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Dr. Mahler,

I applaud and appreciate your efforts to develop a report for presentation to the UN General Assembly to better protect older adults from the risks associated with climate change. I am a former Director of Livable Communities at AARP (the United States' largest advocacy organization dedicated to older adults), and author of the forthcoming book, *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation* (Island Press, October 2023), and feel strongly that far more attention must be paid to this issue.

I am motivated by the tragic reality that in 18 years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, Louisiana – in which 2/3 of the nearly 1000 people who died were older adults – the US has not yet solved the challenge of how to reduce risk for this ever-growing cohort. In countless climate-fueled wildfires, storms, and hurricanes since that time – most recently, Hurricane Ian which ravaged the Southeast US and winter storms which hit Buffalo, New York, both in 2022 – we continue to see that older adults represent a disproportionate share of deaths. In addition, changing conditions that don't fully rise to the level of a disaster – such as more recurring flooding, and longer periods of hot weather – impact the health and well-being of older adults in ways that make them more vulnerable to climate change. Given the projection that older adults will outnumber children for the first time ever in 2034 in the US, the urgency of addressing this challenge could not be greater. I fully expect that your forthcoming report will describe these dynamics.

As such, it is my privilege to share with you the following information which supports your inquiries about frameworks, participation, and intersectionality.

Relevant FEMA/AARP Resources

Under my leadership, AARP and the US Federal Emergency Management Agency collaborated to create two new co-branded publications to build the understanding among practitioners about older adults' needs in disasters. Those reports are the [AARP Disaster Resilience Tool Kit](#) (July 2022) and the [FEMA Guide to Expanding Mitigation: Making the Connection to Older Adults](#) (May 2022). Both include data, insights, and practitioner perspectives – as well as solutions – to better serve older adults during disasters, and I encourage you to draw on them for your research.

These documents together make an effort to identify shortcomings in the United States' current approach to disaster management and share strategies for improved collaboration that better supports older adults' safety and well-being in times of disaster.

Learnings from Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation

In addition, I have written a comprehensive overview of this issue myself recently, which I encourage you to draw on. That table of contents is as follows:

- Introduction: Why It's Essential to Approach Resilience through a Lens of Aging
- Chapter 1: Who Are Older Adults?
- Chapter 2: Climate-Enhanced Disasters Look (and Feel) Different Based on Age and Other Vulnerabilities

- Chapter 3: Moving toward Climate Resilience for All Ages
- Chapter 4: Strategies for Age-Friendly Resilience
- Chapter 5: Community Resilience for All Ages in Action
 - State of New York
 - City of Portland and Multnomah County, Oregon
 - City of New Orleans, Louisiana
- Chapter 6: Lessons Learned and How to Move Forward

I make the case that communities must evaluate their resilience efforts through a lens of aging, and center the needs of older adults in their planning and implementation – not only related to disasters, but to community-wide infrastructure decision-making as well.

I argue that the WHO/AARP Network of Age Friendly States and Communities provides a useful framework for organizing this approach at the local and state level. While it is not the only planning framework available (the Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction framework is another), it does offer an array of concrete examples of how communities in the US are currently addressing the issue of disaster resilience. Moreover, the interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral approach that undergirds many age-friendly efforts is a necessary precondition to achieve greater risk reduction for older adults, as the task of doing so falls to those in the aging services, health care, emergency management, land use planning, and energy/utility professions (among others). Particularly on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic many members of the age-friendly network have begun to explicitly integrate disaster preparedness, emergency management, or climate resilience efforts into their efforts – but much more is needed in order to truly deliver better outcomes for older adults.

I would draw your attention – and that of the United Nations’ General Assembly – to the following examples of existing leadership across the US, described in greater detail in my book.

- San Francisco, California -- The City and County of San Francisco’s Action Plan for an Age and Disability Friendly San Francisco identifies resiliency and emergency preparedness as an area of focus, committing to strengthen individual-level preparedness, community-level resilience, and greater understanding among emergency responders of the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. In the plan, San Francisco has focused on developing and implementing an outreach campaign through community-based organizations to encourage registration with AlertSF; ensuring that there is a strategy in place for evacuating people with mobility challenges in multi-story buildings; and assessing how to best reach vulnerable residents that are not connected to existing social service networks.¹
- Austin, Texas -- A member of the age-friendly network since 2012, Austin updated its approach in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and Winter Storm Uri (February 2021) which revealed gaps in its age-friendly approach. In response, Austin committed to creating a new working group to explore the need for specific City of Austin emergency preparedness plans for older adults, and better engaging aging-related nonprofits to create and distribute emergency toolkits while also increasing coordination among service agencies to make it easier for older adults to get (and give) help.²
- Longwood, Florida -- Longwood has committed to several specific activities with an eye to reducing risk for older adults during disasters, including educating residents on disaster management and emergency preparedness, better coordination to relocate elderly residents to shelters, and bolstering use of a service called Reverse 911 to inform people—particularly those without internet service or home computers—about risks of danger during storms and to advise them about local shelters.³

- Washington, DC – The nation’s capital is now in its third phase of age-friendly work since joining the WHO network in 2012, and commits to addressing Emergency Preparedness and Resilience as an explicit part of their age-friendly plan. Citing projected growth in the number of residents 60 and over, the district commits to strengthening its opt-in AlertDC system to reach more registered residents through email, phone, and text, with updates on traffic and public safety, and training older residents through the Community Emergency Response Team volunteer program, which requires five three-hour classes for certification on how to respond in emergency situations. ⁴

In addition, I would share a few lessons learned described in my book to prompt further discussion and action:

- Actively engage older adults and their advocates at the planning table
- Plan for the mobility and ability (physical, financial, cognitive) limitations of older adults
- Use communication systems that match the habits, abilities, and preferences of older adults
- Recognize that the majority of older adults live outside of congregate settings, and often live alone
- Plan for family and non-family caregivers (both as providers and recipients)
- Acknowledge the medical and health requirements of older adults during disaster response and recovery
- Build the capacity of community-based organizations with training and resources
- Build accountability structures and feedback loops to continually improve ⁵

I would welcome any opportunity to support your presentation and report to the UN, particularly since I will be discussing the matter at a number of US-based events to promote the book’s release in October. If I can be of service, please let me know.

Best regards,

Danielle Arigoni

Endnotes:

1. City and County of San Francisco, Department of Aging and Adult Services, “An Action Plan for an Age and Disability Friendly San Francisco 2018–2021,” 2019, 50, https://www.sfhsa.org/sites/default/files/Report_Age%20and%20DisabilityFriendly%20SF_2018-21.pdf.
2. City of Austin, Texas, “Age-Friendly Austin: Progress Report 2021,” accessed October 30, 2022, 4, 50–55, <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/age-friendly-network/2021-progress-reports/tx-austin-progress-report-2021.pdf>.
3. City of Longwood, Florida, “City of Longwood’s AARP Age-Friendly Action Plan,” August 2019, 17, <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/age-friendly-network/2019/FL-Longwood-Action-Plan-2019-Final.pdf>.
4. Age-Friendly DC, “Age-Friendly DC Five Year Progress Report to the World Health Organization,” accessed January 20, 2023, 7 and 27, <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Washington-DC-Progress-Report.pdf>.
5. Danielle Arigoni, *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation* (Island Press, October 2023), <https://islandpress.org/books/climate-resilience-aging-nation>