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Media Contacts:

Age-Friendly Innovation Center, The Ohio State University College of Social Work,
AgeFriendly@osu.edu, agefriendly.osu.edu.

Malika Bryant, Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, Public Relations Specialist,
mbryant@coaaa.org, 614-645-9916, www.coaaa.org.

**Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging and the Age-Friendly Innovation Center Release Toolkit
for Extreme Weather Preparedness in Affordable Housing**

Columbus, OH –Planning ahead for extreme weather and disasters can be lifesaving as central Ohio is experiencing more heat events, flooding, and tornados than ever before. During extreme weather events, many older adults face safety risks from factors such as living alone, financial constraints, health issues, or living with disabilities.

The Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging (COAAA) and The Ohio State University’s College of Social Work’s Age-Friendly Innovation Center (AFIC) have partnered to create the Weather and Aging Resilience Model (W.A.R.M.) for Affordable Housing Toolkit for service coordinators and human service professionals who work with older adults in subsidized housing communities in the region.

Recognizing the need for resources that support older adults' safety and well-being before, during, and after extreme weather emergencies, COAAA and AFIC started this collaborative work in 2023. The partnership, based on a shared attentiveness and dedication to the communities we serve, provided a unique opportunity to learn from older adult residents and aging network professionals.

The W.A.R.M. Toolkit is informed by scholarly studies, best practices for emergency preparedness, and evidence-based and community-engaged research conducted by COAAA and AFIC with residents in a Columbus senior subsidized housing complex. It includes professional insight from COAAA's licensed social workers, service coordinators, and registered nurses.

“By utilizing survey, focus group, and walk audit data, we were able to collaboratively put together an evidence-informed tool to assist residents and human services professionals to prepare and cope with extreme weather events,” stated Dr. Holly Dabelko-Schoeny, director of research for the AFIC.

Findings from this research study indicated that many of the older adult residents felt unprepared for extreme weather and disasters. Service coordinators did not feel well-informed

or equipped to have important conversations and support residents to take action to prepare for extreme weather events.

“It is crucial to listen to and incorporate the experiences of older adults and human services professionals directly- they are the “experience experts.” We hope this resource can help make preparedness a priority and that it can be updated regularly and tailored to other contexts,” said Dr. Smitha Rao, faculty member at the College of Social Work.

The W.A.R.M. Toolkit provides information and resources, emergency contacts, tips on preparing for different types of extreme weather in Ohio, and a step-by-step outline for creating an emergency plan. The toolkit guides service coordinators in helping their older adult clients in housing complexes prepare for extreme weather.

Created by AFIC with the support from COAAA and the City of Columbus, the toolkit’s release coincides with National Preparedness Month, an annual safety campaign sponsored and organized by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to remind communities, families, and individuals of the importance of planning and preparing for disasters, emergencies, and extreme weather events.

The W.A.R.M. Toolkit and informational flyers are now available on AFIC’s website: [Link](#)

COAAA offers services and resources to older adults, caregivers, professionals, and the public while advocating for programs and policies that benefit older adults and individuals with disabilities. COAAA manages services for 15,000 people and funds services for another 25,000 older adults in eight counties: Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union.

AFIC’s mission is to “innovate with older adults through research, education, and engagement to make our communities age-friendly.” Since 2016, AFIC has had over 4,800 engagements with older adults through various focus groups, interviews, and walk-audits. More than 200 students have worked at AFIC, and 20,000 people have attended AFIC presentations in local, national, and international meetings.

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