CFILC Presents: Disability Disaster Access & Resources

Archived Webinar Transcript

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>> CHRISTINA MILLS: Welcome, everybody. This is Christina Mills from the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers. Next slide, please. I'm very excited today to be presenting with you and my fellow colleagues from across the state, Dani Anderson and Eli Gelardin, both whom are executive directors of two different Independent Living Centers, one serving a community in the northern part of the state, and the second serving multiple counties within the southern part of the state. Both executive directors will be providing their local perspective on our new program, Disability Disaster Access and Resources. And I wanna just start by letting everybody know that we are very aware that we have only 60 minutes with you today, and that many folks have been asking us to do this overview of our new program for a while, we really want to encourage everyone at the end to complete the evaluation, to let us know where you might like us to do a deeper dive in a next webinar, or in a presentation with your specific organization. We are available to do that if you would find that helpful. Both Dani and Eli will have a brief segment of today's webinar presentation, just giving you overview of what it's been like for them to both stand up the program in their local communities, but will not go into the level of detail that some people might want to have from a local perspective. So again, you are invited to provide that feedback in the evaluation so that we can make sure that we are providing the presentations and trainings that the community wants and finds helpful. So I just wanna lay the ground by just acknowledging a couple of things to make sure everybody's on the same playing field as we go through this presentation. The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers is not an Independent Living Centers. And for those of you joining from a different location across the country, you might know Independent Living Centers as centers for independent living. Like all things California, we tend to rename our programs and services and so in California, we refer to centers for independent living as Independent Living Centers. Rather than provide services at a local level like our Independent Living Centers do. We are instead of statewide membership association for the Independent Living Centers in our state. Independent Living Centers, make up CFILC's Board of Directors, and currently CFILC's membership, which is a annually based covers 56 of California's 58 counties. If you're interested in learning more about our membership, we've provided the link here on our slide to learn more about our members. So, Independent Living Centers are run by and for people with disabilities, which makes all of our resources and programs very uniquely positioned to provide beneficial services and information to those that we serve. Independent Living Centers are often confused with independent living facilities, housing facilities, rather than the disability resource centers that are uniquely positioned to provide the peer based services. That's always really important to remind folks and to ground us all in who we're talking about when we're talking about Independent Living Centers in California as well as across the country. There are 28 Independent Living Centers in California. And again, our membership is annual, currently CFILC provides membership services to 23 of California's 28 centers. Just to give you an idea of some of our other programs that we administer statewide, CFILC is home to the Digital Access Project, which provides affordable low cost internet through Comcast, AT and T, Spectrum, Frontier, and a couple of the other telecommunication companies available for internet in California. We also have a alternative loan program known as FreedomTech, where someone who may need assistive technology and couldn't otherwise get a small personal loan from a bank to successfully get that assistive technology, they can go through the FreedomTech program. We have Ability Tools, California, not many people know but each state in the nation also has an AT act program that stands for assistive technology. And CFILC is the AT act program for California known as Ability Tools. We have the Disability Organizing Network, which organizes the Independent Living network and the larger disability rights community across the state. Y.O. Disabled and Proud, Youth Organizing, Disabled and Proud, educating, organizing and connecting youth with disabilities. And then our membership services and public policy, which is what our association covers, and our newest program, Disability Disaster Access and Resources, which is what we're going to focus on during today's presentation. So, just to lay some history and get us all to know why CFILC and the Independent Living Centers are invested in providing disaster and emergency services to consumers with access and functional needs. We in 2005, I was actually just relocating to Northern California from San Diego, after the largest wildfires at that time in San Diego County. We had commissioned some after action disaster reports from that fire. And then since then also commissioned additional reports with one of our fellow partners, June Kills Isaacson and found that event after event, there were a number of best practices and lessons learned that we could change and implement as a part of the solution mechanisms for making prevention in disaster readiness and emergency preparedness more accessible for people with disabilities and those across the lifespan that have access and functional needs. We've sponsored, supported and opposed disability disaster related legislation, provided expert witness testimony, hosted and participated in a number of disability disaster coalitions, locally, statewide and nationally. We provide regional, we coordinate with regional and local office of emergency services and planning, putting together plans, implementing plans, providing repopulation after a disaster, and a number of our members also sit on the FAST teams, the functional assessment service teams in providing services during an emergency event. And historically, that's most of the time been through different fires. We've done a number of virtual and on-site shelter accessibility. Supports provided on-site but also done some checklist preparation and ensuring that accessibility of shelters is in place and provided assistance and technical assistance to a number of entities including the Red Cross to ensure that shelter accessibility is not ignored or forgotten. We've also been known quite well through the years in fulfilling and assisting and providing folks who have lost their assistive technology or durable medical equipment during a disaster because they've had to maybe evacuate from their home very quickly without say their cane, wheelchair, walker, incontinent supplies, we have been able to provide a lot of that support to folks that need it when they are evacuated without their individual needs. And then, of course, we've been a part of advisory committees and represented the disability community on a variety of different boards related to disaster and emergency related information. But also we have membership on climate change commissions and councils that I think is important to mention, because as we know, climate change has impacted a lot of what we're dealing with in today's disasters. We also established the Richard Devylder Disaster Relief Fund, which was established in part to provide the assistive technology and DME that we didn't have necessarily in our reuse or loan closets across the state, but stuff that we could purchase relatively quickly to get to folks that were in shelters or staying with families, and couldn't necessarily use their own resources or didn't have their own resources to maybe purchase another scooter that they might have had that leave without jackets for their guide dogs. There's been a variety of different types of technology and tools that we've assisted people in getting after losing 'em in a disaster. And then last but not least, over the last couple of years, we've been building our partnership with both Anthem Blue Cross and Pacific Gas and Electricity, which really helped us launch our Disability Disaster Access and Resources program. So, I wanna set the stage by letting you know how we ended up focusing on the priorities that we are in disaster, Disability Disaster Access and Resources, and I'm gonna call it DDAR moving forward. But there's also DDARCs. So, I'm going to hopefully not confuse people and try to reiterate to make everything clear. And annually, CFILC and a coalition, Disability Action Coalition has historically put on a capital event with hundreds, sometimes thousands of individuals across the disability community and across the state that come up to Sacramento every year to do some advocacy in the Capitol and education around disability needs and services. And in 2019, we really wanted to take advantage of the opportunity in having everybody or having so many people in one place at one time. So, we created a community assessment. The tight we asked just simple questions and then put together this infographic here that I'm going to briefly describe and is on our DDAR website. We surveyed over 400 people that day and also had the survey online for an additional two weeks. We had people with mental health disabilities, deaf folks, blind folks, folks who identifies intellectually and developmentally disabled, mobility, physical disabilities, and then those with chronic health conditions. And then 22% of the folks who took our survey, identified as being seniors, but not necessarily folks that have disabilities. During that assessment, we asked folks how ready they were for a disaster. 14% said they didn't know, 25% said somewhat, 26% said yes, they're ready. And 35% of the total said, no, they're absolutely not ready. And what we really wanted to find out was how ready are the people that think they're ready? And so we asked as an individual with a disability or older adult, what would you need if a disaster or power outage were to hit today? And we found that our top issue that came up was accessible and reliable transportation, second backup generation or batteries, disaster preparedness kits, a place to stay like hotel or motel, someone to check in on them or us, food assistance during a disaster, a landline phone, a cell phone, first aid kits and then about 52 people said other and that was a wide range of other. And then we got down to the nitty gritty, in terms of public safety power shutoffs when the power goes out proactively from the utilities, how many folks in the state that use assistive technology or job or medical equipment that is powered by electricity actually identify as people with disabilities or older adults. And we found that 53% of the folks that we surveyed do require electric power AT or DME, that was astonishing to us. And the reason why is it is very hard to get an idea and we're hoping through our program, we will be able to get a better idea. But this number really helped us identify that there is a significant need in California, if over half the folks we surveyed told us that they use durable medical equipment or assistive technology that has to have electricity, to have their daily lives, to live their daily lives. And that could have meant a lot of different things. It could have meant a communication device for somebody who maybe doesn't communicate verbally, it could have meant a communication device for someone who is deaf. It could have meant a CPAP machine, it could have meant backup power for daily charging of a power wheelchair. It could have meant keeping an electric hospital bed going, pressure sore mattress. I mean, the list goes on and on. And we still don't know how many people in California truly use electric based assistive technology or DME, but this gave us a basis to know where to start, and how important it was to get people prepared for future public safety, power outages and any other type of outage. And so the last question we asked because we understand there are a lot of myths and misconceptions about the utility medical baseline program is how many of the folks that we interview, that we assess through the survey knew that they could enroll in the medical baseline program. And so we see that 40% said yes, 32% said no, 21 unsure, I'm sorry, 21% didn't know and 6% not sure. And so that really also told us that we needed to do some additional research to figure out why that was. So again, the CFILC, Disability Disaster Access and Resources, public safety power shutoff, is really the priority of our program at this time. But I also just wanna mention that our website has information geared towards different types of disasters. And when we envisioned this program last year, when we started discussing what it would look like when it launched in 2020, we were not thinking about a pandemic for one and we also weren't thinking about other types of power outages, we were thinking that fires have become unfortunately a normal part of our life and environment in California. And so therefore public safety power shutoffs and continuing to build and rebuild the infrastructure that the utility provides was going to be a priority moving forward. And therefore, the basis of our program would be focused initially on public safety power shutoffs. So, we launched our program earlier this year and have been very excited to have over 800 applications come in, many of which are from folks that are in the most significantly hit fire areas historically, who definitely know that they need to be more prepared and want to be prepared and want the assistance and resources needed to be prepared. Again, our website to check it out disabilitydisasteraccess.org, and this is just the beginning of our programs. So, we really do plan to expand and increase based on the needs of the disability access and functional needs community. So PSPS support in 2019. Some of you know that while we weren't providing services through any contractual form, we did develop relationships with battery vendors and I did a lot of research and development in determining what type of backup batteries might work for different types of assistive technology or durable medical equipment. We had community members test the equipment in their own home with our batteries, provide us back information that would be helpful in determining what would help as we eased into our pilot program. During the PSPS's last fall, Centers for Independent Living are seen as trusted sources of information and service providers in their community. And therefore, it was no surprise that we had over 1000 incoming calls from individuals impacted by the public safety power shutoffs during the few PSPS's that occurred last year. We had also through our relationship building with battery vendors and Pacific Gas and Electricity, had put in an order for some mobile batteries that could be used by individuals. And we had 250 batteries available that we were able to put out to community members. And I just wanna mention that while we weren't in any type of contract to do any of these things, it was about making sure that the community's needs were met and doing it in the best way that we could. The 250 batteries that were supplied to folks were a great help. But it was a drop in the bucket compared to the actual need of what I believe is going to need be needed in California moving forward. For those that a battery maybe wouldn't assist or be a good source of backup. We assisted 82 individuals and families in going over to a hotel or motel and paying for their stay through PG and E resources to make that happen. And then we also provided over 250 meals to folks that were without food either in the motels or hotels or spoiled food in their individual homes. And then last but not least, we assisted over 40 individuals in getting access to accessible transportation or providing gas to fill up generators or their accessible vehicles to be able to go to a hotel, motel or a friend's house to stay during a PSPS. So, lessons learned and continue to be learned every single day in this program, every individual situation is unique, eligibility for our program and the PSPS resources specifically need to be on an individual by individual basis. What makes our program very different is that we know as people with disabilities and lived experiences, that income shouldn't be the reason why we are eligible or not eligible for services that save our life essentially. And for those of us who rely on powered assistive technology or DME, we also know that lots of times our other disability daily needs are not factored in as how our income is used. And therefore sometimes we might look like we have higher incomes, although we have a lot of out of pocket expenses as people with disabilities. So, we chose and PG and E agreed that our program would not be based at this point during the pilot on income because everybody situation is so uniquely different. And while we learned last year that some people could benefit from a battery and couldn't maybe purchase it on their own, they weren't able to access it quick enough with a power safety shutoff happening within two days. So of course, providing a short term loan for a battery was essential. Getting that battery back while the individual ordered their own. That was a way that we could make sure that we provided the resources we had available to us in an emergency situation. I also wanna mention that batteries are a great solution for some, but they're also a band aid. There is no battery on the market right now that is portable and easy to use in an individual's home who uses multiple pieces of assistive technology or durable medical equipment. While batteries provide support for what we're seeing is now the largest number of applicants who have applied through our program. It seems that CPAP users, which we all know could have long term impacts on their health if they don't use their CPAP machines are some of the highest applicants we've received through our program. Also power wheelchair users who need backup electricity for charging in the evening, as well as communication devices and oxygen concentrators. Those are some of the top products that folks have needed the battery backups for and that will work for a specific number of hours and days at a time. But when you have a public safety power shutoff that lasts for days let's say and then you have 24 hour break and then an additional PSPS for another three or four days. It is very difficult and it also requires if you do have a battery that that battery be recharged in between, and so our solution in our program is to make sure that people have a plan to ensure that their battery does get charged, that there's a backup plan. And there are ways to make sure that that individual remains safe. Educating and working with individuals to develop their long term sustainable emergency and disaster plan is critical. I would say that that's probably the most important part of our program. Personal preparedness is something that we all need to be responsible for. And we want to assist those that need support and making that happen. Get to that point and that place where they actually have a plan that's going to work for them. Because again, everybody's individual situation is very unique. And as we know, as people with disabilities, we can be very creative and very resilient. But we might need support and assistance and thinking through what our options might be when it comes to a disaster. Resources in our programs are limited and only reach so many individuals. But again, that's part of the process in having a pilot program. And we hope that our findings show that an expansion and an increase in resources is needed to provide for additional people in California that experience PSPS or other types of emergencies that impact their daily life. So our pilot, this is very important because I don't know that everybody understands what a pilot program is, a small scale preliminary program or study that is conducted in order to evaluate feasibility, duration, cost, adverse events, and improve upon prior to the performance of a full scale program. And I can tell you eight months into our program this year, we're already seeing some adverse events and improvement that can be made. So, having the opportunity to run a pilot program and really work in collaboration with others around the state that prioritize emergency and disaster preparedness for folks with disabilities and older adults with access and functional needs is very important and continues to be a priority for our organization. There is no program across the country that resembles what we're creating in DDAR. And I just wanna highlight that we have a number of states and folks across the country that are joining us from all walks of life today to learn more about our program, because again, climate change is something we're all experiencing, and other programs are being thought about across the country. So in our program, all counties are covered by the pilot except for two, San Diego and Imperial. And a lot of folks will ask why is that? San Diego and Imperial have a separate utility system. They're the smallest investor owned utility in the state, I believe. San Diego Gas and Electricity and we have not cultivated a relationship there. But I'm sure that partnerships can be made. And we can expand our program if need be. And if the community down there does wanna replicate what we've done and be a part of it. 20 of our Independent Living Centers, some of you might remember that I said 23 of our centers are members, only 20 of our members are engaged as a local Disability Disaster Access and Resource Center partner. So, DDAR is the name of our statewide program and each independent living center that is engaged in it is subcontracted with CFILC to be a Disability Disaster Access and Resource Center partner. So, they are working in collaboration regionally and locally with their government officials, their community organizations, local utility contacts, emergency personnel, community action networks, and many, many more other local folks that are also prioritizing disaster. Our target audience in the program, again, people with disabilities across the lifespan, who utilize assistive technology and or durable medical equipment on a regular basis and therefore will be placed in a vulnerable position without electricity. And I just wanna say, while we talk about vulnerable populations, we're not vulnerable until we don't have what we need to live and fulfill our needs on a daily basis. And for some, electricity is a matter of life and death. And for others, it's a matter of quality of life. And so some of us may not even be able to get out of bed, if our wheelchairs are powered up to be able to get in and move around and do our business. There are so many things that make people with disabilities independent as a result of assistive technology and durable medical equipment. But the second you take away our ability to use that by turning off the power, that's what makes us vulnerable. So, our program is a streamlined has a streamlined statewide structure with local expertise and peer to peer knowledge. The establishment of Disability Disaster Access and Resource Centers at the ILCs also occurred earlier this year. So, we're all in this pilot together. Our pilot is prioritizing tier three and tier two, high fire threat areas across the state. We're also focused in addition to in addition, in building public awareness, providing disaster training, and enrolling folks that otherwise don't know that it's available or thought they were not qualified for the medical baseline programs and alert systems that are available to them in their communities. We have a peer to peer assessment process to determine what an applicant might benefit from during an emergency, including a public safety power shutoff. So, what that looks like is when you go on to the DDAR website, you fill out a very disability friendly, simple application. When that comes through, it comes through the CFILC office statewide, my staff and I see who's applying and we send down that application to the appropriate Disability Disaster Access and Resource Center. We let the applicant know that it will take two to three business days for the center to get back to them. Of course, there's been a significant increase in applications over the last several days with the other outages as well. So, that timeline has gone longer. But we want to make sure that, we wanted to make sure and we're very thoughtful in creating an application that would be user friendly and accessible for people with all different types of disabilities who we know would benefit from the program. Our DDAR resources include motel and hotel and food assistance, transportation support, and the portable backup batteries. I wanna be very real with everyone that there is a shortage of the battery systems that are available and most portable for people with disabilities. While we definitely are advocating to extend and expand the self incentive generation, SGIP, self generated incentives program through the CPUC. We also know that many people with disabilities would not qualify for SGIP because they're not homeowners or because their landlords would not want to install the backup power into the building that the renter is staying and we've had many conversations and we are hoping to also be able to expand SGIP to show other landlords that it can be a model for low income apartment complexes especially. But we're not there yet. The portable backup batteries that we do have access to is over 1200 across the state now. And those were funded both by Anthem Blue Cross as well as PG and E. And they we do not nearly have enough and the other partners across the state providing similar services are also having a battery shortage issue. So, just tip if you're thinking about creating something similar in your state, definitely start cultivating those relationships with battery vendors now. So again, as a reminder, climate change continues to impact the reasons why we experienced power outages, and I wanna really just stress that there are different kinds of outages. Our program at this point only provides resources to those who are impacted during a public safety power shutoff, a PSPS. And for those of you who are in California and even myself, who have experienced different types of power outages over the last several days, they are not what we refer to as public safety power shutoffs. Now, does that not mean that we don't want to provide for people that need backup power and resources, regardless of the type of outage they're having? No, absolutely not. We want people with disabilities to be safe and well, no matter what. But when this contract was written, it was in regards to PSPS's specifically, and we are having discussions with our founders at this point to determine how we might be able to expand to cover other outages in the future. So, just wanna give everybody a quick, this is very visual. But for those of you who have not seen it, when we talk about the most vulnerable counties in our state that might be impacted by fire. I talk about tier three and tier two as the priority areas where folks will be prioritized if they are in this area for DDAR resources. Just to give you a sense of what that looks like, the California Public Utilities Commission has published a fire threat map. The map has not been updated since January 19th 2018. But it really shows you visually what the tier two and tier three levels are across the state. So, when we refer to folks that we want to prioritize and making sure that they have, what they need to stay safe and independent in their home, we're looking at counties like Humboldt, we're looking at the North Bay, we're looking at Morin, we're looking at San Bernardino. We're looking at Alameda, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Mariposa, Monterey, Nevada. I mean, we all know right now that there are 15 fires and it could have gone up overnight, currently happening in California. So, we are doing our best statewide to get as many people proactively enrolled in our program as possible. As we know fire season in California has expanded and fire season for us started in June and it used to be a fall thing. It's now almost become a year around event. So, our pilot priorities again, keeping people with disabilities safe and independent. Busting the medical baseline myth by increasing the number of individuals enrolled in the program. Increase the individual preparedness among people with disabilities. Organize and facilitate emergency disaster trainings and virtual community forums on emergency priority topics. One of the benefits of COVID is that now we can do that statewide. And so while some local centers are providing trainings to their community, they've also been able to open up those opportunities and provide them to folks across the state. Providing support and resources to individuals with disabilities who use electric powered AT and durable medical equipment devices before, during and after a PSPS event is another priority, and hosting and participating in public awareness activities to educate the community on disaster emergency impacts of people with disabilities in our community. How it works? Applying for PSPS resources on our website. Again, application gets processed, we send it down to the local center, the individualized needs assessment occurs. The local center supports the individual in enrolling in the medical baseline program, supporting them and setting up their personalized disaster plan. Determining if there are other and I should have said this before in the medical baseline program, also making sure that people are enrolled in any alert systems that are available in their community. And then as we go down determining what PSPS resource strategy might work for that individual, so obviously, somebody who uses multiple durable medical equipment or pieces of assistive technology are not gonna benefit from a backup battery, therefore, we might determine that that person would be better served, and, of course, by their choice to go to a motel or hotel instead, because a battery would not be sufficient for them or keep them safe. One thing that I do wanna stress is that our program is also decreasing and preventing hospitalization. So, we definitely saw from the first PSPS in 2019 to the last that we dropped the number of people that were going to ERs to charge up their devices as a result of the shutoffs because of our program. So I'm gonna turn it over for brief overviews in terms of Eli and Dani's programs look like in their geographic areas that are very different from one another. Eli, if we could have you come off mute.

>> ELI GELARDIN: All right, can y'all hear me? So, success and wrapping up this critical program in Marin has been one of our top priorities over the course of COVID. Recognizing as Christina said that we are in a high risk area for wildfire, as well as surrounded by other high risk areas for wildfire like Napa and Sonoma County, and learning from our experience last October, with the North Bay fires, it was critical for us to really lay the groundwork for a strong PSPS program. So part of that is really identifying what success looks like from the front, from the gate. And that means distributing over 50 high voltage batteries, increasing the medical baseline in Marin by 10%, which is about 200 new enrollees in the baseline program, conducting semi monthly trainings and webinars, overall increasing disaster preparedness for Marin's access and functional needs population and then being ready to activate at a moment's notice during an actual PSPS event and provide food, shelter and financial resources. We also really recognize that part of success isn't just reaching and getting to people with access and functional needs, but building up strong networks, whether that's family members, caregivers, community based organizations and partners that individuals with AFM rely upon. Plugging in locally with our Emergency Operations Center, in the county of Marin, and building the capacity of the community to support people with access and functional needs. And then just adding an additional layer, one of the priority areas that we really wanted to focus on as we launched this program was equity. Recognizing that in the place and time that we're in, and then in an affluent community like Marin County, there were still many folks with access and functional needs, who were experiencing multiple marginalized impact, and that those are the individuals we wanted to get to the most, individuals, people of color, people from underserved and under resourced communities. And so as part of that strategy, we really developed trusting relationships and subcontracts with six key community based organizations that were serving Marin's most underserved community members. Recognizing that this was an opportunity not only to wrap up a critical program but also elevate and address some of the issues around equity and racial disparity that Marin has experienced for decades. One of the keys in terms of starting up our program was really building a strong internal team. Identifying roles and clarity when it comes to who on our team would be coordinating battery logistics, who would be engaging in outreach and work closely with our key CBO partners, in ensuring that they weren't getting the materials they needed to get out to the community. Who would be doing the education and training components, the webinars and developing the support staff around all of those activities to make it happen. Today, we have received approximately 140 applications, which I believe is fairly high. We have already allocated all 70 plus batteries that we were given through PG and E. We've also developed a new partnership with Marin Clean Energy and have distributed additional batteries through MCE. In terms of the future and next steps for our local program. We're really looking at expanding and leveraging the work that CFILC and PG and E provided and securing additional funding from other local stakeholders to secure more batteries given the need and the demand that we're seeing. And I also just wanna recognize that CFILC has played an invaluable role in terms of sharing resources between centers and best practices, so that we are learning from each other and building the strength of our local programs collectively. Thank you.

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: Thank you, Eli. Dani Anderson.

>> DANI ANDERSON: Thank you, Christina. Thank you, Eli. Good morning, everyone. I'm Dani Anderson, executive director at the Independent Living Resource Center and we serve Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Louis Obispo counties. We're one of the few Independent Living Centers in the state that has two power utility companies in their service territory. It's basically split right down the middle. So, Ventura and South Santa Barbara County are covered by Southern California Edison and North Santa Barbara County and Saint Louis and Bristol County are covered by PG and E. I think that no one can discount the importance of communication with everything that we're talking about today, whether we're talking about the communication that Christina and CFILC used to benefit all of the Independent Living Centers throughout the state for a very long time now in creating the relationships that got us to where we are today with this program, or we're talking about the local communication that's really necessary for us as Independent Living Centers to get the word out not just about the program, but also about all of the services that are provided by the Independent Living Centers and who we serve. So, that was a really important thing for us to start even before launching the program, far before launching the program was educating the power companies, educating the local offices of emergency management, the public, other CBOs and other organizations that didn't necessarily realize or prioritize the emergency preparedness in the way that it needed to be prioritized. So, we went really hard with that for a very long time. And we're now included in conversations that we weren't included in before. And I think that that's a huge win for all of the Independent Living Centers and all of the people that we serve. When we're talking specifically about what this program looks like for ILRC, it's a big program, and we have a very big service area. And while we just like all of the Independent Living Centers serve people with all disabilities, we have an increased number of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in our area. And we've seen proof over the years that in emergencies, these are the people that missed out on the alerts, they miss out on first responders driving through the streets and telling them to evacuate because they can't hear it over the microphone. These are people that need to be accommodated a little bit differently. So, a lot of what we do is thinking about whether it's the batteries or the alerts, making sure that they're fully accessible for all disabilities, and that the batteries are also very important to be used to help people who need to charge communication devices, cell phones, video phones, whatever it may be in order to get the alerts. We've also, we've engaged with Edison and PG and E in different ways. We've found ourselves a seat at the table at the Consumer Advisory Panel for the Southern California Edison, finding ourselves teaching them a lot about disability and being listened to, which is huge. For talking about the medical baseline program. Historically, people have understood this program to be something that strictly just helps save money on your bill and it does do that but the bigger part in the world of PSPS and in the world of emergency preparedness is that it provides alerts first. So, the medical baseline is on the list of the first groups that are gonna find out that there's going to be a PSPS. Hopefully in three days is the timeline. So, getting three days notice for something that is gonna happen is the ideal situation with a PSPS. And being on the medical baseline program is what ensures that and those could come through text, through email, even through phone calls, and people who are on even increased list which is called the critical care. These are the people that not only need these for these devices for life support, but for life saving. If they don't respond to the alert or get a phone call, the utilities have figured out ways even in partnership with Independent Living Centers to go out to these people to make sure that they know what's happening. We are finding that in addition to the devices that Christina mentioned, in our hotter areas, it's really important that people are able to have their fans, their air conditioners, their swamp coolers, which, again, these batteries are a band aid. So, we are working really hard to try to figure out ways individually with the consumers to be prepared. And so I think that the main thing that we're experiencing here at ILRC in our areas is that this program has given us again, the opportunity to be engaged with our consumers in our community in a new way. We're learning every day as we go. And we're excited to be learning and we're excited to be at these new tables. And it really comes down to the importance of personal preparedness, as Christina mentioned, and using the resources that are out there for our consumers, us for example, to be able to help with those plans. So, we hope that the word will get out, our website is about to go public as well. And we're just really excited about continuing this program. So thank you, Christina for having us today.

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: Thank you, Eli and Dani for joining us. And remind people I've said it over and over again. But the eligibility for the program must use AT or DME on a regular basis, must have a detailed personal preparedness plan or willing to create one with support of your local Disability Disaster Access and Resource Center. Must be enrolled or willing to get enrolled in the medical baseline program, of course, if you're eligible, but if you're coming to our program, you're automatically eligible that means you're using AT or DME on a regular basis that the utility likely has on their list as eligibility criteria. And then must live in a high fire threat area based on the CPUC map that we shared. I know we only have six minutes, it looks like for questions and comments. I do want to just let folks know that we well, CFILC has a variety of different program, social media platforms. Because our program is in pilot stage, we are using our CFILC outlets for everything related to this program. So, that's what we have listed here for Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. And again, I really wanna encourage everyone to fill out the evaluation. And let us know how you would like us to do a deeper dive in any of the areas that we've covered, or any of the other access and functional needs areas that you might find helpful for your community. Megan, do we have questions or Katherine in the queue?

>> MEGAN COWDELL: This is Megan. We do have a couple. Our first question comes from Haruki on he's watching on Facebook and lives in Monterey and wants to know how somebody can actively participate that maybe doesn't need these services. Will there be volunteer opportunities?

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: That's a great question. And I'm so happy you asked. In fact, some of the changes we've had to make to the program have been obviously, because of COVID. Some of the transportation of dropping off and picking up batteries has been a need for many of our centers. CCCIL, Central Coast Center for Independent Living. Jorge Ruiz is the program director there. I would love if you could connect with him. And we can definitely put his email in the chat box to see if maybe you can be one of the volunteer assistance with their program.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Great, thank you. Our next question comes from Cindy on Zoom and she wants to know, are these batteries in this program, is it only for folks who are living independently or also for folks who may live in a care home?

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: That's a great question. And at this point, we are covering both. But again, everybody's unique circumstances are based on what services and resources might benefit them from our program. So as an example, we did have a facility over the weekend, with a number of hospital beds apply for each individual in the facility that needed to be able to operate that hospital bed. It's not likely that 17 people need to move there or just their beds at the same time. So, therefore we're working with the facility to see is it that they don't have the resources to purchase maybe just a few batteries? Or do they need resources to understand who to go to for batteries? But to answer your question, every situation is individualized. So it's yes or no, but based on the individual situation in the facility that we're assisting now, it's likely that we are going to work with them to get them a few battery backups that they can use for multiple residents.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Great, thank you. Our next question comes from Crystal and she wants to know, are there any costs to a consumer to participate in this program?

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: Great question Crystal. There are no cost to participate in this program. And again, it is through 56 of 58 counties. So, as long as you're at this point, we hope to expand again, in as long as you're not in San Diego or in Imperial County, we can assist you.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Thank you, this is Megan. And I think we have time here for one more question. Deb wants to know, is there any way to help? I'm sorry. It's Alicia. Are there any specialized solutions for immunocompromised or those who are more affected by COVID-19? Are you guys doing no contact or needing to leave things at somebody's home? How are you handling that?

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: Yeah, that's a really great question. And because our Independent Living Centers are primarily as well as CFILC, staffed by people with disabilities, some of which are immunocompromised, that's where our volunteers have really been handy. But also some of our staff and even our family members had been doing Dropbox at individuals homes. We have a number of centers that are doing meal delivery services that can do that. We are definitely taking social distancing, face coverings and all of the necessary steps to keep people safe, including our own staff, and making sure that folks in the community have what they need to live their best life during a COVID environment as well.

>> MEGAN COWDELL Thank you, this is Megan, I know we are running out of time here. If folks have additional questions, where's the best place for them to contact or reach out to us?

>> CHRISTINA MILLS: Our info email, info@disabilitydisasteraccess.org, is a great email to get ahold of us. We answer that email daily. Lisa Austin is our program manager for this program. Her email is Lisa L-i-s-a@cfilc.org. And before we disconnect, I wanna mention that like Dani had brought up in her presentation. While Edison is working wonderfully with the Southern California centers in their area, they have been a significant partner and another utility that I think is invested in learning from people with disabilities. So, I don't wanna make it sound like we're not working with them. They're not funding our program at this time. But again, we do hope to expand to bring our statewide structure and implementation down into the Southern California Edison territories as well. And I think with that, I just wanna again share that personal preparedness in all aspects is really important. And we're living in a COVID environment. We're living in an outage environment. I don't want anybody to think that we accept that power outages are happening. We accept that climate change is a reality. And that we wanna make sure people with disabilities and access and functional needs are safe and independent as they can be given everything that's going on in the emergency and disaster environment.