
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Senator Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 837
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Consultant: Heather Hopkins

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Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Disaster and emergency preparedness

SUMMARY

This bill requires Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness training specifically designed to help older adults and people with disabilities prepare for emergencies and ensure their safety before, during, and after natural disasters and other emergency events. This bill requires that the training utilize existing emergency preparedness and response tools developed by the Office of Emergency Services, the California Department of Aging, the Department of Rehabilitation, and other relevant community partners. This bill requires that the training raise awareness of existing resources and guidance.

ABSTRACT

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes an Aging and Disability Resource Connection program to provide information to consumers and their families on available long-term services and supports programs and to assist older adults, caregivers, and persons with disabilities in accessing long-term services and supports programs at the local level through Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs operated jointly by area agencies on aging and independent living centers. (WIC 9120)
- 2) Provides that area agencies on aging and independent living centers shall be the core local partners in developing Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs. Requires the California Department of Aging to assist interested and qualified area agencies on aging and independent living centers in completing an application to be designated as an Aging and Disability Resource Connection program. (WIC 9120)
- 3) Provides that an Aging and Disability Resource Connection program operated by an area agency on aging and an independent living center shall provide all of the following:
 - a. Enhanced information and referral services and other assistance at hours that are convenient for the public.

- b. Options counseling concerning available long-term services and supports programs and public and private benefits programs.
- c. Short-term service coordination.
- d. Transition services from hospitals to home and from skilled nursing facilities to the community. *(WIC 9120)*

4) Provides that an Aging and Disability Resource Connection program operated by an area agency on aging and an independent living center shall do both of the following:

- a. Provide services within the geographic area served.
- b. Provide information to the public about the services provided by the program. *(WIC 9120)*

5) Provides that the California Department of Aging, in consultation with the Aging and Disability Resource Connection Advisory Committee within the California Department of Aging, shall develop a core model of Aging and Disability Resource Connection best practices. These best practices shall be implemented by July 1, 2022, by all Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs operated by area agencies on aging and independent living centers. To the extent feasible, the best practices shall be considered in the development and continued updating of the master plan on aging. In the development of these best practices, the department and advisory committee shall consider, at a minimum, the following practices:

- a. A person-centered counseling process.
- b. Public outreach and coordination with key referral sources, including, but not limited to, caregiver resource centers, the medical centers of the United States Department of Veteran Affairs, acute care systems, local 211 programs, local multipurpose senior service programs, Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), adult day care services, and long-term services and supports providers.
- c. A formal follow-up procedure to ensure that services for which a person received a referral were received and methods for correcting service provision if needed.
- d. A model for the best ways for area agencies on aging and independent living centers to share necessary data and client information.
- e. A model for the collection and reporting of data to the California Department of Aging, which shall include, but not be limited to, the demographic information for each individual counseled, the number of consumers served by category of service, and the number of caregivers served. *(WIC 9120)*

6) Provides that the California Department of Aging shall review implementation of the Aging and Disability Resource Connection Infrastructure Grants Program described in

WIC 9121 for consideration in developing and updating the best practices model. (WIC 9120)

This Bill:

- 1) Makes legislative findings and declarations regarding individuals who are especially vulnerable during a disaster and the challenges in adequately supporting this population during national disasters.
- 2) Provides that Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs operated by an area agency on aging and independent living centers shall provide disaster and emergency preparedness training specifically designed to help older adults and people with disabilities prepare for emergencies and ensure their safety before, during, and after natural disasters and other emergency events.
- 3) Provides that this training shall utilize emergency preparedness and response tools developed by the Office of Emergency Services, the California Department of Aging, the Department of Rehabilitation, and other relevant community partners.
- 4) Provides that training shall raise awareness of existing available resources and guidance, including, but not limited to: local alert systems; local emergency plans; information from the local fire department; information on emergency transportation and evacuation resources; and information related to utility services during emergencies and natural disasters.

FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has not yet been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**Purpose of the Bill:**

According to the author, “The state has long been aware that individuals with disabilities and older adults face a disproportionate risk of death during natural disasters. A 2019 audit by the California State Auditor highlighted the critical gap in emergency management agencies' ability to support these vulnerable populations, revealing a lack of guidelines for assisting these individuals in cases of emergency. Recently, wildfires in Southern California claimed the lives of several individuals with disabilities, many of whom were over the age of 70. Despite the longstanding dangers faced by this community, the state has repeatedly failed to take meaningful action.

“SB 837 (Reyes) aims to address this urgent issue and ensure that we prevent further tragedies. This bill will require Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness training tailored to the needs of older adults and people with

disabilities, equipping them with the knowledge and resources necessary to stay safe before, during, and after an emergency. Additionally, it will prioritize funding for area agencies on aging and independent living centers that provide critical transportation and evacuation services during emergencies under the California Disaster Assistance Act.”

Aging and Disability Resource Connections

In 2003, the federal Administration for Community Living and the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services established a joint funding opportunity through the Aging and Disability Resource Connection initiative. This initiative was designed to provide visible and trusted sources of information, one-on-one counseling, and streamlined access to long-term services and supports.

In 2015, the California Department of Aging established the Aging and Disability Resource Connection and an advisory committee to engage stakeholders in identifying and implementing strategies to strengthen, sustain, and expand Aging and Disability Resource Connection services throughout the state. The committee is the primary advisor to the California Department of Aging in the ongoing development and implementation of the state’s Aging and Disability Resource Connections. Committee members include representatives from the California Departments of Aging, Health Care Services, Rehabilitation, and Veterans Affairs, as well as representatives of providers and advocates in the long-term services and supports community. California’s Aging and Disability Resource Connection program was codified by AB 1200 (Cervantes, Chapter 618, Statutes of 2017).

The California Department of Aging contracts with local area agencies on aging and independent living centers, which coordinate a variety of supportive services to seniors and adults with disabilities. Not all area agencies on aging provide Aging and Disability Resource Connection services. Anyone, regardless of age, income, or disability, may receive Aging and Disability Resource Connection services.

Aging and Disability Resource Connection services may include:

- Enhanced information and referral services, such as comprehensive resource information, follow-ups, and “warm hand-off” referrals.
- Options counseling, such as assisting in identifying goals and needs through person-centered counseling and coordinating access to public and private-funded long-term services and supports in the community.
- Short-term service coordination, including expedited access to services and supports for individuals at risk of institutionalization, generally for 90 days or less, until a longer-term plan is in place.
- Transition services for people who are currently in a hospital, nursing facility, or other institution and wishes to receive long-term services and supports at home or in a community-based setting.

Natural Disasters and Emergencies

Natural disasters include earthquakes, floods, extreme heat and all types of severe weather. The Environmental Protection Agency classifies wildfires as natural disasters, though not all wildfires are the result of natural events. California has experienced several devastating fires in recent years, including the Palisades Fire in 2025 and the Camp Fire in 2018. Natural disasters can occur anywhere, but they do not impact all populations equally. Research shows that “the oldest adults seem more likely to be displaced due to multiple disasters, and many older adults who are displaced face health hazards and disability: such as food and water shortages, loss of electricity, and unsanitary conditions, isolation and mental health impacts, and both cognitive and physical disabilities.”¹ United States Census Bureau data shows that once displaced, 21% of people with disabilities never return home. This is four times the rate for persons without disabilities. These disproportionate impacts highlight the need for increased focus on these populations in training and resources to ensure they are protected during natural disasters and emergencies.

Prior/Related Legislation:

AB 1069 (Bains, Chapter 445, Statutes of 2025) requires as part of disaster planning and response, an area agency on aging, independent living center, or an Aging and Disability Resource Connection program have access to an emergency shelter in order to ensure older adults and persons with disabilities receive continuous services and necessary support.

SB 352 (Reyes, Chapter 120, Statutes of 2025), as heard by this Committee, was almost identical to this bill prior to it being amended out of this committee’s jurisdiction.

COMMENTS

The recent fires in Los Angeles highlighted the need to improve disaster and emergency response and evacuation plans for the elderly and persons with disabilities. The median age of those killed in the fires was 77 and at least one-third had mobility impairments. The average age of those who died in the 2018 Camp Fire was 72. This bill seeks to address the disproportionate impact natural disasters and emergencies have on older adults and disabled persons by increasing disaster and emergency training to support these vulnerable communities.

POSITIONS

Support:

None Received

Oppose:

None Received

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¹ <https://PMC12762612/>