

# FEMA Further Advances Americans with Disabilities Act Anniversary with Programs that Improve Assistance for People with Disabilities

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WASHINGTON -- On July 26, FEMA commemorates the 34th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and FEMA's efforts to incorporate it into our mission. The ADA guides FEMA's commitment to improving services and programs so that they are equitably available to people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

"We have made significant updates to survivor assistance. These changes drastically improve our ability to meaningfully help people with disabilities," said Administrator Criswell. "This is part of the work we are doing to reach communities disproportionately impacted by disasters more effectively to empower them to rebuild their lives."

When the ADA legislation passed in 1990, it added to the protections afforded to people with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which provided civil rights legislation that protects people with disabilities from discrimination by federal agencies and federally funded programs. It ensures that FEMA, including members of the workforce with disabilities, community and disability stakeholders and governmental partners at every level have a strong foundation to work together so that disaster survivors with disabilities have equitable access to services and programs, while preserving their independence.

"The ADA goes beyond ensuring fairness, dignity and access for people with disabilities by accelerating recovery for survivors who rely on medications, medical devices, service animals and personal care services to function," said FEMA Disability Coordinator and Office of Disability Integration and Coordination Director Dr. Sherman Gillums, Jr. "Our office works year-round to make communities more



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resilient when ADA compliance is made part of a preparedness strategy to be executed before, during, and after disasters.”

To support the disability community, earlier this year, FEMA made major changes to the Individual Assistance (IA) programs. These changes address historic challenges faced by disaster survivors and increase accessibility for people, families and communities. The changes fall into three main categories:

### **Established new benefits**

FEMA now offers new benefits that provide flexible funding directly to survivors early in the recovery process when they need it most.

One new benefit eligible survivors may receive is **Displacement Assistance**—money to help with housing needs if you cannot return to your home because of the disaster. The money can be used to stay in a hotel, with family and friends or other options while you look for a more permanent housing solution.

For people with disabilities, Displacement Assistance can also help pay for accessible accommodations, such as one-story, short-term lodging, lodging approved for service animals, or a facility with assistive listening or reading devices. For people with disabilities, the prime beneficiaries are those who face greater health risks when access to disability-related necessities is delayed.

### **Expanded eligibility**

Expanded eligibility means we can reach more people to help them recover faster while building their homes back stronger.

FEMA is making accessibility improvements to help eligible survivors with disabilities improve their living conditions by making their homes even more accessible than they were pre-disaster. For example, FEMA can pay for wheelchair ramps, grab bars and paved pathways for a home that was damaged by a disaster - even if these items were not there before the disaster and the disaster did not cause a disability. This will not count against the federal Housing Assistance maximum.

### **Simplified application process**



A simpler application process will help to meet a disaster survivor's individual needs and ultimately help more people.

With the new changes, FEMA will now be able to help underinsured survivors. For example, when the insurance payment for home damage isn't enough to cover what happened, FEMA may be able to help up to the maximum allowable amount of assistance to make that home safe, sanitary and functional. The money will help cover that gap for people who are underinsured. FEMA assistance is not a substitute for insurance and can't compensate for all disaster losses. So, survivors need to apply with their insurance companies if they're insured after the disaster.

For Fiscal Year 2024, the Housing Assistance maximum is \$42,500, and the Other Needs Assistance maximum is \$42,500. This amount will be adjusted each fiscal year. Before the changes, survivors with disabilities, who received the federal assistance maximum or more for insurance payments for damage to their home were not eligible for home repair assistance from FEMA. This update will provide more of a financial cushion for people with disabilities who already bear the cost of higher rates for coverage that includes grab bars, ramps, and other accessibility enhancements to a home.

For more information on all the updates made to the Individual Assistance program, please visit [fema.gov/ia](https://www.fema.gov/ia).

Nationwide, disability stakeholders are part of the agency's whole community approach and work with FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination teams to create a path to independence for people with disabilities impacted by disasters.

To learn more about FEMA's support to people with disabilities, go to [Office of Disability Integration and Coordination](#).

