

Disaster Resilience and People with Functional Needs

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When Hurricane Sandy pummeled the northeast and mid-Atlantic states in October, uprooting trees and causing massive flooding, at least three large hospitals were forced to evacuate after emergency generators failed. Governors of 10 states declared emergencies and requested federal aid. As in the super derecho that swept through the Midwest and mid-Atlantic 4 months earlier, millions of residents were left without power.

One alarming consequence of these storms was their effect on residents with functional needs — those who are dependent on home nursing, personal care attendants, or electric medical technologies. Some residents depend on the electrical grid for refrigerating critical medications or for powering lifesaving medical equipment. Many residents, particularly those requiring ongoing respiratory care, streamed into emergency rooms to receive respiratory treatments, refill oxygen tanks, or recharge batteries. Some residents whose medical needs had not escalated but who needed to recharge medical equipment were turned away from shelters whose operators believed their needs could not be met in a general shelter.

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