, public health educators and nurses conducted presentations and distributed flyers and pamphlets about the registry in key areas of the city. Other tactics include use of broadcast and print media, the internet and community word of mouth. To date, over 1,200 residents are registered; the effort is ongoing. During National Emergency Preparedness Month, the Atlantic City Health Department presented a program for its community partners, introducing the HEAT (High Rise Evacuation Accountability Training) program. Incident Command training is also integrated into the HEAT curriculum.

### **MERCER COUNTY OFFICE FOR THE DISABLED**

The Mercer County Office for the Disabled (MCOB) created a File of Life Brochure/Packet that has been distributed throughout Mercer County. The File of Life is a nationally-recognized refrigerator magnet with a tri-fold card that centralizes insurance and medical information and is easily recognized and transportable in the event of an evacuation. Along with the Files of Life, the MCOB created a brochure on what an individual with a disability would need to be prepared for such events. During phase one of this effort, 6,000 Files of Life, with the accompanying brochure, were distributed throughout Mercer County.

The MCOB also collaborated with the Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL) on the development of another brochure that provides information to agencies who are providing services on how to help people with disabilities be prepared for sheltering at home or evacuating their safe havens. Another 10,000 copies of the File of Life magnet and both brochures have been reprinted and are being distributed throughout the community. Two-thousand copies of the Files of Life have been purchased in Spanish and are being distributed through the Office of Community Services, the County Board of Social Services and several other community agencies.

The MCOB launched a Special Needs Registry registration effort; 20,000 copies of the registry form are being disseminated throughout Mercer County by using many avenues of distribution.

Under its Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP), each of these agencies – Easter Seals-New Jersey, All About Care, LLC and MAXIM Healthcare Services, Inc. – has

policies in place for their personal assistants to help their consumers with disabilities evacuate to a shelter and stay with them until the consumer has been deemed 'safe' and in a secure setting. The MCOB has made arrangements with the NJ Division on Disability Services, the funding source for the PASP, to allow for reimbursements for personal assistants who may be directed to remain with their consumers beyond the normal scope of their personal care plan.

## **PROGRESSIVE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING**

On September 19, 2006, the Hunterdon Progressive Center for Independent Living sponsored an Emergency Preparedness Conference for persons with disabilities, emergency managers and providing agencies. This conference was attended by over 100 persons from throughout the state.

During the Summer of 2007, the PCIL also partnered with Project Freedom to distribute 72 disaster "go-bags," Files of Life and registry forms at the PFI Lawrenceville site.

The NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD) has awarded a grant to the PCIL for the development of persons with disabilities as peer-to-peer community disaster educators and special needs advisors to local OEM's. In August 2007, the American Red Cross provided its "Community Disaster Educator's" course to 5 PCIL representatives who are persons with disabilities. In September 2007, PCIL staff conducted its first peer-to-peer community disaster education presentation to the Center for Heightened Independence and Progress in Hudson County. The Hudson County LINC agency sponsored this event.

## **DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY**

Funding, communications accessibility support and administrative support have been secured by the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, the NJ Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the NJ Office of Emergency Management for the delivery of the Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network's [CEPIN] training program "Emergency Responders and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community: Taking the First Steps to Disaster Preparedness." Course delivery is expected to take place in April 2008.

## **ASSOCIATIONS REPRESENTING SENIORS, HEALTH CARE, HOME CARE, HOUSING AND LONG-TERM CARE PROVIDING AGENCIES**

The PREPARE program is an opportunity for long-term care facilities to learn how to protect their residents, staff and facilities and effectively prepare for emergencies and disasters.

Using the PREPARE curriculum, the **New Jersey Hospital Association's** Departments of Continuing Care and Emergency Preparedness joined forces with the **New Jersey**



**Department of Health and Senior Services** – Division of Health Infrastructure Preparedness and Emergency Response, **Health Care Association of New Jersey**, **New Jersey Association of Homes and Services for the Aging** and the **New Jersey Primary Care Association** in training over 150 long-term care professionals to date.

The day long PREPARE program defines age-appropriate care for older adults during times of public health emergencies; helps participants understand the special needs of older adults exposed to biological, chemical or nuclear agents; defines and describes how older adults cope with physical and psychological stressors in the aftermath of a disaster; presents ways for LTC facilities to effectively work with their communities during emergencies that may require evacuation or the need to shelter in place; and aids participants in creating disaster plans for their LTC community and for their families. An interactive tabletop exercise of a Pandemic Flu scenario allowed the participants to work in groups, communicate and tie in all the material learned.

The associations sponsored 4 PREPARE programs in 2007 for over 200 participants.

### **FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

On June 27, 2007 SNAP members presented the FEMA Region II Regional Administrator with an overview of its various initiatives. The Administrator also addressed the group concerning FEMA's increased focus on special needs populations and trends nationwide.

### **PRESENTATIONS TO EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The diversity of its membership positions the NJ SNAP as a unique information resource; during this annual report time period, presentations were made to the following organizations:

- NJ Association of Community Care Providers Annual Conference, Atlantic City – November 27, 2006
- NJ County Emergency Management Coordinator's Association, February 2007
- NJ Emergency Preparedness Association Conference, Atlantic City, May 10, 2007
- NJ Association of Community Care Providers monthly meeting, Trenton, June 20, 2007
- Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey, Trenton, July 11, 2007
- Hudson County LINCS/OEM Providing Agencies' Meeting, Secaucus, August 13, 2007
- Tri-State Spina Bifida Association – September 19, 2007
- NJ Personal Services Assistance Program - September 21, 2007
- NJ Association of County Disability Services, Inc. – September 28, 2007

## **EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS/MEDIA**

The NJSNAP uses mass media to promote SNAP goals and objectives. Below are links to articles highlighting SNAP activities:

The group was featured in an article published in the NJ Council on Development Disabilities “People & Families Magazine” January 2007 [“More Than a Motto: Be Prepared” <http://www.njddc.org/PF1-4.pdf>].

In July 2007, The Cape May County Herald covered Cape May County’s stakeholder meeting with the Delta Development Group concerning the Coastal Counties Registry Project.

[<http://www.capemaycountyherald.com/article/5880-state-local-officials-gather-begin-work-special-needs-registry>]

During National Preparedness Month 2007, New Jersey Network with financial support from the NJ Citizen Corp program, produced a television ad featuring the importance of disaster preparedness for special needs populations.

[<http://www.njn.net/community/projects/emergency/>]

Also in September 2007. Action Magazine, the online journal of United Spinal Association, featured an article written by SNAP member Kelly Rouba featuring SNAP, emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities, and FEMA Region II Director Stephen Kempf.

<http://www.unitedspinal.org/publications/action/2007/09/04/surviving-a-disaster/#more-815>

In early October of 2007, an Atlantic City Press editorial came out strongly in favor of a the establishment of a statewide registry project, characterizing the need for it as urgent and long overdue.

<http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/editorials/story/7506417p-7404168c.html>