



**Disaster Preparedness Education for the Neurodiverse
Population during Severe Weather**

March 25th from 1:00pm-2:00pm ET

Presented by: **Eliza Octavo**, Office Coordinator, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Presentation Abstract: Over time, emergency preparedness activities have lacked sufficient focus on individuals with special needs (HHS, n.d.). Preparedness is a shared responsibility at the national, state, local community, and individual level and is a critical public health investment. The prompt warning of the general population and those with special needs such as the neurodivergent, remains a challenge for emergency managers and weather officials. Many natural disaster lessons learned reports such as the U.S. Fire Administration's Operational Lessons Learned in Disaster Response, noted the importance of including the special needs population in planning, response, and recovery efforts to be successful. Through this project, a culture of preparedness for severe weather and emergencies as a whole is presented. Children with special needs can learn to plan and prepare together with family, educators, and emergency personnel through simple strategies and activities that can be incorporated into everyday routines. This helps children build the self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and emotional tools they need to cope with adversity. Implementing

an educational program/lesson and creating a new initiative for Camden County's Community Emergency Response Team to collaborate with the Bankbridge Development Center in disaster exercises will successfully do so. The plan created multimedia programs that help families prepare, and respond to, emergencies and provide tools so that children can build the skills they need to become resilient. The plan is to also have the program's materials on a centralized website similar to Cincinnati's Children's Special Needs Resource Directory or NJ Register Ready for families to access whatever resources whenever they are needed.

Keywords: Preparedness, Severe Weather, Communication, PECS, Vulnerability, Neurodivergent, Neurodiverse, Autism Spectrum, Special Needs

Speaker Bio: Eliza Octavo hopes to continue working in the healthcare management field collaborating with underserved communities as well as those who face disparities to become better prepared and knowledgeable not only in a disaster situations, but to improve their overall livelihoods as well. She has become determined to improve the human condition for the betterment of society and hopes she can turn her compassion into action. She does everything with the thought of her immigrant family members as well as other vulnerable populations such as those with access and functional needs in mind.