

A background image of a vast field of golden wheat under a clear blue sky. In the top left corner, there is a solid white horizontal bar.

From Clinic to Community: Advancing Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults in Eastern Oregon

- *Patty Barfield*
- *EOCCO Fall conference*
- *October 16, 2026*

Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP)

- Interprofessional team passionate about improving care for older adults across Oregon
- Partnership, training, and education
- Funded by HRSA (U1Q53044)
- Informed by community needs
- No COI to disclose



Learning Objectives

Recognize	Recognize factors that increase vulnerability among older adults during emergencies and disasters.
Identify	Identify practical preparedness strategies that can be implemented across healthcare, public health, and community settings.
Describe	Describe opportunities for interdisciplinary and community collaboration to support older adults before, during, and after disasters.



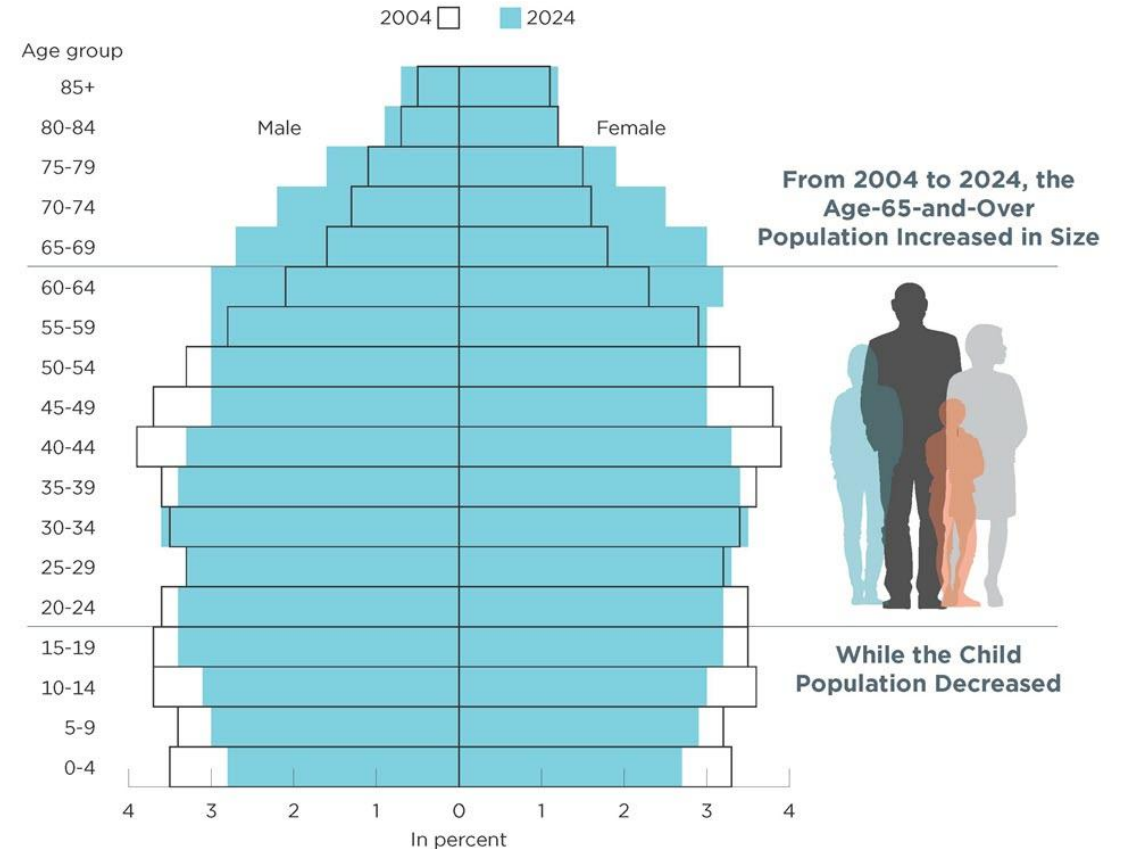
Road Map

- Why focus on older adults?
- Our rural context
- The 4Ms framework
- Key takeaways

Why Older Adults?

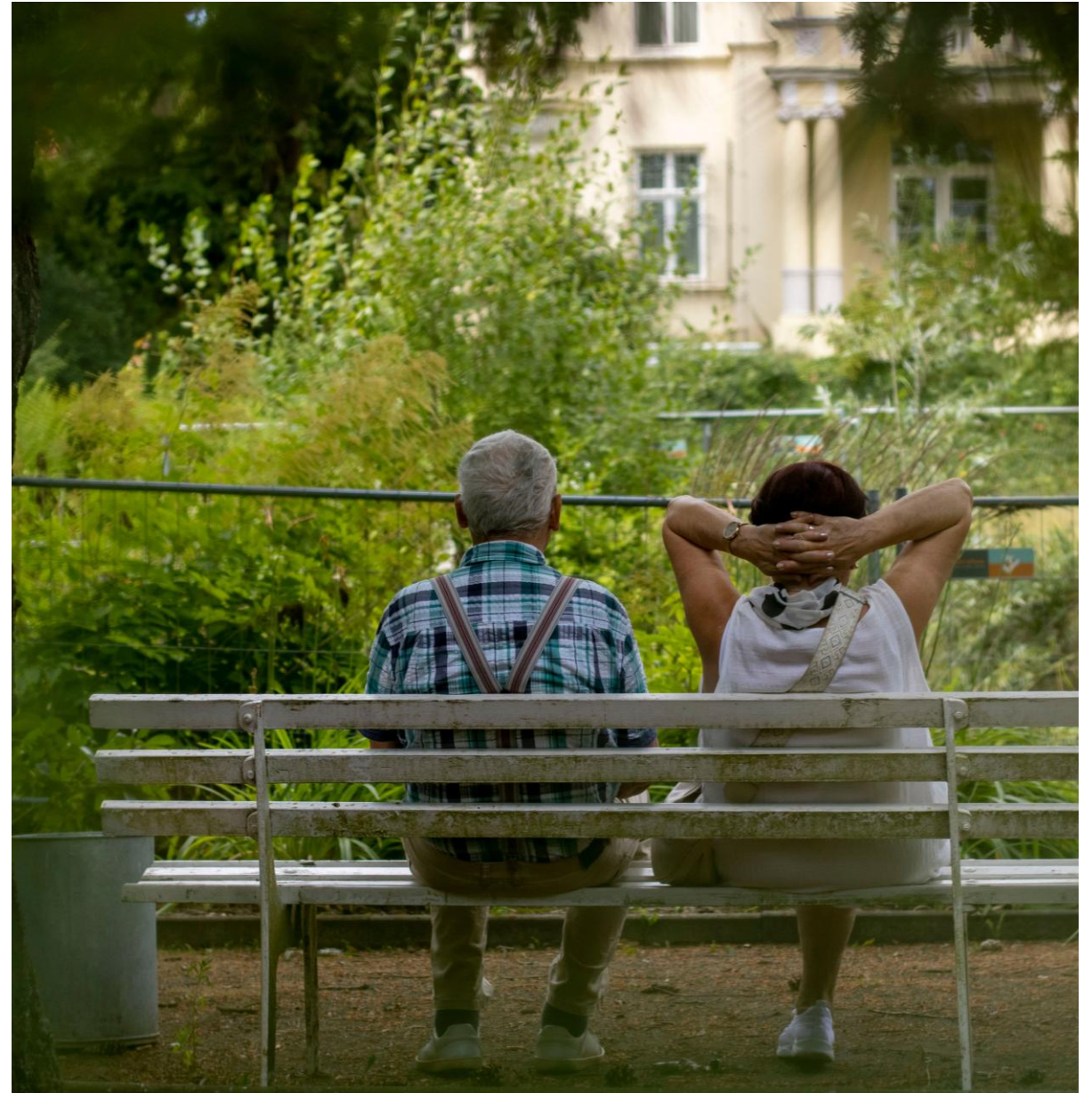
- Shifting **demographics**
- 20% of rural residents are 65+ compared to 16% of urban
- Intersection of **aging**, aging related **health issues**, social **isolation**, and limited rural **infrastructure**

Population of Older Adults Now Comparable to Population of Children



The Aging Process

- Physiological Alterations
- Chronic & Complex Health Conditions
- Medication & Medical Needs
- Functional & Mobility Challenges
- Cognitive & Sensory Changes



Older Adults & Disaster Outcomes

- **Pacific Northwest Heat Wave (2021):** Approximately 1,000 people died, with 78% of victims were over 60 yrs. (Kohon et al., 2023)
- **Camp Fire (2018):** 85% of fatalities were in persons over 60 yrs. with an average age of 72 (Bénichou et al. 2020)
- **Hurricane Sandy (2012):** Longitudinal data indicates individuals 65+ who lived in flooded areas had a 9% higher risk of death compared to those in non-flooded areas, demonstrating long-term, rather than just immediate, mortality risks. (Keenan et al. 2025)
- **Hurricane Katrina (2005):** 74% of Katrina deaths occurred among those over 60 yrs. (Brunkard et al., 2008)



Rural Realities

- Geographic distance
- Healthcare access
- Social isolation
- Infrastructure disruptions
- Resource limitations
- Preparedness belongs to all



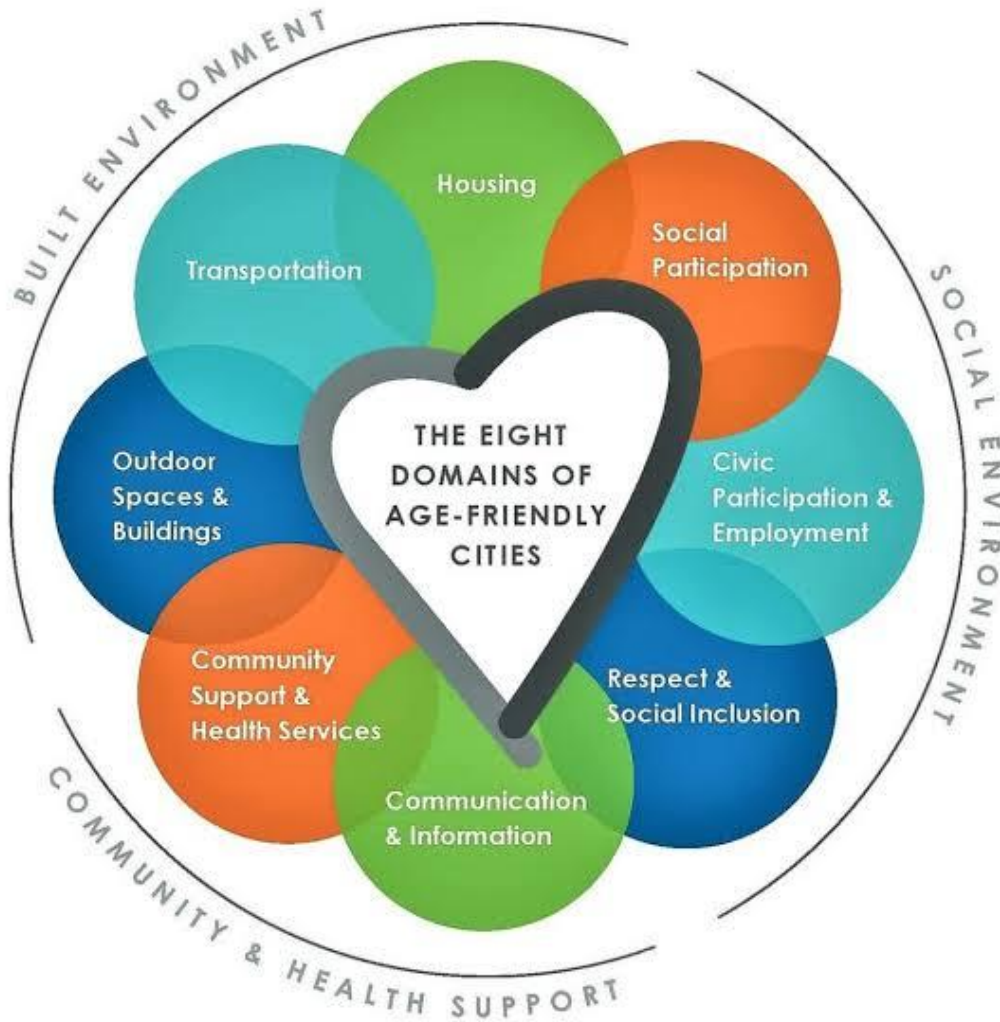
Rural Cultural Considerations

- Strong attachment to home, land, livestock, or community → reluctance to evacuate
- Fear of losing property or animals during evacuation
- Desire for independence and self-sufficiency
- Distrust of government systems or outside responders

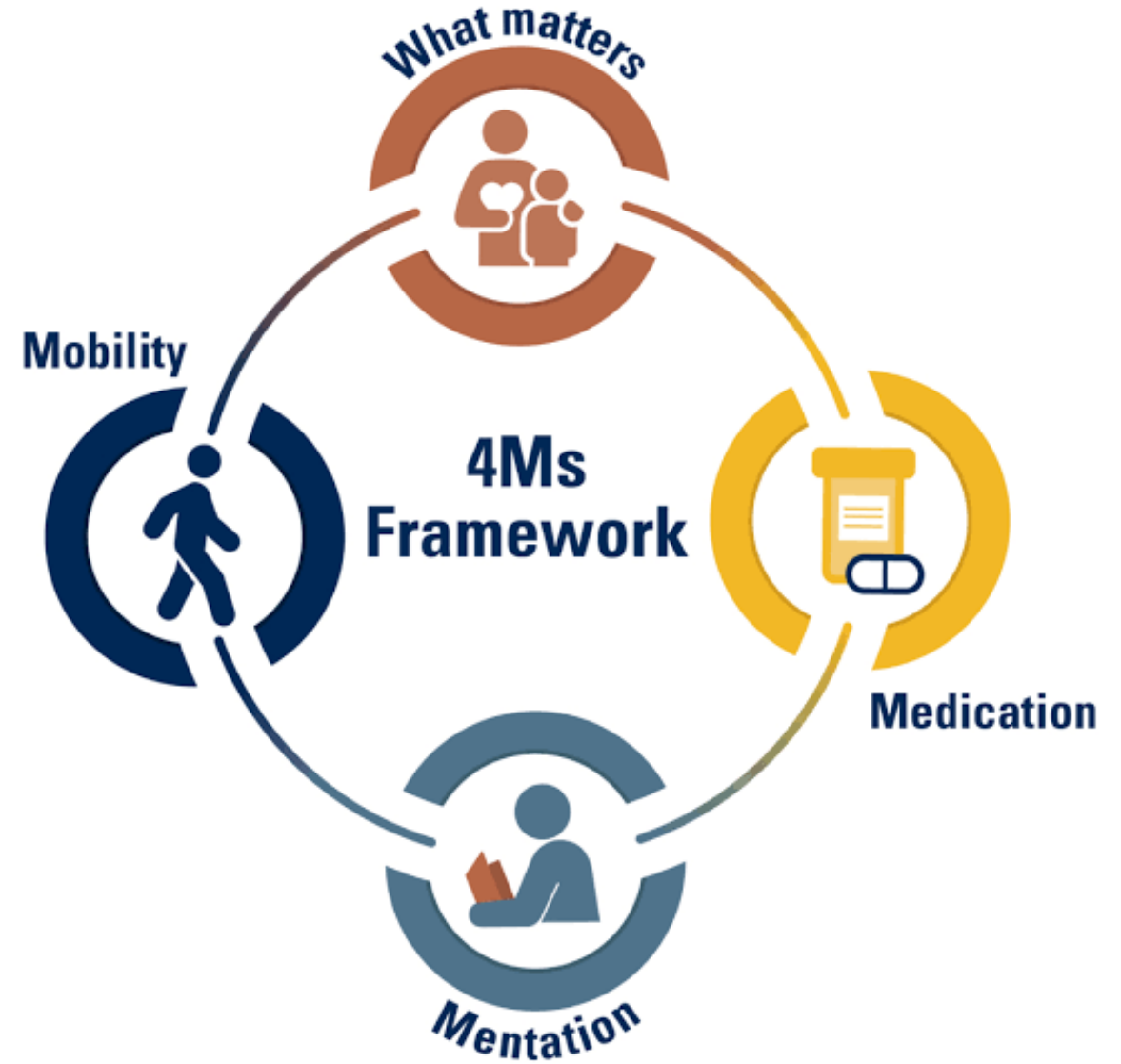


The Power of Connection

- Older rural adults rely on support from multiple sectors:
 - Healthcare
 - Public health
 - Emergency management
 - Community-based organizations
 - Caregivers, families, neighbors
 - Animal health and care



The 4M's: A Shared Framework for Emergency Preparedness



Applying the 4M's: Sam's Story

Sam is a single 78-year-old man living in Grant County with a medical history of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cataracts, and mild dementia.

He was recently hospitalized after multiple falls at home. He declined to move to a higher level of care and still lives alone at home.

There is a wildfire in the region of Sam's home. You have been tasked with alerting community members.

You arrive at Sam's home. He appreciates your concern but states, "This is where I belong, my home is here, my animals are here, I'm not going anywhere."



What Matters



Ask what matters

Understand the priorities, goals, and values

Align plans, services, and supports

Revisit what matters as circumstances change



What Matters Preparedness Strategies

Ask

Document

Identify caregivers & trusted
contacts

Create a “What Matters Most” card

Mentation

Consider understanding and decision-making

Recognize impacts of stress, fear, illness, sensory and cognitive changes

Adapt communication

Support informed decision-making



How do you think Sam is processing the situation?

Mentation Preparedness Strategies



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- Recognize, assess, and document cognitive impairment risks
 - Identify trusted caregivers and support persons in advance
 - Prepare a comfort kit with familiar and calming items
 - Plan for identification and location support if wandering is a risk
 - Practice calm, clear, and structured communication approaches
 - Document cognitive baseline, preferences, and response recommendations

Keep in Mind!



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- Healthy older brains have more **difficulty multi-tasking & word finding**
 - **Processing speed slows** --> takes longer for older adults to interpret heard information
 - **Response times slow** --> takes longer to compose and deliver a response
 - Healthy ears **struggle to hear higher pitches** and multiple common consonants
 - 's', 'f', 'th', 'sh', 'ch', 'h', 't', 'k', 'p'
 - **Word discrimination** can be more challenging
 - Background noises increase hearing challenges

Medication

Sam's Medical History

- ✓ Heart disease
- ✓ Diabetes
- ✓ Hypertension
- ✓ Cataracts
- ✓ Mild dementia

What does Sam need?

Medications?

Medical supplies/equipment?

How vulnerable is his access?

Where are his meds stored?

What happens if access is disrupted?

What is the backup plan?

Does he have refills available? Emergency supply?

Pharmacy information?

> How do we ensure continuity of medications and treatment during a period of disruption?

Medication Preparedness Strategies



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- **7-to-14-day supply** of all essential medications in labeled containers.
 - Include a **current medication list** with:
 - Names, dosages, frequency
 - Prescribing providers
 - Allergies and adverse reactions
 - Pack medical equipment: pill organizers, insulin supplies, inhalers, etc.
 - Store meds in a waterproof, temperature-safe container.
 - Notify pharmacies in advance to **arrange for emergency refills or transfers.**
 - Have copies of **insurance and prescription cards** ready.
 - Maintain a list of high-alert medications.



Mobility

- Safety
- Accessibility
- Function
- [Video](#)

Mobility Preparedness Strategies

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- **Note or assess mobility level and fall risk**
 - **Document mobility assistance and equipment needs**
 - **Identify home evacuation hazards and support requirements**
 - **Keep mobility aids in strategic locations**
 - **Plan for transportation and evacuation**
 - **Know available community transportation resources**
 - **Locate older adults closest to shelter dining, restroom, and supports**

Key Takeaways:

A Shared Framework for Preparedness

4M	Preparedness Questions
What Matters	What is most important to this person?
Mentation	How is the person understanding, processing, and responding to information?
Medication	What treatments, medications, or supplies must continue during a disruption?
Mobility	How will the person remain safe, functional, and connected to needed supports?

In Summary

- Growing population of older adults
- Aging and rural residency increase vulnerabilities
- Rural communities depend upon connected services and sectors
- A shared understanding and framework improves emergency preparedness



References

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Thank you!

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