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Language Access Inclusion in Pennsylvania Disaster Planning: Current State and Direction for the Future

As of 2021, 25.7 million, or 8% of people aged five or older living in the United States had limited English proficiency (LEP) (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2023). A limited English proficient individual is defined as a person 'who does not speak English as their primary language and who has a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English' (FEMA Policy, 2023). Several laws, policies, and directives outline the obligations of Emergency Management organizations to individuals with LEP (Lau v. Nichols, Stafford Act, PKEMRA). This poster will outline research focused on questions such as: How well are language access requirements outlined in Pennsylvania county-level Emergency Operations Plans? How well do Pennsylvania Emergency managers understand requirements and responsibilities related to language access? What are the leading challenges for Emergency Managers in providing language access to people with LEP? What strategies are Emergency Managers using or considering to improve language access within their Emergency Management program? The poster will assess extent of language access (LA) inclusion in Emergency Operations plans in counties where a significant number of LEP individuals reside and provide a review of

qualitative interviews with Emergency Management professionals to identify common challenges and best practices related to LA.

Presentation Theme: Disasters can disproportionately impact individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) due to needing help understanding evacuation notices or instructions, not understanding disaster relief providers impeding access to shelter or medical care, and not understanding available recovery supports (FEMA Policy, 2023). These disparities and legal and ethical imperatives require emergency managers to examine how to best serve individuals with LEP.

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