

Public Safety & Emergency Management Policies and Priorities

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) believes that emergency preparedness and public safety are best achieved through a holistic and regional approach. Public safety and emergency management take the coordinated efforts of numerous jurisdictions to successfully protect both metropolitan and rural regions of the nation. To promote safer, healthier and more resilient communities, NARC urges the federal government to support regional efforts to coordinate planning, response, and recovery efforts.

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

The availability of prescribed and unprescribed, legal and illegal substances has led to millions of Americans experiencing alcohol/drug problems and the related outcomes that arise as a result of substance misuse disorder. Opioid misuse has emerged as the single most significant alcohol/drug problem for persons with substance misuse disorders. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the misuse of drugs has killed more than 67,165 people in the twelve months ending June 2019¹. Substance misuse presents major problems for cities, counties and regions everywhere. In response, local, and tribal governments have been aggressively developing policies and programs to address substance misuse. NARC supports a significant state, federal and local response to the misuse of alcohol and drugs, generally, and prescribed and unprescribed opioids, specifically.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Provide guidance on how funds under the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) of 2016 and the 21st Century Cures Act are to be spent by local law enforcement, fire and emergency medical personnel.
- Require states to submit a plan on how they will use unspent FY 2017 and 2018 21st Century Cures Act and CARA funding they distribute to local programs for prevention and treatment of substance abuse.
- Include statutory language in future substance abuse disorder prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery funding that would require federal agencies to allocate funds for competitive grants to local governments and regional councils.
- Require states to have a transparent funding distribution process for the federal dollars being dispersed at the local level.

¹ Ahmad FB, Escobedo LA, Rossen LM, Spencer MR, Warner M, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts. National Center for Health Statistics. Centers for Disease Control or Prevention, 2020.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS AND INTEROPERABILITY

NARC believes that a dependable, robust, resilient and interoperable communications system is imperative if municipalities, counties and regions are to effectively communicate during natural and man-made disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Ensure dependable, robust, and resilient communications systems that function across municipal and county boundaries, including the 9-1-1, the public emergency call system.
- Preserve the local government and regional council role in public safety communications systems so that local governments may take advantage of technological innovation and result in improved communications efforts and practices within localities and across regions.
- Support interoperability as it is necessary to ensure that first responders throughout a region are able to communicate with one another during public emergencies.
- Transmit vital information to emergency response personnel among all levels of government without interference and delay is key to communications for public safety.
- Promote interagency sharing of information and equipment during emergencies among all levels of government including regions is critical if localities and regions are going to be able to address public safety concerns during emergencies.
- Enable local governments to improve public safety services will always be a key component to reducing crime, planning for and predicting disasters, and responding to emergencies.
- Allocate sufficient communications spectrum to municipalities for public safety use in order to enhance interoperable communications among public safety and service agencies, and to ensure the ability of local governments to meet their responsibilities for public safety and emergency services both within their localities and across regions.
- Involve cities, counties and regions as it develops standards for the delivery of emergency information on communications systems.
- Take immediate action to provide local governments with the broadcast channels needed to enhance their communications capabilities.
- Ensure that public safety training programs provide a level of consistency among all agencies, which are essential to implement mutual aid and regional cooperation agreements.
- Support funding for the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) created under the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012.
- Encourage efforts by FirstNet to work with state, local, and regional organizations, as well as the first responder community, to ensure that funding, coverage, and use are addressed in all FirstNet initiatives.

CYBERSECURITY

NARC shares the growing concern that the number of attacks on local and regional cyber networks has become one of the most serious economic and national security threats our nation faces. Cyber-based infiltrations of the nation's electric grid, water, sewer, and other critical infrastructure as well as data breaches that have resulted in the release of significant amounts of personal information have already occurred. The cyber network attacks and data breaches have left behind software that could be used to disrupt local systems. Localities and regions that manage critical infrastructure such as utilities and transit systems, as well as maintain sensitive databases on individuals, public works, and industries are at considerable risk of cyberattacks.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Disseminate cyber intrusion detection and prevention tools to intergovernmental partners, and be permitted, when requested, to provide assistance to localities and other entities in addressing and repairing damages from a major cyber-attack and for advice on building better defenses.
- Extend services offered by the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center to state and local governments and establish a new federal grant program designed to assist state and local governments in protecting our digital assets against the threat of cyber-attacks or data breaches.

GUN VIOLENCE

NARC believes that the increase in gun violence and mass shootings presents a serious local and regional problem that must be addressed in a systematic and thoughtful way. As of October 31, 2019, 370 mass shootings have occurred in which four or more individuals were killed. Thus far, 1,466 people were injured and 441 have died, for a total of 1,907 victims. In 2018, there were more than 48,875 gun-related incidents, killing 12,217 people and wounding 24,877; and after several years of decline in the rate of gun violence, many cities and counties around the country are now reporting a significant rise in the level of gun violence, including mass shootings. This increase in gun violence and mass shootings has placed significant burdens on city and county law enforcement and the regions in which these incidents have taken place.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Conduct comprehensive research to identify the underlying causes that lead to violence, and mass shootings in communities and the factors that contribute to an increase in violence, including gun violence.
- Provide funding for education and training for law enforcement on how best to address gun violence and mass shootings within their communities.
- Appoint a bipartisan commission that consists of federal, state, and local officials, gun rights advocates, survivors of gun violence, law enforcement officials, and medical and mental health providers to recommend legislation to reduce mass shootings in the United States.

- Grant local agencies access to national criminal and mental health records so that they are better able to determine whether individuals should have access to firearms.

DISASTER RESPONSE, PLANNING AND COORDINATION

NARC supports the role regional councils have and are playing by acting as the coordinating body during major disasters by providing cities and counties with an effective and coordinated way to plan for, mitigate and respond to disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Formally recognize that regional councils serve an important role in disaster response and should make funds available to region councils that are responsible for local government coordination.
- Establish a competitive grant program for regional planning organizations to enhance emergency planning and response at the regional level.
- Prioritize grant funding based on regional or multi-jurisdictional planning and collaborative efforts.
- Support the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) grant program, which establishes a strategic direction for the enhancement of regional response capabilities and capacities.
- Streamline federal homeland security grant application and planning requirements.
- Include public safety and emergency preparedness as key elements of resilient communities.
- Provide funding on the basis of identified needs, particularly for critical infrastructure and multi-state regions.
- Encourage and provide funding for regional data collection, greater use of GIS and the use of regional scenario planning tools when planning for disasters.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION

Ensuring the safety of the general public during a natural disaster is the responsibility of state and local governments and regions. Significant resources are required to ensure the livability of communities after a natural or man-made disaster. Such resources are needed for local communities and regions to plan for disasters, mitigate the impacts of environmental changes, and recover after a disaster.

RECOMMENDATION:

The federal government should:

- Provide sufficient funds for disaster preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery so as to improve public health and safety, support environmental stewardship, and ensure social and economic security for residents after a disaster.
- Incent local and regional communities recovering from natural disasters to take preventative steps to ensure that public facilities are built outside of flood zones, away from wildfire prone areas, and other

disaster prone areas by adopting FEMA’s Consensus-Based Codes, Specifications and Standards for Public Assistance policy.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

NARC believes that emergency management decisions should be driven by a consensus-based, inclusive process that all stakeholders use and trust. Regional councils can provide an important coordination function when making emergency management decisions. Regions should be encouraged to develop, in cooperation with local, state, and federal governments, comprehensive emergency management systems that include preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery activities in order to minimize the destructive impact of all types of disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Invest in public safety and emergency preparedness so as to strengthen localities and enhance local emergency preparedness and crime-fighting efforts.
- Maintain federal investments in resources critical to enabling local law enforcement to adequately provide for public safety during emergencies.
- Fully fund the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) program, the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), the Assistance to Firefighters grant programs and for disaster preparedness, prevention, recovery, and response for all-hazard threats.
- Provide increased disaster funds for communities to assist with emergency management, including disaster funds for communities either trying to prevent or clean up from fires.
- Continue to provide leadership in the development of coordinated emergency management systems by offering cities, counties and regions financial support for and technical assistance when developing such plans.
- Coordinate emergency management systems through a robust, sustained, and consistent process.
- Recognize all stakeholders – local and state governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations – are included when developing these systems and that regional councils provide an important and necessary coordination function.
- Adopt legislation that formalizes the role of regional planning organizations in emergency preparedness and response similar to that of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in transportation planning, implementation, and capacity building.
- Provide and allow flexibility at the local and regional levels so that local governments have the authority to provide and maintain communications before, during, and after a disaster or emergency.

- Train and equip first responders and the public and private medical community, requiring federal agencies to develop and coordinate pre- and post-disaster mitigation programs for the types of emergencies they manage, and allow maximum flexibility at the local and regional level.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM (NFIP)

NARC supports the National Flood Insurance Program. The National Flood Insurance Program was created in 1968 to make affordable flood insurance available to homeowners, renters, and business owners. This insurance was developed in conjunction with flood insurance rate maps for floodplain management by participating communities in order to help local communities mitigate flooding and reduce the liability borne by local governments and elected officials. Because there is still no viable private market for homeowners and businesses to acquire sufficient flood insurance coverage it is incumbent on the federal government to maintain this program to ensure that property owners and renters have access to viable insurance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Reauthorize the NFIP and to keep flood insurance rates affordable for primary, non- primary and business properties while balancing the fiscal solvency of the program.
- Work with states, regions and localities to develop an incentive-based disaster insurance and mitigation system that would incentivize property owners to retrofit existing structure to reduce future losses from natural disasters.
- Fund mitigation activities at the local and regional levels to enable training, mapping, assessments of technical capability, and implementation of response and recovery plans.
- Continue to upgrade the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) generated and specified Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS) for floodplain management by participating communities that reflect emerging trends due to climate change and sea level rise.
- Research and fund new and accurate flood maps as they are crucial to assessing flood hazards, flood risks, and the data from these maps help guide mitigation efforts.
- Support a transparent and efficient process for updating flood-maps.
- Ensure that proper funding is allocated to update flood insurance risks maps as they help to establish areas that are eligible to receive grant funding for mitigation efforts.
- Improve flood mapping to ensure that it reflects actual risks based on emerging trends due to climate change and sea level rise.
- Expand the National Flood Insurance Program to cover wildfires, earthquakes and other natural disasters for which there is no available private sector insurance.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA)

NARC supports FEMA and the work that it does to mitigate disasters and address them when they occur. The National Advisory Council (NAC) advises FEMA's Administrator on all aspects of emergency management, including preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation for natural disasters, acts of terrorism and other manmade disasters. While the legislation establishing the NAC requires municipal and county representation, it does not require regional representation. The current NAC includes at least six city and county officials but does not include any regional representation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The federal government should:

- Include regional council representation on FEMA's Regional Advisory Councils and National Advisory Council.
- Conform response and reimbursement rates with the Stafford Act, including those funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), various cabinet level departments, and other agencies responsible for providing assistance before, during, and after a natural or man-made disasters.
- Establish standardized guidelines for post disaster assistance applications for FEMA and other agencies such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure that these standardized guidelines are known and adhered to.