



Engaging Immigrant Communities in Emergency Preparedness

Many immigrants have limited English proficiency. This and other factors can make them more vulnerable during public health emergencies¹. Therefore, the development of culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions is essential to increase preparedness for public health emergencies.



What are some barriers to preparedness?

Immigrant communities are not homogenous—get to know the populations in your community to determine how best to engage them in preparedness. That being said, the following barriers may be common to many immigrants:

- **Limited English Proficiency:** Many immigrants have limited or no English Proficiency. Messages communicated through English language media may not reach them, since research shows many rely on a combination of their native-language media (particularly radio) and secondhand news from English-speaking friends and relatives^{1,2}.
- **Cultural differences:** Culture can influence how threats such as natural disasters are perceived¹. Additionally, people's cultural backgrounds may change the way they understand terms used in preparedness materials. Therefore, it is vital to engage the immigrant populations in your community in preparedness planning in order to determine how best to communicate with them in the event of a public health emergency, both in language and media.
- **Trust:** Many immigrants have limited trust of government entities such as law enforcement^{1,2}. Some immigrants interviewed after Katrina and the California wildfires reported that their mistrust of the US government stems from prior negative experiences with police and government in their homelands. Others stated that their immigration status and fear of deportation play an important role¹. This mistrust may prevent immigrants from engaging in government-sponsored preparedness events¹.

How can you promote preparedness in immigrant communities?

- **Employ ethnic media:** Ethnic media are frequently the first place that many immigrant people turn to for information in an emergency. Work with community members to identify reliable and credible media outlets, and to make connections with them before an emergency occurs.
- **Use community members and organizations to promote preparedness:** The Latino Health Initiative used community-based health promoters to communicate preparedness messages to Latino immigrants in Montgomery County, MD³. Health promoters are trained volunteers who connect communities with health information and services. They are especially helpful in overcoming language and trust-related barriers to preparedness. Additionally, consider enlisting help from other informal information sources, such as faith-based organizations and community centers, since these are also cited as trusted messengers in immigrant communities.

What are some essential steps to communicating with immigrant communities?

- Connect with community leaders (faith community leaders, cultural organizations, media representatives) to learn about and build networks within the community.
- Work with community groups to develop appropriate messages and materials. Test these out with focus groups to ensure they make sense to your audience. Be sure to ask about the best methods of delivery (TV, radio, newspaper, telenovela, etc.) too.
- Communicate your message through multiple communication channels—this may include community networks (faith-based organizations, trained community members, etc), as well as media such as local newspapers, radio or TV stations (especially ethnic media outlets).

How can you engage community members in preparedness planning?

It is important to give community members the sense that the meeting is about them and make it as convenient as possible, particularly when you are asking them to do something for you such as contribute to and comment on materials. Some keys to success identified by the Latino Health Initiative include:

- Use the community's native language as the primary language for the meeting
- Serve food (based on the community's preference)
- Provide childcare
- Offer incentives (i.e. gift certificates for grocery stores, preparedness kits, etc.)

For more information:

- **Disaster Preparedness in Urban Immigrant Communities:** This document gives guidance, based on lessons from recent disasters, on how best to engage urban immigrant communities in preparedness and includes many resources and references. http://demographics.apalc.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/disaster-report_final.pdf
- **Plan 9 Campaign:** This toolkit contains easy-to-read, customizable materials available in nine languages. The materials emphasize a 9-item disaster preparedness kit and are available in community trainer flip chart, poster, take-away brochure, and tri-fold brochure formats at: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/phs/APC/workforce.asp>
- **National Resource Center on Advancing Emergency Preparedness for Culturally Diverse Communities:** This website is a clearinghouse for resources that build preparedness among racially and ethnically diverse communities. Visit the site at: <http://www.diversitypreparedness.org/>

References:

1. Mathew, AB & Kelly, K. (2008). Disaster Preparedness in Urban Immigrant Communities: Lessons Learned from Recent Catastrophic Events and Their Relevance to Latino and Asian Communities in Southern California. http://demographics.apalc.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/disaster-report_final.pdf
2. Messias D. & Lacy E. (2007). Katrina-related health concerns of Latino survivors and evacuees. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor & Underserved*. 18 (2), p. 443-64.
3. Carter-Pokras, O., Zambrana R., Mora S., Aaby K., (2007). Emergency preparedness: knowledge and perceptions of Latin American immigrants. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor & Underserved*. 18 (2), p. 465-81



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