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**Floods Bring Coordination Between FEMA and Disability Organizations**

**COLORADO SPRINGS – Colo**. – As the floodwaters rose around the state of Colorado, so did pressure on the state to improve its emergency response for individuals with disabilities. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Office of Disability Integration and Coordination contacted the Nick DeSutter, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator at The Independence Center, for assistance in communication and synchronization of leaders within the states’ disability community.

“Communication is key,” said DeSutter. “What we learned from this experience is how to quickly align centers for independent living and disability agencies at large, while communicating within a region to immediately target real-time accessibility barriers. We also want to provide solutions during and after an active emergency incident.”

Independent Living Centers across Colorado, and numerous other disability-focused organizations, have decided to take this model of synchronization and examine what went well, areas that need improvement, and how to better prepare for future incidents affecting populations with disabilities.

“No one ever wants to see the state they live in be affected by any type of natural disaster, but it’s important to be prepared,” said DeSutter. “Our model centers around communication and is designed to support people with disabilities and make sure they’re informed.”

The FEMA Disability Integration and Coordination office serves the sole purpose of integrating and coordinating emergency preparedness, response and recovery for children and adults with disabilities and others with access and functional needs before, during and after a disaster.

For more information about The Independence Center visit [www.theindependencecenter.org](http://www.theindependencecenter.org/advocacy/emergency-prep).

**About the Independence Center:**

The IC was founded to assist people with disabilities to make changes in their lives that lead to independence in our community. We empower people with disabilities to live independently in the community through services such as home health, peer support, benefits counseling and access to assistive technology. We are a vigorous participant in local efforts to remove barriers for people with disabilities because we believe that people with disabilities should have the same civil rights, options and control over choices in their lives as people without disabilities. We provide skills training to empower people with disabilities to be well informed advocates and active citizens; to change laws, legislation, systems and attitudes that affect their independence.

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