

BLAKEFORD

B

Seniors and Natural Disasters Preparing for the Unexpected

Seniors are often more vulnerable than others during a natural disaster. They are less mobile and often less willing to evacuate. Fear, predisposition to stress, and a strong attachment to the home they have lived in for many years are among the challenges seniors face during emergencies.

It is imperative for families to talk about natural disaster preparedness with seniors, especially those who live on their own before disaster strikes. Families with loved ones that live in senior living communities should be aware of what the community's disaster plan is and make sure contact information is current.

Here are some helpful tips to prepare for natural disasters:

- **Stay informed:** Talk to a senior loved one about what their biggest concerns are when dealing with impending natural disasters. Encouraging them gather information on preparedness.
- **Keep funds accessible:** As a best practice, recommend seniors regularly arrange to have interest from investments, Social Security benefits, and other federal aid directly deposited into their checking accounts.
- **Make a plan:** Help seniors make a plan and build a survival kit:
 - Discuss everyday routines and plan multiple evacuation routes/plans.
 - Compile a list of medications.
 - Make two copies of important documents, including birth certificates, passports, insurance and Medicare cards, wills, living wills, health care powers of attorney, and any available records. Place one set in the emergency kit and store the other in a safe-deposit box.
 - Put together an easily accessible list of emergency numbers including family, doctors, and local law enforcement.
 - Discuss future living options in case a home is destroyed.
- **Build a legacy kit:** Include journals and archived photos to keep important mementos safe. Include it in the emergency kit and/or store in safe-deposit box.
- **Network:** Get to know their neighbors and exchange contact information. Create a list of neighborhood resources, including senior living communities.

Once a natural disaster has occurred, assist seniors in navigating through insurance inspections and home repairs.

Seniors may need assistance dealing with depression and anxiety that occurs after surviving a natural disaster. If a senior is struggling to adjust, talk to an expert in senior care about the best way to approach the situation. Seniors may need extra attention and social activity after an event.

Many organizations offer resources to help seniors prepare for natural disasters and deal with the aftermath. Resources for information and assistance include:

- American Red Cross: 202-303-5000, americanredcross.org
- AARP: 888-687-2277, aarp.org
- Council on Aging: 615-353-4235; councilonaging-midtn.org
- FEMA: 800-621-3362, fema.gov