

Access and Functional Needs: Overview of Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Presentation provided by

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Access & Functional Needs

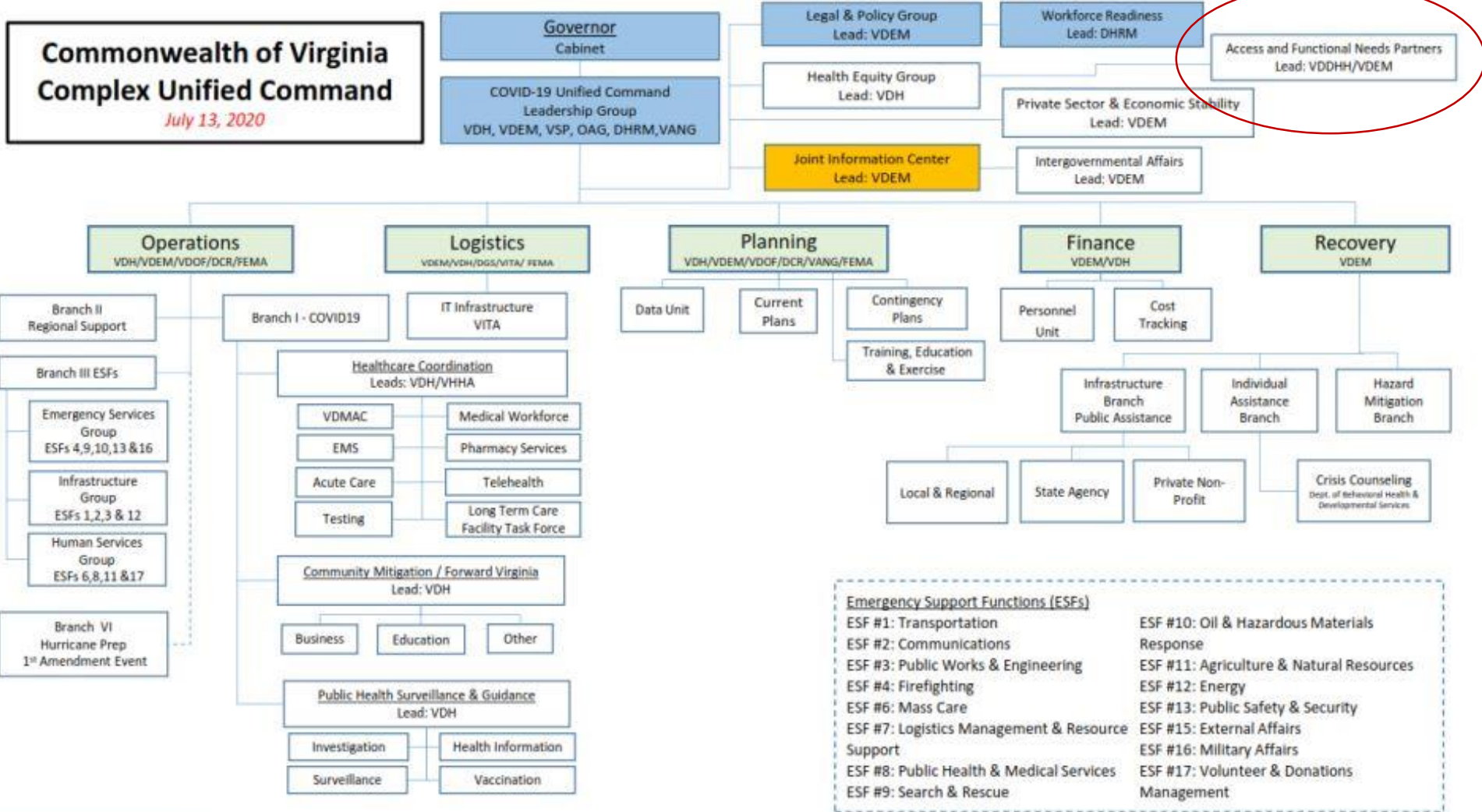
Access and Functional Needs demographics: Individuals with access and functional needs may include, but not limited to, people with disabilities, older adults, Limited English Proficiency, children, and persons with limited access to transportation.

The Access and Functional Needs Officer (AFNO) to the VEST for VDEM supports and assists the emergency operations center and incident management personnel on matters related to people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs (AFN). This is a command level position.

Supporting Virginia's COVID-19 Response

AFNO provided accessibility information, resources, and recommendations for best practices, to state, local, and private sector partners, including the Governor's office (Assistant Secretaries, Chief DEI Officer, VDEM, VDH, Office of Health Equity at VDH, Joint Information Center, and various state agencies as requested, referring concerns to appropriate channels as needed. Also collaborated with FEMA's Office of Disability Integration to network with other states in the region.

COVID-19 Organizational Chart



The COVID-19 pandemic
“unmasked” the fact that
accessibility is critical for health
and wellbeing.

Accessibility is lifesaving.

Accessibility must be “baked in.”

This includes...

Communication
& Information

Physical spaces

Digital spaces

Transportation

Operationalizing Accessibility

Communication & Information: Press conferences interpreted in ASL and Spanish; translation of materials; captioning; outreach to community stakeholders

Digital spaces: Accessibility of state agency websites and content (screen reader compatibility, captioning, etc), Section 508 compliance for digital documents and messaging creatives; using Plain Language;

Physical spaces: ADA compliance for testing and vaccination sites

Transportation: options for getting to testing and vaccination sites for those who cannot or do not drive, or bringing resources to them

...these are just a few examples

Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee

“It is the mission of the Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee (AFNAC) to work with the whole community to better prepare individuals, localities, and the Commonwealth to meet the needs of people with access and functional needs during a disaster. To this end, the Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee shall provide guidance and recommendations to the State Coordinator of Emergency Management (through the Chief Deputy Coordinator) and others regarding state level preparedness, response, and recovery planning.” (predated COVID-19 activation)

- Board for People with Disabilities
- Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
- Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
- Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
- Department of Education
- Department of Emergency Management
- Department of Health
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Department of Medical Assistance Services
- Department of Rail and Public Transportation
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Veterans Services
- Office of the Attorney General

Activities

AFN Partners: informal network of state, local, and private sector organization representatives who contributed situational awareness information, access concerns, and needs for support. Expanded reach during COVID from regional to statewide.

Facilitated AFN Partners calls (more than 50 held), Drafted ongoing call notes, agendas, and forwarding of resources to AFN Partners, follow-up on Needs & Concerns raised on AFN Partners calls

AFN Partners included:
AFNAC represented agencies
Centers for Independent Living
Local governments
Emergency Managers
Refugee organizations

Red Cross
FEMA Office of Disability Integration
Office of Health Equity
Partners in Prayer and Prevention
Disability Resource Centers
And more

March 2020 to March 2022, participated in over 400 COVID-19 response meetings including:

VDEM Command and General staff

Health Equity workgroup leadership

Equity Leadership Taskforce

Overarching Communications workgroup

Accessible Communication subgroup

Health Equity Guidebook for Testing and Tracing development workgroup

Marketing vendor campaign feedback SME committees, RFP reviews

Joint Information Center sync calls

VDH Testing:

Touchpoint calls

Operations

Governor's Testing Advisory Committee – Vulnerable Populations

Antigen testing for homeless populations

VDH Vaccination

Vaccine advisory workgroup

Training development team

CVC planning sync

CVC Vendor advisory meetings

Homebound & vulnerable populations strategy group

Call center accessibility including ASL

VDH COVID Partners calls

Vulnerable Populations outreach director check-ins

Crisis Standards of Care Stakeholders group

Telehealth Workgroup

Long Term Care Facility Task Force

Participated in drafting/creation or revision of documents including but not limited to:

- Communication Accessibility guidance documents
<https://www.vaemergency.gov/communication-accessibility-guidance/>
- [Health Equity Guidebook document and accompanying checklist](#) (operationalizing HE and AFN considerations for testing and tracing)
- Crisis Standards of Care/Scarce Resource Allocation ([document](#), [FAQs](#))
- Hurricane Evacuation Guide update for community members
- Worked with the State Sheltering Taskforce to craft approach and processes for non-congregate sheltering during COVID-19 social distancing conditions; drafting/updating of Shelter Plan and Annexes

- Connected FEMA ODI & SAVE site team with local AFN related contacts & with the Homebound strategy team
- Webinars for MRC staff training, provided AFN content for VDH training modules for vaccination site staff/volunteers
- [Vaccination site AFN guidance](#) document for distribution by VDH, provided ADA checklists, signage templates, interpreting vendor information for use during planning
- VDDHH Created Virginia versions of the [COVID-19 Visual Communication Tool](#) and the [Visor sized COVID-19 Communication Card](#)
- VDDHH efforts include our [COVID-19 DHH Resources page](#); ASL translations of vaccination related information releases (partnering with VDH) included on our [COVID-19 playlist on YouTube](#)

Of Note...

- Briefed National Governors Association's Homeland Security subcommittee regarding AFN considerations and activities in Virginia
- Briefed the FEMA Chief Administrator on AFN activities
- Briefed Governor's constituency outreach directors group on AFN
- Disability Community Conversation webinar held by the Governor's office and Office of Health Equity

- Participation in After Action Reviews
- Facilitated the establishment of ASL-to-ASL direct communication access for the Vaccinate Virginia call center (first in the nation for a vaccination information line)
- Received 2020 Governor's Honor Award for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for work with the Health Equity Taskforce Leadership

Without accessibility, there cannot truly be equity or inclusion

After Action...

Recommended that AFN be given further consideration by VDEM:

- White paper recommended formalizing the job description and duties for AFNO
- Establishment of AFN Coordinator roles to be assigned to personnel from various state agencies for support in the field

Of continued concern:

Long COVID / newly disabled population

Continued / extended “shelter in place” for vulnerable individuals

State & local government website accessibility compliance

Backsliding / loss of institutional knowledge of accessibility principles