News Release

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People with disabilities and older adults can, and should, take concrete steps to prepare before the next disaster for a better recovery

(Salem, Ore.) – “From a house fire to major earthquakes, taking simple steps to be prepared can be the difference between survival and recovery from a disaster,” said Ed Flick, director of the Oregon Department of Human Services’ Office of Resilience and Emergency Management. “Unfortunately, older adults, people with disabilities, and those on fixed incomes are the ones we often read about who weren’t able to prepare for emergencies or evacuate. We aim to change that as soon as possible.”

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) joins the national observation of Preparedness Month during September by encouraging older adults and people with disabilities to prepare for disasters.

LeAnn Ivers is the Co-chair of Disability Emergency Management Advisory Council (DEMAC). She’s also hard of hearing and experiencing vision loss. Those lived experiences, and her time on the DEMAC, have taught her that people don’t understand that emergency responders won’t be as available during a large casualty situation. “We all need to prepare as if no one is coming to rescue us,” says Ivers. “We can take control by creating our own plan and how we respond to disasters.”

Ivers recommends these tips for older adults and people with disabilities, although many are relevant to everyone:

- If you have access and functional needs and are in an area preparing for possible evacuation, consider evacuating early, instead of waiting until your area is at level three, the “go” level. Medical needs, transportation challenges and more can make it hard to get out at the last minute.

- Have extra supplies for your specific medical conditions, such as special diets, durable medical equipment, batteries, oxygen, catheters, extra eyeglasses and hearing aid batteries.

- Also prepare extra supplies for your service animal.

- Keep your prescriptions and essential over-the-counter medication handy, as well as contact information for your medical providers. Build up an emergency supply of prescriptions by ordering as soon as you can each time and check
with your insurance company to explore emergency supply options. Be aware of potential hazards in the area and sign up for emergency alerts.

- Be “2 Weeks Ready” with at least two weeks’ worth of food, water and critical supplies. Learn how to assemble an emergency supply kit at Ready.gov or American Red Cross. “Putting together these supplies does not have to be accomplished all at once or at a high cost,” Ivers said. “A helpful way to accumulate these supplies can be to simply add one or two of the items into your shopping and then reserve the extra items for your emergency kit.”

- Reach out to your local support groups or others in your community who have gone through emergencies to learn from their experience.

- Get to know your neighbors. Even if you have family, your neighbors will be the first ones available to help.

- If you have an older adult or person with a disability in your neighborhood, get to know them and how you can help in an emergency.

“Each person’s needs are unique to their circumstances, so it’s important that each of us create our own plan to ensure we are ready and can take quick action in a disaster,” Flick said. “ODHS is committed to helping people be prepared and ready for the next disaster.

**About the DEMAC:** The Disability Emergency Management Advisory Council was created to apply the experiences and knowledge of people with disabilities, as subject matter experts, to guide statewide emergency management in developing and implementing inclusive practices through all planning, response, and recovery activities. The DEMAC is jointly funded by the Oregon Department of Emergency Management, ODHS, and the Oregon Health Authority.

**About ODHS and disasters:** Oregon’s emergency and recovery plans give ODHS responsibility to support impacted individuals and families during emergencies and recovery, at the request of and in partnership with local and tribal governments. This is in keeping with the agency’s primary role to assist people in meeting their basic needs while moving toward independence.

The ODHS Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (OREM) focuses on the needs of people before, during and after disasters, reducing disaster impacts in times of crisis and investing in communities year-round to ensure greater resilience. OREM carries out ODHS’ roles in Oregon’s Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan as the primary agency for mass care, food and water in disaster situations and social services during recovery, and coordinates efforts among local and Tribal governments and nongovernmental organizations. The office centers
equity in its work, ensuring that the goals and needs of vulnerable communities directly inform resilience plans and that response systems effectively address disproportionate disaster impacts. OREM also assists other ODHS programs in preventing, mitigating, responding to and recovering from natural, technical and human-caused hazards.

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