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**Language Guidelines for Inclusive Emergency Preparedness,**

**Response, Mitigation and Recovery**

FEMA is committed to working towards emergency management language and practices that are inclusive of people with disabilities, and recognizes the power of language in setting the stage for successful “whole community” efforts.

The table below offers language guidelines for referring to people with disabilities and others who may be disproportionately impacted in a disaster. This chart is based on several key principals:

* Use ***people-first*** language; place the emphasis on the individual instead of the disability
* Use terms consistent with the integration mandate in the Americans with Disabilities Act which requires public agencies to provide services "in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with disabilities."
* Use language that is respectful and straightforward.
* Disability is a legally defined term for a protected class of individuals and remains an appropriate term.
* When referring to “access and functional needs”, we are referring to people with and without disabilities who have physical, programmatic and effective communication accessibility requirements. Meeting access and functional needs enables equal access to emergency programs for the whole community.
* Refer to a person’s disability only if it is relevant
* Avoid terms that lead to exclusion (e.g., “special” is associated with “separate” and “segregated” plans and services)
* Avoid terms that are judgmental, negative or sensational (e.g., special, brave, courageous, dumb, frail, super-human, vulnerable)
* Avoid making assumptions or generalizations about the level of functioning of an individual based on their diagnosis or disability. Individuals are unique and have diverse abilities and characteristics.
* Avoid acronyms (PWD, AFN) when referring to people.

Language influences behavior. Inclusive language is a powerful ingredient for achieving successful outcomes that are beneficial for the whole community.

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| **Preferred** | **Avoid** |
| People with disabilities | The handicapped, the disabled, the impaired, the challenged |
| An individual or person with a disability  | Disabled person, PWD, PAFN |
| Access and functional needs, the access and functional needs of people with or without disabilities, people with disabilities and others who also have access and functional needs | Special needs, vulnerable, vulnerable populations, AFNs, she’s an AFN |
| **Preferred** | **Avoid** |
| Equal access, universal access, universal design, physical access, program access, effective communication access, reasonable accommodation | Special access, handicapped access, special accommodations, AFN accommodations |
| Disproportionate impact | Vulnerable populations, special populations, at-risk populations |
| Deaf, hard of hearing, hearing loss, sensory disability  | Deaf and dumb, the deaf, deaf mute, hearing impaired |
| Accessible communication, effective communication  | Special communication, special needs communication |
| He has a speech disability | He has a speech impairment, speech impediment |
| He is blind, he has low vision | The blind, sight impaired, vision impaired |
| She has a mobility disability  | She’s mobility impaired, physically challenged, crippled, an invalid, lame, differently-abled, bedridden, house-bound, shut-in |
| She has … (multiple sclerosis, cancer, etc) | Suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, impaired by  |
| He uses a wheelchair, he uses a scooter, he uses a mobility device | Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair person |
| Assistive devices, assistive technology, durable medical equipment | Handicapped equipment, special devices |
| Power chair, motorized wheelchair, scooter | Electric wheelchair , electric chair, cart  |
| She sustained a spinal cord injury, she has paralysis, she is a spinal cord injury survivor, has paraplegia, quadriplegia, limb loss, amputee | She’s paralyzed, she’s a cripple, she’s trapped in her body, her body is lifeless, crippled, useless |
| Prosthesis, prosthetic limb | Fake leg, wooden leg, peg leg |
| He has cerebral palsy | He’s spastic, palsied |
| He has epilepsy, he has seizures | He has spells, fits |
| She is a little person, she has dwarfism, he is of short stature | She’s a dwarf, she’s a midget |
| She has Down syndrome | She’s Downs, a Down’s kid, mongoloid, retarded |
| He has a learning disability | He is learning disabled, slow, slow learner, dumb |
| A person with an intellectual disability, developmental disability | The mentally retarded, retard, retarded, mental retardation, mentally impaired |
| A woman with a cognitive disability, a person with dementia or Alzheimer’s Disease | Senile, demented |
| A child with a traumatic brain injury or a person who sustained a head injury | Brain damaged, slow |
| He has autism, he is autistic -this term is preferred by some people with autism-on the autism spectrum  | Mental, mentally impaired, retarded, dumb |
| She has a mental illness, mental health support, psychiatric disability, she has a diagnosis of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, uses behavioral health services | Emotionally disturbed, disturbed, crazy, psycho, schizo, insane, manic, manic depression, mental, mental patient He’s a behavior problem, he needs behavior management, she’s a problem child, he is crazy, they are out of control   |
| **Preferred** | **Avoid** |
| Congenital disability , sustained a birth injury, acquired at birth  | Birth defect, defective  |
| Children who receive special education services , children with Individual Education Plans | Special education kid, special needs child, rides the short bus, SPED, he’s special ed, he is special needs  |
| Senior, older person, older adult or older adult with a disability | The frail elderly, the elderly |
| Accessible bathroom, accessible parking, accessible housing, accessible transportation  | Handicapped bathrooms, handicapped parking, special needs housing, special housing, special transportation |
| Medical needs, acute medical needs, health care needs | Special Medical Needs |
| She requires support or assistance  | She has a problem with … |
| Planning with people with disabilities, disability inclusive planning | Planning for the disabled |
| Whole community planning, inclusive planning, integrated planning | Special needs planning, special plans, special needs annex  |
| Universal cot, accessible cot | ADA cot, special needs cot, special medical cot |
| Personal assistance services, personal care assistance for children, youth and adults, caregiver (more appropriate with children)  | Patient care, caregiver (for an adult), carer, takes care of |
| Functional needs support services in a general population shelter, accessible shelter, universal shelter | Special needs shelter, special shelter, special functional needs shelter |
| Medical Shelter | Special Medical Shelter |
| Person who receives or utilizes disability services | Client , patient (unless referring to the acute care services of a nurse or doctor), consumer, burden, welfare case |
| Disaster survivor | Disaster victim (when used to describe an individual who survived the disaster) |

***The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug. -Mark Twain***

**Links**

<http://www.fema.gov/about/odic/>

<http://www.jik.com/language%20FINAL-L-12.27.10.pdf>

<http://www.jik.com/HHS%20Special%20Needs%20_2_.pdf>

<http://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>

<http://eeo.gsfc.nasa.gov/disability/publications.html>

<http://www.nesilc.org/personfirst.html>

<http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/explore/pfl>

<http://dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/dhs-management-directive-disability-access_0.pdf>

<http://dhs.gov/video/video-commemorating-40th-anniversary-section-504-rehabilitation-act-1973>

<http://dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/guide-interacting-with-people-who-have-disabilties_09-26-13.pdf>

<http://www.dhs.gov/publication/tips-effectively-communicating-protected-populations-during-response-and-recovery>

<http://www.rtcil.org/products/RTCIL%20publications/Media/Guidelines%20for%20Reporting%20and%20Writing%20about%20People%20with%20Disabilities%207th%20Edition.pdf>

<http://www.hiddc.org/language.htm>

<http://blog.govdelivery.com/usodep/2010/10/president-obama-signs-rosas-law.html>

<http://curbcut.net/advocacy/dont-call-me-special/>