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What If We're Ready? Erie County Launches "Ready, Steady, Safe" Campaign to Help Older Adults Prepare for Emergencies

ERIE COUNTY, NY – Erie County officials including Deputy County Executive Lisa Chimera, Commissioners Dr. Gale Burstein (Health), Daniel Neaverth Jr. (Homeland Security and Emergency Services) and Randall Hoak (Aging) gathered at the Erie County Public Safety Campus to launch a new preparedness initiative, *What if We're Ready?*

Developed during National Preparedness Month in partnership with COAD – Community Organizations Active in Disaster – and community partners such as the American Red Cross, the campaign provides practical tools and resources to help families, children and teens prepare for emergencies.

Building on that effort, Erie County Department for the Aging is introducing *Ready, Steady, Safe*, a program created to meet the unique needs of older adults who are often among the most vulnerable during disasters. The campaign focuses on three key steps:

- **READY** – Gather essentials such as medicines, glasses, hearing aids, important papers, food and water. Download the Ready Erie App for alerts and guidance.
- **STEADY** – Establish a trusted support network. Identify 2–3 people to check in with, share keys and plans and arrange transportation options in case of evacuation.
- **SAFE** – Stay connected by listening to official alerts, asking for help when needed and checking on neighbors.

Why It Matters

Older adults are more likely to be affected by disruptions to power, transportation or healthcare access during emergencies. For many, being prepared can mean the difference between remaining safe at home or facing a crisis that threatens health and independence. Even small steps—such as creating a checklist, updating emergency contacts or talking with a trusted neighbor—can make a big difference.

"Emergencies can be stressful at any age but planning ahead reduces fear and helps older adults stay safe and independent," said Randall Hoak, Commissioner of the Department for the Aging. "By making a plan, preparing a kit and practicing together, seniors and caregivers can protect themselves and one another."

County Executive Poloncarz added, “Preparedness is not one-size-fits-all. We want to make sure our older residents have the resources and support they need to feel confident and protected when emergencies occur.”

Deputy County Executive Chimera emphasized the importance of collaboration: “Older adults face unique challenges in emergencies—whether it’s managing health conditions, mobility, hearing or vision limitations or living alone. That’s why partnerships through COAD are critical. Nonprofits, faith-based organizations and service providers play a central role in keeping our seniors safe.”

“Preparedness is about empowerment,” said Dr. Gale Burstein, Commissioner of Health. “By taking small, regular, practical steps, older adults can prevent emergencies from becoming life-threatening situations.”

Tools and Resources

To make preparedness easy and accessible, Erie County Department for the Aging and COAD have created a *Ready, Steady, Safe* Fridge Card – a quick-reference tool with space to list three personal contacts and important emergency numbers. Cards are being distributed at senior centers and community events, with plans to include them in home-delivered meals programs to reach residents at higher risk.

The Department’s **University Express program** is also offering classes focused on emergency preparedness, including *Hands-Only CPR/AED Wellness* and *When and How to Call 911*. These free, interactive sessions give older adults practical skills and the confidence to respond effectively in emergencies—whether at home, in the community, or while caring for others.

Additional resources available through the Department for the Aging, Department of Health, and COAD include printable checklists, guidance on storing medications and documents, tips for transportation and pet support, fire safety guidance and emergency kit adaptations for medical or sensory needs.

Several senior centers—including Akron, Aurora, Cheektowaga, Delavan Grider, Grand Island and Tosh Collins—will be hosting the NYS Citizens Preparedness Course, a free program open to all community members. Led by the New York State National Guard, the course teaches how to build an emergency kit, create a family plan and stock essential supplies. Each participating family will receive a free preparedness backpack filled with vital disaster items. To find a class, visit **dhhs.ny.gov/citizen-preparedness-corps**.

Learn More

Preparedness resources and contacts can be found:

- On the Ready Erie App
- At erie.gov/aging/preparedness

- On Erie County's COAD website
- Directly through:
 - Preparedness and Children: <https://www3.erie.gov/health/kids-and-preparedness>
 - *Get Prepared, Stay Ready* video playlist: <https://www3.erie.gov/health/kids-and-preparedness>