

# VEHICLE SAFETY: RECOGNIZING PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES

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A Diagnostic Challenge for IDD Service Providers

# PREVENTION BEGINS WITH RECOGNITION.

Neglect during transportation rarely starts with dramatic incidents. It begins with minor oversights and unchallenged assumptions—situations that seem manageable until they're not.

This presentation contains 5 real-world case files, representing the most common opportunities for prevention.

## PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES - YOUR APPROACH

As you review each case file:

1. Use the 6 Lenses to identify prevention opportunities
2. Analyze for similar vulnerabilities in your own agencies
3. Compare your analysis to the learning points provided

After all 5 case files, you'll find comprehensive prevention planning recommendations.

**What you recognize, you can prevent.**



# YOUR DIAGNOSTIC TOOLKIT: THE 6 LENSES OF PREVENTION

Analyze each case file through these six critical lenses

## Person-Specific



Individual needs, including behavioral, medical, and physical considerations.



## Driving Safely



Safe driving behaviors, technology supports, and defensive driving.



## Training



Staff knowledge, competency, and proficiency in areas like defensive driving, loading/unloading, and wheelchair securement.



## Admin. Oversight



Policies, verification systems, driver license checks, and proficiency assessments.



## Safe Equipment



Condition of the vehicle and personal equipment, such as crashworthy wheelchairs and proper seating with seatbelts.



## Procedures



Protocols for loading, unloading, transfers, and supervision.

# CASE FILE #1: THE OVERTURNED WHEELCHAIR

What **prevention** opportunities can you identify?

## THE SITUATION

An individual was seated in a van. During a turn, the individual's wheelchair fell over, and their head struck the interior wall. Staff pulled over, returned the wheelchair upright, and seeing no obvious injuries, continued the trip. Upon arrival, surveillance footage reviewed by supervisors showed the head impact and revealed that staff had incorrectly secured the wheelchair—the straps appeared attached but were not properly tightened. The individual was then sent for medical evaluation

What **prevention** opportunities do you see?

Use the 6 Lenses to identify what could have prevented this incident



# What **Prevention** opportunities do you see?

## Case File #1 Your Analysis

### Use the 6 Lenses of **Prevention**

#### **Safe Equipment**

- How can staff verify that securement straps are truly secure?
- What physical checks should be done on tie-down systems?

#### **Procedures**

- What should happen right away after a head impact during transport?
- What review steps should happen before the vehicle leaves?
- What guidelines direct response to injuries during transport?

#### **Administrative Oversight**

- What systems could check for proper securement before leaving?
- How can organizations track securement practices?
- What supervision or review steps could catch errors?

#### **Training**

- What wheelchair securement skills do staff need?
- How can organizations check that staff can properly secure wheelchairs?
- When should staff skills be checked again?

#### **Person Specific**

- Are there individual factors that might call for extra securement steps?

#### **Driving Safety**

- How does the way you drive affect whether wheelchairs stay stable during transport?
- What safe driving practices are important when transporting wheelchairs?

# Prevention Opportunities Identified

Case File #1 Compare your analysis

## 6 Lenses of Prevention

### Safe Equipment

- Pull on each strap before leaving (pull test) to make sure it's tight
- Looking at straps isn't enough—you should physically test them

### Procedures

- When someone hits their head during transport, they need a medical check-up right away
- Review all safety steps before the vehicle leaves

### Administrative Oversight

- Having two people check (double-check system) can catch mistakes before leaving
- Cameras and GPS in vehicles can track how staff secure wheelchairs and drive

### Training

- Good training builds staff skills in securing wheelchairs safely
- Staff who know how to tighten straps with no slack create safer conditions
- Skills can weaken over time without regular practice and review

### Person Specific

- Knowing each person's needs helps determine the best way to secure them safely

### Driving Safety

- Drive slowly and carefully when transporting wheelchairs—anticipate turns to reduce risk
- How you drive affects whether wheelchairs stay stable during turns and stops

# CASE FILE #2: THE FALL FROM THE STEPS

What **prevention** opportunities can you identify?

## THE SITUATION

An individual, whose support plan requires assistance for all vehicle transfers due to a seizure disorder, was waiting to board a van. While staff were busy assisting another individual, this person began ascending the van steps independently, experienced a seizure, and fell backward onto the pavement, sustaining significant head trauma requiring hospitalization.

**What **prevention** opportunities do you see?**

Use the 6 Lenses to identify what could have prevented this incident



# What **Prevention** opportunities do you see?

## Case File #2 Your Analysis

### Use the 6 Lenses of **Prevention**

#### **Safe Equipment**

- What physical features of vehicles support safe boarding?
- What equipment helps reduce fall risk during transfers?

#### **Procedures**

- What boarding order could prevent unsafe independent transfers?
- How should staff be positioned during boarding?
- What guidelines address assistance needs during high-risk activities?

#### **Administrative Oversight**

- How can organizations make sure support plans are reviewed and followed?
- What assignment or supervision systems support safe boarding?
- How can multiple people boarding at the same time be managed safely?

#### **Training**

- What do transportation staff need to know about individual support plans?
- What seizure-related knowledge is important for transportation staff?
- What training supports safe transfer assistance?

#### **Person Specific**

- What written information exists about the person's needs?
- How should seizure risk guide boarding procedures?
- What medical conditions need special attention during transfers?

#### **Driving Safety**

- What role does the driver play in safe boarding procedures?
- How should parking and vehicle position support safe transfers?

# Prevention Opportunities Identified

Case File #2 Compare your analysis

## 6 Lenses of Prevention

### Safe Equipment

- Non-slip surfaces and handrails on van steps are an important safety features

### Procedures

- Boarding people who need help first (before those who don't) prevents gaps in supervision
- Staff should stay within arm's reach when providing one-to-one help

### Administrative Oversight

- All transportation staff should review support plans
- Assigning one staff member to be responsible for each person during boarding can help
- Having supervision systems helps make sure people get the assistance they need during boarding

### Training

- All transportation staff need to review and understand each person's support plan
- Knowledge of seizure first aid and how to keep transfers safe is important

### Person Specific

- This person's support plan said they needed help with all vehicle transfers
- Having a seizure disorder creates higher risk during transfers and boarding

### Driving Safety

- How you position and park the vehicle supports a stable boarding area

# CASE FILE #3: THE MID-TRIP EMERGENCY

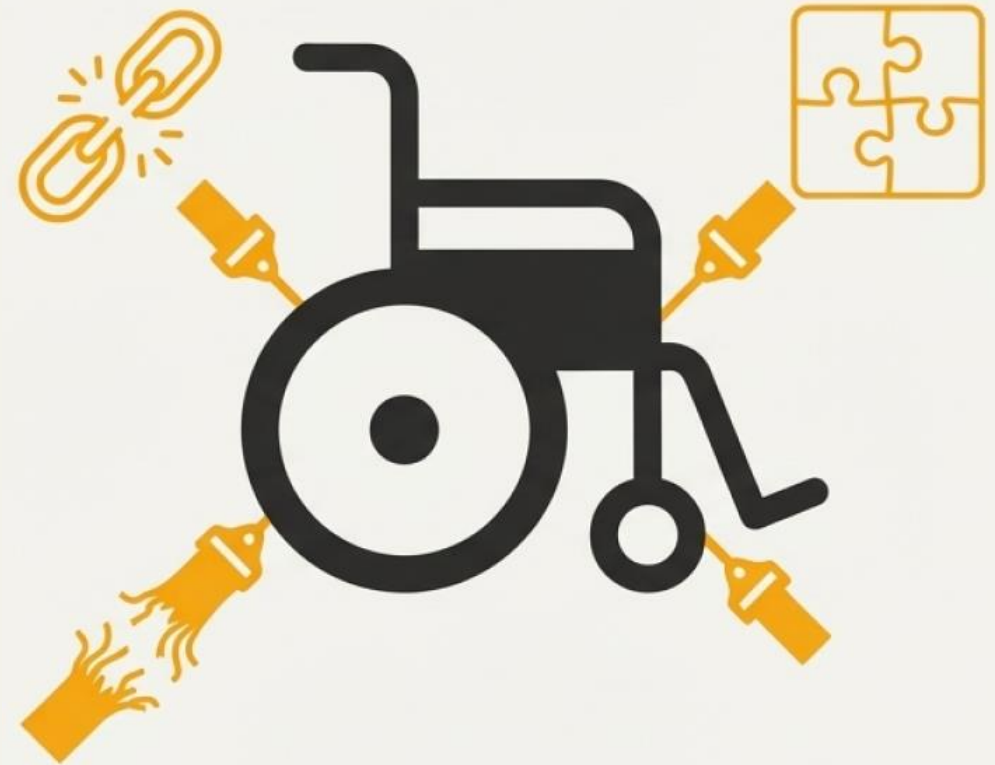
What **prevention** opportunities can you identify?

## THE SITUATION

An individual had a seizure in transit. As the van pulled over, their wheelchair tipped, causing an injury. The tie-down equipment was broken and mismatched. Staff admitted to intentionally securing only the front tie-downs for convenience to avoid moving individual's personal bag. Staff did not provide first aid and continued to the destination instead of calling 911 immediately.

**What **prevention** opportunities do you see?**

Use the 6 Lenses to identify what could have prevented this incident



# What **Prevention** opportunities do you see?

## Case File #3 Your Analysis

### Use the 6 Lenses of **Prevention**

#### **Safe Equipment**

- What was the condition of the tie-down system?
- What equipment standards should exist for compatibility?
- What emergency medical supplies should be in every vehicle?

#### **Procedures**

- What are the requirements for wheelchair securement?
- What should staff do when obstacles (like personal bags) interfere with safety procedures?
- What is the protocol when someone experiences a medical emergency in transit?
- What first aid response was needed for the injury?

#### **Administrative Oversight**

- What processes are in place to take broken equipment out of active service?
- What inspection schedules should be in place?
- What verification systems could ensure drivers are qualified?

#### **Training**

- What training gaps became apparent in this incident?
- What emergency response knowledge should all transportation staff have?
- What securement training do staff need?

#### **Person Specific**

- What should the individual's seizure history have told staff about securement needs?
- Should this person's support plan have included specific transportation requirements?

#### **Driving Safety**

- How does driving behavior affect wheelchair stability?
- What should a driver do immediately when a medical emergency occurs during transport?

# Prevention Opportunities Identified

Case File #3 Compare your analysis

## 6 Lenses of Prevention

### Safe Equipment

- Broken tie-down equipment should be taken out of service right away
- Using tie-down parts that match (from the same manufacturer) keeps the system working properly
- Having first aid kits that are easy to reach and fully stocked supports emergency response

### Procedures

- All four tie-downs are needed for safe wheelchair securement every trip
- Emergency medical guidelines help staff know when to call 911 (like for seizures during transport)
- Medical emergencies mean stopping at the nearest appropriate place for help

### Administrative Oversight

- Having equipment inspection systems keeps broken or mismatched tie-downs out of use
- Daily pre-trip vehicle safety inspections can catch equipment problems
- Clear systems for who is responsible help make sure protocols are followed

### Training

- All four tie-downs are needed for safe wheelchair securement on every trip
- First aid skills are important when injuries happen during transport
- Training on how to handle obstacles (like personal items) while keeping safety steps in place

### Person Specific

- Creating a transportation plan for people with medical conditions adds extra safety

### Driving Safety

- Knowing how to stop safely during medical emergencies is important
- How you drive during an emergency affects whether wheelchairs stay stable

# CASE FILE #4: THE HOT VAN

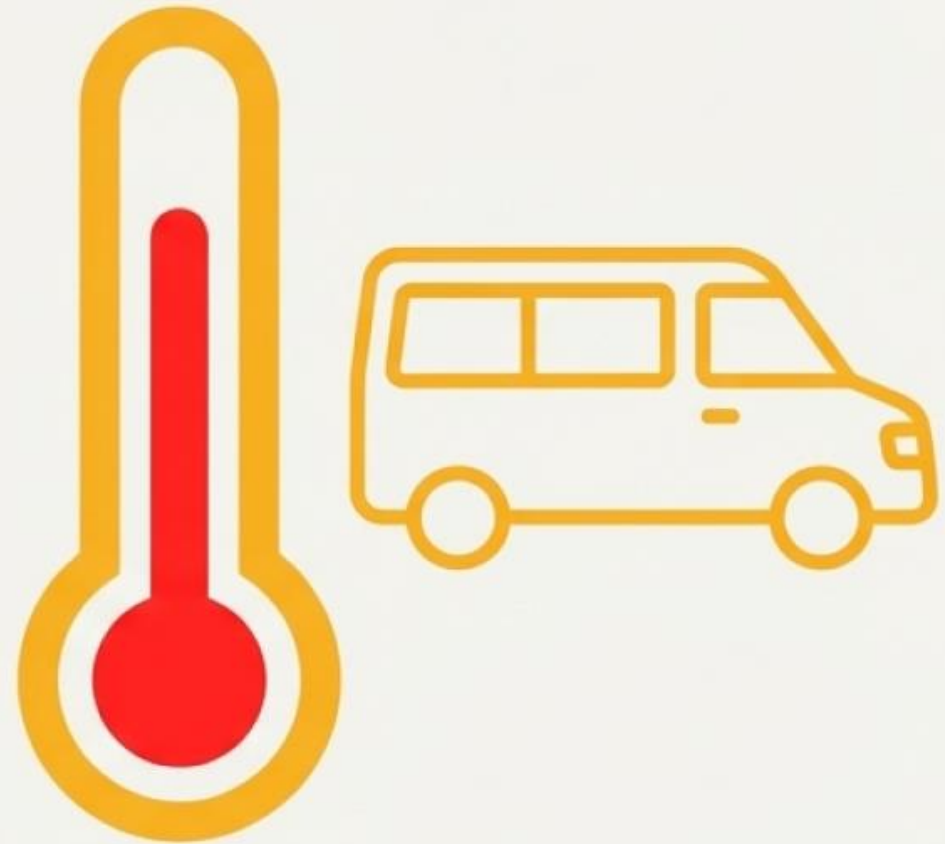
What **prevention** opportunities can you identify?

## THE SITUATION

On a 100-degree day, individuals were loaded onto a van before the driver arrived. The van was not climate-controlled. One individual, known to be at high risk for heat-related complications due to psychotropic medications, became distressed while waiting on the hot van with staff standing outside the vehicle

**What **prevention** opportunities do you see?**

Use the 6 Lenses to identify what could have prevented this incident



# What **Prevention** opportunities do you see?

Case File #4 Your Analysis

## Use the 6 Lenses of **Prevention**

### **Safe Equipment**

- What vehicle systems manage climate before and during boarding?
- What technology could support vehicle preparation in extreme weather?

### **Procedures**

- At what point should boarding begin?
- What vehicle conditions must be met before anyone boards?
- How should boarding be managed in extreme weather?
- What weather-specific protocols should exist?

### **Administrative Oversight**

- How can transportation and program schedules be coordinated well?
- What tracking systems could check vehicle readiness?
- What systems make sure drivers arrive and vehicle are prepared?

### **Training**

- What do staff need to recognize about heat-related illness?
- What knowledge helps staff identify at-risk people?
- Where should staff be positioned when people are on vehicles?

### **Person Specific**

- Which people might be at higher risk in extreme temperatures?
- What medications or medical conditions increase heat-related risk?
- How might distressed behaviors relate to the environment?

### **Driving Safety**

- What is the driver's role in vehicle preparation before boarding?
- How should vehicles be prepared for extreme weather ?

# Prevention Opportunities Identified

Case File #4 Compare your analysis

## 6 Lenses of Prevention

### Safe Equipment

- The vehicle's climate control (heat or air conditioning) should be running and working before anyone boards
- Remote vehicle start systems can cool or heat vehicles ahead of time

### Procedures

- People should board only after the driver arrives and the vehicle is climate-controlled
- Boarding people in order during extreme weather (those who need help first) reduces exposure time
- Having specific guidelines for extreme heat and cold protects people's safety

### Administrative Oversight

- Having a system to confirm when drivers arrive helps programs and transportation work together
- GPS monitoring can show when vehicles arrive and when engines are running

### Training

- Train staff on how to recognize the signs of heat-related illness
- Staff should stay with people on vehicles at all times to observe for problems

### Person Specific

- Staff need to know which people are at high risk for heat-related illness (like those taking certain medications)
- Heat stress can trigger distressed behaviors

### Driving Safety

- Making sure drivers arrive on schedule and are accountable is important
- Getting the vehicle ready before boarding is the driver's job

# CASE FILE #5: THE UNSECURED ROLL-AWAY

What **prevention** opportunities can you identify?

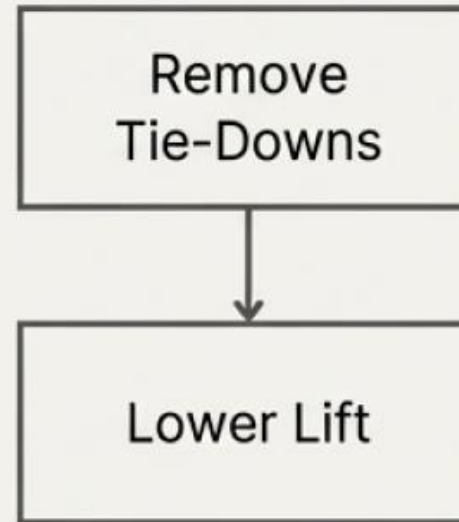
## THE SITUATION

After parking on a slight incline, a staff member removed an individual's wheelchair tie-downs *before* lowering the lift. The staff member left the unsecured individual near the open van door to operate the lift. The individual's wheelchair, which had known faulty brakes, rolled out of the open door and fell to the ground.

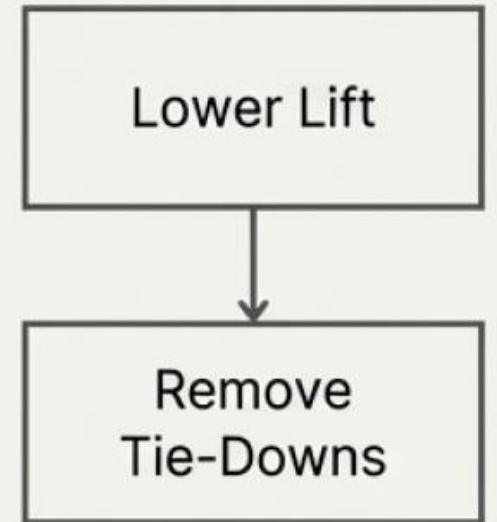
What **prevention** opportunities do you see?

Use the 6 Lenses to identify what could have prevented this incident

**INCORRECT** ❌



**CORRECT** ✅



# What **Prevention** opportunities do you see?

Case File #5 Your Analysis

## Use the 6 Lenses of **Prevention**

### **Safe Equipment**

- What was the condition of the wheelchair brakes?
- What should happen when equipment has known problems?
- What backup equipment should be available?

### **Procedures**

- What is the order for unloading a wheelchair user?
- At what point should tie-downs be removed?
- Where should people be positioned during unloading operations?
- What should guide staff when equipment has known problems?

### **Administrative Oversight**

- How often should wheelchairs be inspected for safety?
- What systems should track equipment problems?
- What is the policy for using equipment with known safety issues?

### **Training**

- What unloading procedures do staff need to know?
- What order should be followed during wheelchair unloading?
- What safe parking practices should drivers understand?

### **Person Specific**

- What individual safety considerations are important during unloading?
- How should known equipment issues for specific people be managed?

### **Driving Safety**

- What parking considerations are important for wheelchair unloading?
- How does parking location affect unloading safety?

# Prevention Opportunities Identified

Case File #5 Compare your analysis

## 6 Lenses of Prevention

### Safe Equipment

- A wheelchair with broken brakes creates an immediate safety risk
- Having a backup wheelchair available when the main one has problems keeps people safe

### Procedures

- The correct unloading order is: Lower lift FIRST, position wheelchair safely, THEN remove tie-downs
- Never leave someone in an unsecured wheelchair near an open door
- Visual guides posted in vehicles can reinforce correct sequences

### Administrative Oversight

- Checking wheelchairs for safety every three months (with written records) creates responsibility
- Having a system to track equipment problems keeps known issues from continuing
- Equipment with broken safety features should be taken out of transportation use right away

### Training

- Staff need to learn and practice the right unloading steps: Lower lift FIRST, then remove tie-downs
- Safe parking practices are part of defensive driving training

### Person Specific

- When someone's equipment has known problems, it needs immediate attention and solutions
- A person's safety is at risk when their personal equipment has safety problems

### Driving Safety

- Parking on flat, level surfaces is important for safe wheelchair unloading
- Knowing safe parking practices and choosing the right spot are part of defensive driving

# KEY FINDINGS: A SINGLE MISTAKE RARELY CAUSES A CRISIS. SYSTEMIC FAILURES DO.

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Three critical patterns appeared in every case file:

- 1 TRAINING GAPS:**  
One-time training is not enough. Competency must be verified and refreshed.
- 2 EQUIPMENT FAILURES:**  
Known issues like broken tie-downs and faulty brakes were left unaddressed. Proactive maintenance is non-negotiable.
- 3 VERIFICATION GAPS:**  
“Trust but verify.” A second check, a pre-trip inspection, or supervisor oversight catches errors before they cause harm.

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## FOR DIRECT CARE STAFF

Speak up when you see broken equipment. Ask for help when unsure. Never skip a step in a safety procedure. Follow person-specific plans exactly.

## FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Invest in equipment maintenance and replacement. Implement systematic verification processes. Prioritize ongoing training with competency assessments. Build accountability systems.

# Comprehensive PREVENTION Planning

## *Immediate Actions to Consider*

### Equipment Safety

- ✓ Inspect all vehicle tie-downs and wheelchair brakes—take broken equipment out of service
- ✓ Check first aid kits to make sure they are fully stocked and easy to reach in every vehicle
- ✓ Check wheelchair securement parts to make sure they match (manufacturer-matched parts only)

### Policy Establishment

- ✓ Consider a clear guideline: Call 911 for any medical emergency during transport
- ✓ Consider a driver-present-first boarding approach (no boarding until driver arrives and climate control is on)
- ✓ Set a clear guideline for immediate medical check-up for any head impact during transport

### Staff Readiness

- ✓ Review all driver records to check current qualifications
- ✓ Retrain all staff: All Four tie-downs are needed every trip, no exceptions
- ✓ Review support plans for all people who need transfer help or have medical conditions

### Procedure Review

- ✓ Set up a two-person check system for wheelchair securement before leaving
- ✓ Post visual securement checklists in every vehicle
- ✓ Post emergency medical guidelines in every vehicle

# Comprehensive PREVENTION Planning

## SYSTEMIC PREVENTION SUGGESTIONS (Build Into Ongoing Operations)

### Training & Competency

- ✓ Bi-annual first aid/CPR certification for all transportation staff (Cases 2, 3)
- ✓ Check wheelchair securement skills hands-on every three months (Cases 1, 3, 5)
- ✓ Training on seizure first aid and safe transfers (Cases 2, 3)
- ✓ Training on managing obstacles while keeping safety steps in place (Case 3)
- ✓ Defensive driving certification including safe parking and emergency response (Cases 1, 3, 5)

### Equipment Management

- ✓ Weekly vehicle equipment inspection checklists with documentation (Cases 1, 3, 5)
- ✓ Schedule for replacing equipment based on what the manufacturer recommends (Cases 3, 5)
- ✓ System to track equipment problems with automatic follow-up for unresolved safety issues (Cases 3, 5)
- ✓ Budget set aside for immediate replacement of safety-critical equipment (Cases 3, 5)
- ✓ Daily checks before trips including physical pull-test of securement straps (Cases 1, 3)

# Comprehensive PREVENTION Planning

## SYSTEMIC PREVENTION SUGGESTIONS (Build Into Ongoing Operations)



### Administrative Oversight

- ✓ GPS tracking systems to monitor driving behavior and emergency response (Cases 1, 3, 4)
- ✓ Supervisors complete spot-checks of vehicle departures every three months (Cases 1, 2)
- ✓ Regular driver license and driving record checks (Case 3)
- ✓ Camera systems in vehicles for monitoring and coaching opportunities (Cases 1, 2)
- ✓ System for programs and transportation to coordinate schedules (Case 4)



### Person-Specific Planning

- ✓ Transportation plans for people with medical conditions (seizures, heat sensitivity, etc.) (Cases 2, 3, 4)
- ✓ Staff review of support plans before each route to know who needs assistance (Case 2,4)
- ✓ Communication systems between programs and transportation staff about daily assistance needs (Case 2,4)
- ✓ Assign specific staff members to be responsible during boarding and transport (Case 2)

# Comprehensive PREVENTION Planning

## SYSTEMIC PREVENTION SUGGESTIONS (Build Into Ongoing Operations)

### Procedures & Protocols

- ✓ Boarding order (people who need help first, independent people last) (Cases 2, 4)
- ✓ The correct unloading sequence: Lower lift FIRST, then remove tie-downs (Case 5)
- ✓ Weather-specific guidelines for extreme heat and cold (Case 4)
- ✓ Emergency medical guidelines with clear decision steps (Cases 2, 3)
- ✓ All transportation staff must review support plans (Cases 2, 4)

### Verification Systems

- ✓ Two-person check for all wheelchair securement before leaving (Cases 1, 3)
- ✓ Video monitoring of boarding/unloading with supervisor review (Case 2)
- ✓ Physical inspection requirements before trips (Cases 1, 3, 5)
- ✓ Supervisor sign-off on weekly equipment checklists (Cases 3, 5)

# Your PREVENTION Plan

## Reflection Questions for Your Team:

- 1. Assessment:** Which of these system issues exist in your organization today?
- 2. Prioritization:** Which immediate actions can you implement this week?
- 3. Resource Planning:** What budget, staffing, or equipment investments are needed?
- 4. Timeline:** What's your 30-day, 90-day, and 1-year implementation plan?
- 5. Accountability:** Who is responsible for each prevention system?
- 6. Measurement:** How will you verify that these systems are working?

## Next Steps:

- Schedule a team meeting to review all 5 case files
- Complete a gap analysis using the 6 Lenses framework
- Develop your organization's prevention action plan
- Assign who is responsible and set timelines for each system change
- Set up tracking systems to follow implementation

# REMEMBER: PREVENTION IS SYSTEMATIC, NOT REACTIVE

The case files showed that **no single mistake causes a crisis—system failures do**. Your prevention plan must address all 6 Lenses:

- ✓ Person-Specific needs
- ✓ Driving Safely practices
- ✓ Training & skills building
- ✓ Administrative Oversight
- ✓ Safe Equipment
- ✓ Procedures & guidelines

What you recognize, you can **prevent**.

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Providers are responsible for ensuring that their policies and practices comply with all relevant state laws, codes, regulations, and administrative directives from pertinent state oversight agencies concerning the safe transportation of individuals, including those using wheelchairs.

Providers should not rely solely on the information presented in this newsletter for making decisions related to compliance or safety practices.