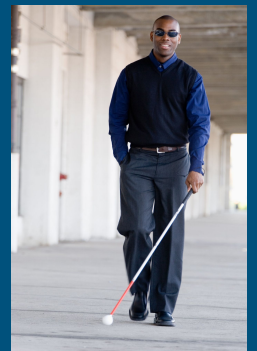


Massachusetts Climate Resilience Policy, Planning, and Needs of People with Disabilities: Paths to Improvement

Rafaello Adler-Abramo

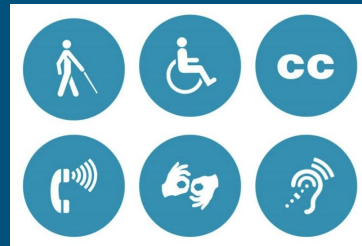
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Presentation summarizes my self-designed MQP
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Project Goal: Increase inclusion of needs of people with disabilities (PWDs) in Massachusetts climate resilience planning.



Strategies:

1. Focus education and resources on one central node which disseminates resilience planning resources within Massachusetts (MA)
2. Bridge two expert communities: disability & environmental resilience



Objectives:

1. Identify evidence of impact of functional omission of PWD needs in MA gov. resilience planning
2. Identify best practices via disability community's expertise
3. Identify node in resilience planning that widely disseminates resources w/in Massachusetts (MA)
4. Offer resources which fit that entity's parameters
5. Communicate what's needed: removal of barriers to access publicly available resources, not "special needs". E.g.,
 - Evacuation vehicles require wheelchair lifts
 - Emergency communications accessible to all despite vision/hearing limits
6. Broker ongoing connection between PWD experts and government resilience planners

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

SDGS Goal **10** Need to
“Reduce inequality”

SDGS Goal **13** “Take
urgent action to combat
climate change and its
impacts”



Part I: Current Challenges

PWDs among most vulnerable

- Disproportionately low income, unemployed, disadvantaged minorities, in Environmental Justice-designated areas (Goodman et al., 2019)
- **26%** of US adults (CDC, 2019)

But are **rarely described as a vulnerable population** by **climate change planners** (Saxton & Ghenis, 2018)

4 times

- **More likely to die in disasters than people without disabilities** (Calgaro, 2021)

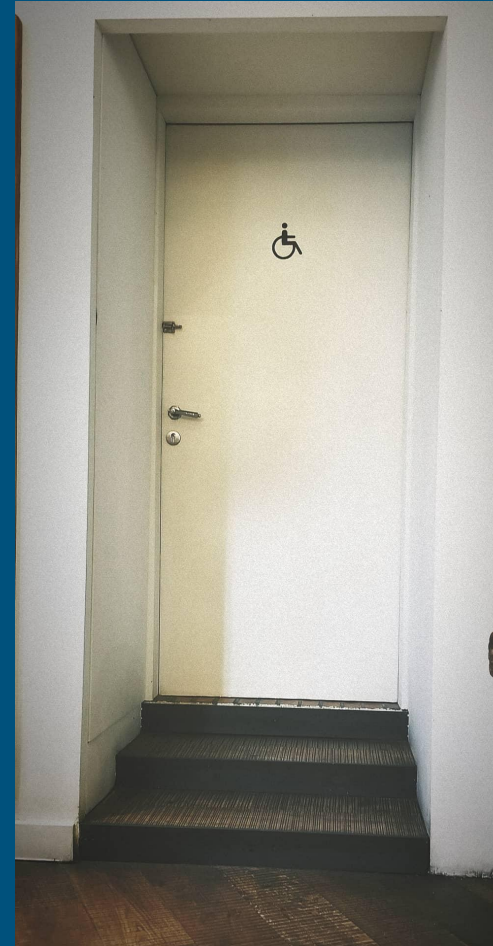
PWDs' higher death rate not due to biological vulnerability. It happens when life-saving resources are inaccessible...

- Spoken evacuation orders are useless if you are deaf
- Evacuation maps are useless if you are blind
- Buses without lifts are useless if you are in a wheelchair

It's not about “**special needs**”. Inclusive planning is needed for **equal access** to resources meant for all.
(Objective 5)

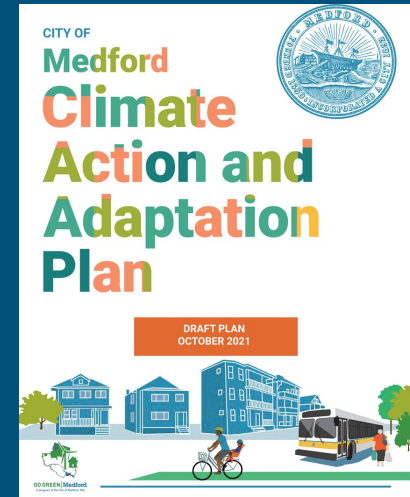
Non-discrimination policy is useless without identifying & offsetting specific barriers.

For example look at this allegedly handicapped accessible bathroom...



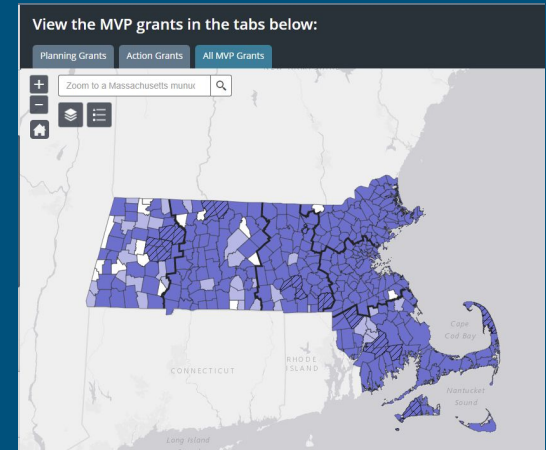
Part II: Steps Towards Improvement

- Interviewed the real experts (PWDs);
- Read recommendations by PWD disaster experts, in addition to academic sources (Objective 2)
- Verified PWD access rarely included in MA climate resilience municipal plans (Objective 1)
- Identified a MA government climate resilience program whose central office influences municipalities throughout state: Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program (MVP) (Objective 3 and Strategy 1)
- Confirmed MVP had no specific guidance re PWDs (Objective 1)



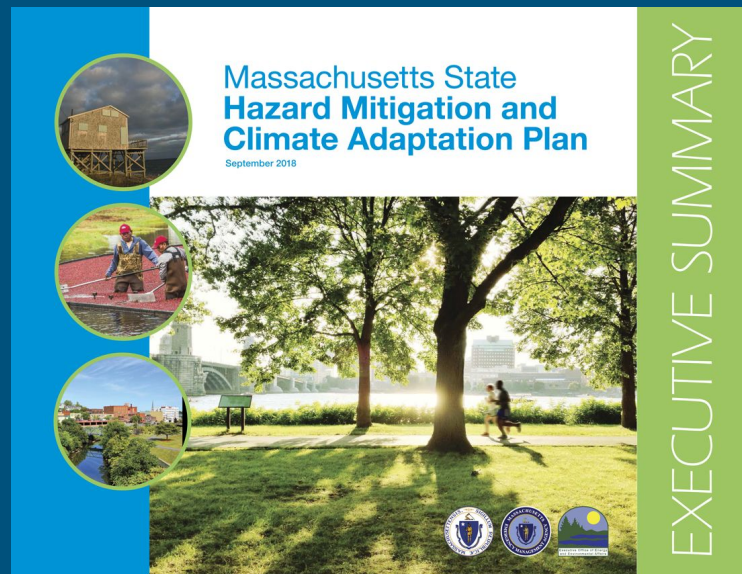
MVP program offers every municipality:

- Planning framework, technical assistance, and funding
- Each locale chooses to participate or not.
- Each creates own plan, aligned with Framework
- 95% of MA municipalities take part



Discussed PWD omission with an MVP regional program coordinator

- Aware of omission. Had planned to address in future.
- Welcomed resources offered.
- Will consider my findings for their 2022 Framework update, sent to all participating municipalities in MA.
- Requested introduction to PWD experts.



My role: Bridging two expert communities

(Strategy 2)

- Connected disability experts to MVP for ongoing expert input (Objective 6)
- Was invited to attend ongoing PWD disaster resilience meetings. Can offer resources from environmental side.

What sustainability planners know & what PWD disaster prep experts know



My project will provide MVP:

(Objective 4)

- Relevant best practices
- Introductions to PWD accessibility experts for ongoing input (obj. 6)
- Ways to remove barriers to community input
- Short pieces tailored to each major MVP stakeholder
- Resource list, incl. making all digital communications accessible (Last slide lists accessibility features of this presentation.)
- I will post these for anyone wishing to make use of them
- Model I created showing needs per disability type in different climate emergencies. E.g., in heat emergency, given that spinal cord injuries impair thermoregulation, prioritize such people for A/C.

Outcome:

MVP is now equipped to take the next critical steps

- Disability inclusion materials will be considered in some form in MVP program's 2022 update to guidelines. These will be presented to participating municipalities (95% of total in MA), leading to greater PWD inclusion in planning and implementation by MA cities and towns
(Objectives 2, 4 & 5)
- Ongoing connections begun between MVP and disabled disaster resilience professionals (Objective 6)
- Project goal and all objectives have been met.

Thank you for your time!



Accessibility features of this presentation include:

- “Screen reader” “alt text” image description text inserted for all photos, drawings, maps, logos, etc.
- Text and images tested for visibility for all major varieties of color blindness
- High contrast text and images used

References and Image Credits

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