



**California
Interagency Council
on Homelessness**

Homeless Emergency and Active Readiness Toolkit (HEART)

Prepared by

**Strategies, Tools, and Emergency
Preparedness for Unsheltered
Populations
(STEP-UP) Interdepartmental Group**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On any given night, an estimated 181,000 people experience homelessness in California, with 68% of those people living unsheltered. While people experiencing homelessness are in a constant state of emergency in their daily lives, facing numerous physical and emotional challenges, the increasing frequency of natural disasters has a particularly pronounced effect on those with nowhere to shelter indoors.

In January 2023, California communities were hit by severe storms, flooding, and other disasters, leading to significant challenges for the state. Given the prevalence of homelessness in California, it is crucial to adopt an inclusive approach to emergency response efforts that promotes collaboration across systems and prioritizes the specific needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in emergency operations plans.

The Homeless Emergency and Active Readiness Toolkit (HEART) provides a framework to help local jurisdictions in California improve coordination between emergency planning and response agencies and homelessness response systems. Its goal is to ensure that local emergency planning and response efforts effectively address the needs of people experiencing homelessness, particularly people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The toolkit offers resources and tools to support both emergency planning and homelessness response agencies in incorporating these needs more comprehensively into disaster planning efforts.

While this toolkit aims to ensure the well-being of people experiencing homelessness specifically during declared emergencies, it is important to underscore the complexity and hardship that people experiencing homelessness face each day.

The toolkit is intended to highlight best practices and considerations to support the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness into local emergency operations plans and activities. This toolkit does not pose new or additional requirements. It aims to support local jurisdiction planning processes by providing resources and information when considering the safety and unique needs of people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies.

The toolkit presents a three-part approach to addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness during disasters or emergencies: Be Informed, Get Connected, and Take Action.

Section 1 - Be Informed: Emphasizes the importance of understanding the emergency response and homelessness response systems. It encourages readers to familiarize themselves with their county's emergency plans.

Section 2 - Get Connected: Stresses the need for collaborative partnerships between emergency and homelessness response systems as well as the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness in emergency planning processes. It promotes a whole-community approach that brings together all relevant partners to meet the needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness during emergencies.

Section 3 - Take Action: Advocates for a proactive and comprehensive approach to address the unique challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness during disasters. It provides specific actions to integrate support for people experiencing homelessness during emergencies into emergency operations plans (EOP), focusing on communication, transportation and evacuation, shelter, essential services and safety, equity, trauma-informed approaches, and transition to recovery.

Toolkit Goals and Audience

Goals and Audience: This toolkit aims to assist local emergency managers, city and county homelessness and housing department leadership, and Continuums of Care by:

- **Creating a shared understanding** of the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness during a disaster or emergency and opportunities for coordination across different entities and services.
- **Informing local partners of respective roles and capacities**, including local emergency planning and response agencies, local public health jurisdictions, county social services agencies, CoCs, homelessness response system leaders, and other community partners.
- **Supporting local interagency collaboration** to establish structures and resources for integrating people experiencing homelessness into disaster planning and response efforts.
- **Providing strategies for supporting people experiencing homelessness** during disasters and emergencies, particularly people experiencing unsheltered homelessness who previously have not been included in many emergency planning efforts.

Appendices: These supplementary sections provide relevant materials that further enhance the understanding and implementation of the strategies and concepts discussed in the toolkit. Included are checklists, contact lists, applicable laws and statutes, and a list of acronyms developed by Cal ICH.

Key Takeaways and Resources: Each section provides key takeaways, tools and templates, and additional resources.

- **Key Takeaways:** Summarizes important information from each section.
- **Tools and Templates:** Provides a selection of tools and templates from various sources linked for easy reference.
- **Additional Resources:** Includes links to publications and detailed sources of information. Online training opportunities to enhance understanding of the subject matter are offered when relevant.

Collaborative Opportunities: Throughout the toolkit, look for call-out boxes highlighting collaborative opportunities. These highlights provide examples of how different audiences can get involved and engage across systems.

Exemplary Practices: Throughout the toolkit, exemplary practices and examples from different communities are included to provide real-world illustrations of the concepts discussed.

Note: It is understood that there are shelters in operation 365 days a year that are referred to within the homelessness response community as “emergency shelters.” It is also understood that there are temporary emergency shelters stood up during times of disaster and emergency often referred to by emergency managers as “emergency shelters.” **To ensure clarity, throughout this toolkit, whenever the term “emergency shelter” is used, it will refer to shelters stood up during a disaster or emergency.** The term “existing shelter” is used to refer to shelters operating 365 days a year, and not only in times of disaster or emergency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

California Interagency Council on Homelessness

The California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH) is a statewide facilitator, coordinator, and leader for policy development and research for the state and local jurisdictions in their work to prevent and end homelessness in California. Cal ICH is motivated by a vision of a future in which homelessness is rare, brief, and a one-time experience in order to prevent and end homelessness in California.

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STEP-UP: Interdepartmental Emergency Preparedness Group

Strategies, Tools, and Emergency Preparedness for Unsheltered Populations (STEP-UP) is an Interdepartmental Emergency Preparedness group led by Cal ICH. STEP-UP includes representatives from:

- California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH)
- California Department of Social Services (CDSS)
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
- California Department of Education (CDE)
- California Department of Aging (CDA)
- California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH)

STEP-UP was formed in response to the winter storms of January 2023 to support local jurisdictions in preparing and planning for future disasters and emergencies affecting people experiencing homelessness. The interdepartmental emergency preparedness group complements the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services Priority Populations Task Force charged with coordinating all state resources in support of the following populations: people experiencing unsheltered homelessness; people who are older or medically vulnerable; people living with disabilities (visible and invisible); and people residing in congregate facilities—medical and non-medical.

In the dynamic landscape of California, individuals and families experiencing homelessness find themselves uniquely susceptible in the face of disasters. Whether confronted by wildfires, earthquakes, floods, or other emergencies, people experiencing homelessness encounter disproportionate challenges. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive disaster response system, it is imperative to coordinate support that addresses immediate crises and safeguards the well-being of people experiencing homelessness. STEP-UP aims to underscore the critical role of an organized, collaborative, engaged, and responsive local disaster response to ensure the safety and stability of people living without shelter throughout California.

STEP-UP would like to acknowledge and thank the following partners for their contributions to the development of this toolkit:

Cal ICH Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB)

Cal ICH LEAB members serve to inform a broad range of decisions of the Council and member departments to ensure systems, programs, and decisions are deeply informed by individuals with lived experience of homelessness. The Cal ICH LEAB works in coordination with the Advisory Committee and Cal ICH Working Groups to assure that policymakers and providers learn of problems and solutions from those with firsthand experiences.

California Local Jurisdictions Survey

Cal ICH incorporated several opportunities for local jurisdictions to provide feedback and contribute to the development of this Toolkit. Monthly office hours with grantees of the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP), Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF), and Family Homelessness Challenge (FHC) grant programs served as an effective platform for grantees to share their experiences and ideas for engaging with local emergency response planning efforts. Cal ICH and the Department of Social Services, via the California Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), also distributed a survey to their grantees. CWDA's distribution list included, but may not be limited to, the human service directors from each of California's 58 counties. Cal ICH's distribution list included California's 44 Continuums of Care (CoCs), 58 counties, and certain cities.

Exemplary Practices Interviews

Cal ICH also interviewed six local jurisdictions to learn more about effective local practices specific to disaster preparedness and people experiencing homelessness. The insights gathered from these interviews offered valuable strategies, processes, and challenges to consider. Effective practices learned during these interviews have been woven into various sections of this toolkit intending to provide resources and tools that can be replicated in other jurisdictions as part of a whole community approach to emergency preparedness. Special thanks to the following for sharing their knowledge and expertise:

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INTRODUCTION

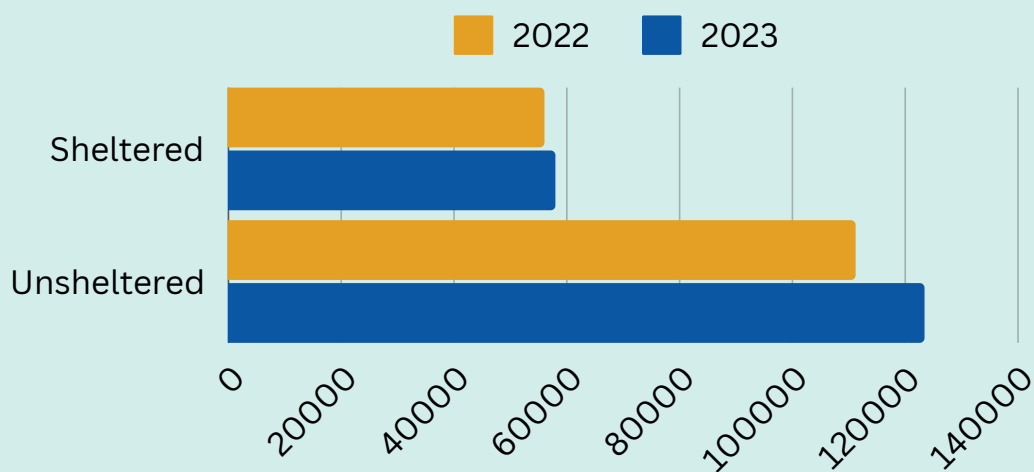
Including People Experiencing Homelessness in Disaster Planning Efforts: Why It Matters

According to Cal OES, from 2017 to 2022, California faced a minimum of 80 declared states of emergency, including wildfires, flooding, earthquakes, severe storms, drought, power shutoffs, and a global pandemic (Cal OES, 2023).

- In 2023, California experienced winter storms that impacted the entire state, causing numerous deaths.
- February 2024 saw massive winter storms again that affected 35 counties (Cal OES, 2024).
- July 2024 set new heat records nationally, with California recording its hottest temperature yet (Toohey, 2024).

As climate change continues to intensify weather patterns, California will experience more frequent and severe disasters each year, as declared by state and federal entities. These disasters will continue to have a significant and long-lasting impact on the estimated 181,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in California, 70% of whom are unsheltered (HUD Exchange, 2024). Disasters often cause further displacement, destruction of belongings, instability, and difficulty connecting with long-term housing solutions for these individuals.

Number of People Experiencing Homelessness on Any Given Night in California, 2022-2023



¹Source: Point-in-Time (PIT) count. PIT is a count of sheltered and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness on a single night in January. (HUD Exchange, 2024).

Released in 2023, [Toward a New Understanding, the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) is the largest statewide study of people experiencing homelessness in California since the mid-1990s. Findings indicate that 90% of participants spent at least one night without shelter in the prior six months. Of those, 46% spent at least one night in a vehicle, and 76% spent at least one night unsheltered without a vehicle (Kushel et al., 2023).

The average life expectancy for people experiencing homelessness is approximately 17.5 years shorter than the average population (Romaszko et al., 2017).

In a [review](#) conducted by the Homeless Mortality Data Workgroup initiated by the National Health Care for the Homeless, the workgroup reviewed data from 68 cities and counties across the nation that recorded an estimate of 5,800 to 46,500 deaths that occurred among people without housing in 2018. This review further indicated an underestimate of reported deaths, with a closer estimate anticipated to be between 17,500 and 46,500 deaths of people experiencing homelessness in 2018 (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2021).

Severe weather conditions, including winter storms or severe heat, can significantly impact those living without shelter, with extreme weather conditions sometimes becoming a matter of life and death.

- The death rate due to hypothermia (freezing) among people living without shelter is 13 times higher than the general population (Romaszko et al., 2017).
- In 2022, people experiencing homelessness accounted for nearly half of the health-related deaths in Los Angeles County, according to the coroner's office (Lin, 2023).

People Experiencing Homelessness: Unique and Significant Challenges During Disasters

In addition to exposure to harsh conditions that worsen health and may lead to death, large scale disasters can pose unique and significant challenges for people experiencing homelessness. People living unsheltered often lack resources and access to services, making them the most susceptible and severely affected group during disasters (Gin et al., 2020).

- **Access to Information:** People experiencing homelessness often lack the technological connectivity to know when a disaster is imminent or to get regular updates on risks and available resources. They may also be estranged from family or community networks to rely on during emergencies. Isolation may increase their vulnerability and limit their ability to seek assistance. Communicating disaster alerts and evacuation instructions, too, may be challenging for public service agencies, with a lack of access to reliable information sources hindering the ability of many people living unsheltered to make informed decisions that can help keep them safe. A lack of trust in government agencies may also impact individuals' willingness to interact with first responders or government agency representatives.

- **Transportation:** People experiencing homelessness often face transportation constraints when evacuating from disaster zones because they may lack reliable and affordable transportation options. Public transportation disruptions during disasters may also intensify mobility challenges.
- **Emergency Shelter:** While emergency shelters established during disaster or emergency welcome the whole community, some communities have shared experiences of discrimination or bias toward people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, emergency shelters may have restrictive policies which may create barriers for people experiencing homelessness.
- **Limited Financial and Material Resources:** People experiencing homelessness often have little to no financial resources and may find it challenging to purchase emergency supplies or secure temporary accommodations that can help keep themselves and their belongings safer during an emergency.
- **Increased Health and Safety Risks:** Disasters can also disrupt access to healthcare services, worsening existing physical health conditions, mental illnesses, or substance use disorders that may be experienced by people experiencing homelessness.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Negative stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness have led to discrimination during disaster response, leading to people experiencing homelessness being turned away, overlooked, marginalized, or excluded from relief efforts.

It's important to recognize the diverse subgroups within the homeless population, such as youth, families, unaccompanied youth, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. While this toolkit is intended to provide resources to support coordination and collaboration focused on people experiencing homelessness, particularly people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, it is important to acknowledge and account for the whole community in emergency planning and response.

While people experiencing homelessness face increased vulnerabilities during disasters and emergencies, a review of 58 county EOPs found that 28 EOPs made no reference to people experiencing homelessness at all.

Thirty EOPs mentioned people experiencing homelessness. However, those that mentioned people experiencing homelessness did not establish any processes or protocols that prioritize planning and response activities to address the needs of individuals living unsheltered during emergencies.

Stakeholder Feedback and Recommendations

Survey Findings

To better understand the current state of coordination between local homelessness response systems and local emergency planning and response agencies, Cal ICH and the DSS Housing and Homelessness Division, via CWDA, disseminated the survey to local contacts. A total of 29 completed surveys were submitted and represented county health and human services, social services agencies, CoCs, and one city.

Survey results showed that the level of coordination between the local homelessness response system and emergency planning and response agencies were reported as very good or good by over half of the respondents. While the remaining respondents reported fair or poor relationships between the two systems.

Survey respondents identified specific actions that could be used to improve coordination, including:

- **Increasing Collaboration:** Respondents emphasized the importance of strengthening relationships between the emergency planning and response agencies and the CoC and homelessness response leadership. They also highlighted the importance of working together more closely to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness during emergencies, including engaging people experiencing homelessness in planning and response efforts.
- **Conducting Joint Training and Exercises:** Respondents recommended that the CoC and homelessness response leadership and emergency planning and response agencies participate in joint training and exercises to build trust, improve coordination, and prepare for emergencies.
- **Communicate Clear Roles and Responsibilities:** Respondents suggested that clear roles and responsibilities be communicated. This clear communication ensures everyone knows their roles and responsibilities, providing a sense of cohesion during emergencies.

California Interagency Council on Homelessness Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB)

Cal ICH LEAB members participated in a discussion focused on the intersection of emergency planning and response agencies, CoCs and homelessness response leadership. The discussion concentrated on strategies for engagement, accessibility, essential services, and transition to recovery for people experiencing homelessness during disasters or emergencies. The group pointed out challenges such as communication issues in areas with limited Wi-Fi, the need for permanent housing solutions, and the unique challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness, including criminalization.

Participants discussed ways to improve emergency preparedness and response for people experiencing homelessness. They emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity, coordinated efforts among agencies, and access to basic facilities such as showers and laundry services. The importance of providing pre-emergency preparation for people living unsheltered, expanding community health worker programs, and training for outreach workers.

LEAB members identified specific concerns and actions for reflection and inclusion in the toolkit:

- **Criminalization:** Concern was voiced regarding the criminalization of homelessness and the challenges faced by outreach efforts when people are relocated, making it difficult to keep them safe. With many communities criminalizing homelessness, people have been forced to live in remote, hard-to-reach areas that may be accessible only by foot. These areas may also be more prone to wildfires or flooding.
- **Building Trust and Rapport:** The need for significant improvements in this area was highlighted. In order to build trust and rapport, communities should prioritize people experiencing homelessness throughout the year rather than only in times of disaster or emergency. Effective strategies involve proactive training and education rather than last-minute interventions during emergencies. Additionally, it was recommended that if law enforcement is involved, they should not carry guns, as this can exacerbate fears within the community. The discussion also touched on the role of community health workers with first-hand experience in establishing trust within communities. It was underscored that there is a need for increased funding and improved working conditions to support such initiatives. There was also a need to provide first responders with the necessary training to approach situations with compassion and respect, emphasizing the importance of cooperation from those being assisted.

- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Participants emphasized the importance of having real-time access to disaster plans and ensuring that these plans are up-to-date and inclusive of diverse needs. The importance of having an expanded network of agencies and service providers during emergencies that can conduct outreach was emphasized. The success of a collaborative approach, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic involving various professionals and organizations, was highlighted. It was suggested to focus on building relationships between people living unsheltered in the community, homelessness response services, and disaster response agencies before an emergency.
- **Access to Information and Training:** Participants emphasized the need to increase efforts to train people experiencing homelessness on what to do during a disaster or emergency. Incentives such as gift cards were recognized as helpful in gaining their participation. Suggestions were made to utilize wait times effectively at agencies like social services by playing disaster preparedness training videos in places where people experiencing homelessness may be waiting in lobbies. Additionally, it was emphasized that building relationships and instilling trust were seen as important aspects of the success of any training.
- **Communications:** The significance of ensuring access to information and people was also highlighted, with a focus on making communications inclusive for visually impaired individuals and those who speak other languages. Proposed methods included using SMS text messaging to provide resources and information during emergency communications, especially when not everyone can access smartphones or Wi-Fi. The importance of distributing information to where people are instead of assuming they will seek it out was also emphasized.
- **Evacuation and Transportation:** The difficulty of persuading individuals to leave their encampments was acknowledged. Challenges related to evacuation and transportation in a rural area were discussed. Deep concern was expressed about the impact of fires in rural, hard-to-reach areas where people have been forced to shelter and the insufficient response for people experiencing homelessness. Specific obstacles to conducting outreach, evacuation, and transportation efforts were identified, including hindrances caused by dirt roads, inaccessible paths, and the resulting challenges in reaching certain areas.
- **Emergency Shelter:** LEAB members emphasized that not all emergency shelters are automatically safe spaces. It was strongly recommended that local authorities offer alternative solutions to traditional emergency shelters, such as bridge housing, transitional housing, or motel vouchers. The success of using alternative emergency shelters like hotels and safer spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic was emphasized. LEAB members also stressed the importance of implementing harm reduction approaches in emergency shelters, especially considering the high prevalence of trauma and exacerbated mental health concerns among people experiencing homelessness.

- **Essential Services:** Addressing fundamental needs such as access to food, healthcare, and reconnection with family, as well as providing a secure environment for marginalized individuals to rebuild their lives, were discussed. LEAB members emphasized the necessity of ensuring the safety of individuals who may feel uneasy around law enforcement and stressed the importance of considering religious preferences, upholding dignity, and establishing trustworthy relationships. Additionally, members emphasized the need for increased access to showers and addressing laundry needs in disaster situations. The group delved into the various obstacles individuals facing homelessness encounter when receiving mail, mainly focusing on acquiring identification documents and securing a reliable mailbox.
- **Recovery:** The importance of housing, not just sheltering, was emphasized. It was noted that sheltering is only a temporary fix. There was strong agreement on the need for employment opportunities during the transition to recovery, available housing, and supplies, as well as the potential integration of these strategies into the case management plan.

People experiencing homelessness are at higher risk during natural disasters and emergencies in California. As communities meet ongoing challenges, inclusive disaster planning can further strategic community response. By incorporating specific protocols and building relationships into the county's emergency operations plan, local communities can take a step toward fully integrating people experiencing homelessness into local-level emergency preparedness and planning efforts. The recommendations provided offer local jurisdictions an opportunity to focus on their strengths and identify opportunities for improvement, such as enhancing communication channels and increasing collaboration and coordination. This is important to ensure that local communities can meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies.



SECTION I: BE INFORMED

It is important to have inclusive emergency planning to assist people experiencing homelessness during disasters. Local jurisdictions can expand their emergency operations plan to provide more inclusive services by working with homelessness response system leadership. This section provides an overview of the homelessness response system and emergency management in California.

HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE SYSTEM IN CALIFORNIA: AN OVERVIEW

Homelessness Response System

The homelessness response system is a collaborative network of various organizations and agencies committed to assisting people experiencing homelessness. This system encompasses various stakeholders, including community-based organizations, housing authorities, government agencies, faith-based groups, food banks, and existing shelters among others. These entities work together to offer various essential services to address the immediate and long-term needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The overarching goal of the homelessness response system is to facilitate a swift transition from homelessness to stable, permanent housing, ensuring that individuals receive the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Continuum of Care

- The CoC serves as the central organization within the homelessness response system in each community.
- CoCs are administrative entities defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and most CoCs in California are geographically defined by counties or collections of counties.
- CoCs' lead agencies can be local governments, nonprofit or community-based organizations, coordinating entities, or joint-power authorities between city and county governments.
- CoCs fund housing and services within a community focused on moving people experiencing homelessness to stable housing and maximizing their self-sufficiency.



Key Takeaways

The CoC sits at the center of the homelessness response system, designed to promote community-wide planning and strategic use of resources to address homelessness in their community. Housing and services funded through the CoC include street outreach, existing shelter, and housing programs and supportive services, all critical activities during emergency and non-emergency times for people experiencing homelessness.

Coordinated Entry (CE)

- HUD requires CoCs to design and implement a CE process in their service area.
- The CE process is a shared, standardized process developed by each CoC to connect people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness with available services and resources in their community.
- The CE process is intended to help communities prioritize individuals who need assistance most.
- CE provides access to services, such as existing shelter, housing, and supportive services.
- CE is intended to allow individuals to access all necessary services through a single entry point, to develop clearer and more effective coordination of services across the community, and to more quickly match individuals with the services that they need.

Housing and Supportive Services

- Key services provided include existing shelter, which offers immediate, short-term relief; transitional housing, which serves as a temporary solution while individuals work towards more permanent housing; rapid re-housing which provides short-term to medium-term rental assistance and supportive services; and permanent supportive housing, which combines housing with supportive services to help individuals maintain stability.
- Additionally, street outreach often plays a key role in locating and connecting with people experiencing homelessness in unsheltered locations such as streets, parks, cars, and abandoned buildings.
- In addition to supporting basic needs, street outreach links individuals to essential services, including healthcare, mental health support, substance abuse treatment, and housing resources.



Supporting people experiencing homelessness is crucial, not just during disaster planning or response, but at all times. Homelessness is a complex issue that affects individuals and families across various systems, such as housing, healthcare, social welfare, and employment. Continuous support is essential for addressing their immediate needs, connecting them to necessary resources, and helping people transition to stable housing and self-sufficiency. By offering ongoing support, communities can work towards breaking the cycle of homelessness and improving the overall well-being of those impacted.

Continuous support for people experiencing homelessness also contributes to creating a more inclusive and equitable society. It allows individuals to access essential services, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Moreover, providing continuous support acknowledges every person's inherent dignity and value, irrespective of their housing situation. By focusing on long-term solutions and support, communities can aim to address the root causes of homelessness and work towards sustainable interventions that promote stability and security for all individuals.

Data on Homelessness

CoCs collect data about the people it serves and the housing and services offered within the CoC service area. This data assists CoCs in planning and coordinating services and funding to prevent and end homelessness in their community. CoCs and homelessness response service providers play a crucial role in understanding and identifying the needs and locations of people experiencing homelessness. They use available data and best practices to determine the demographic details of those experiencing homelessness (age, languages spoken, family structure, disability status) and their geographical distribution within a community. The county emergency planning process relies heavily on this data to support critical planning efforts before and during disasters or emergencies.



Collaborative Opportunity

The At-Risk Populations Framework, developed by the Los Angeles Department of Public Health as part of its broader efforts to address social determinants of health, is a tool for local jurisdictions. The framework outlines a three-phased approach to defining at-risk populations in the context of emergency response and provides considerations for planning, response, and service provision for each phase.



C

Alameda County actively engaged with people experiencing homelessness to shape their disaster response strategies, fostering long-term resilience within the homeless population. Alameda County took the following actions:

Developed Response Capabilities

- Engaged community activists, outreach workers, and leaders from encampments to help develop collaborative disaster preparedness approaches.
- Prevented a hepatitis A outbreak by building trust and rapport with people experiencing homelessness and involved them in disseminating information and vaccine administration.
- Swiftly mobilized resources and involved individuals with lived experience in the decision-making process following a significant fire, addressed underlying needs for light sources and ways to prepare food, and distributed necessary resources to mitigate future fires.

Expanded Response Capabilities

- Proactively responded to COVID-19 and contacted persons experiencing homelessness and distributed essential supplies and information.
- Established street-based healthcare and service centers, prioritized engagement and involvement among the homeless population.
- Emphasized efforts to provide Narcan training and prevent overdoses.

Involved Lived Experience Experts

- Active involvement of individuals with lived experience of homelessness in shaping response strategies was a crucial factor in the success of Alameda County's response efforts.
- Integrated a community advisory board to provide input on emergencies for people experiencing homelessness and focused on developing non-traditional disaster response approaches.

Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS)

- California’s 44 CoCs collect client-level data and information on services provided to individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness who access services through their local Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS).
- CoCs must maintain HMIS and share data with the State of California and HUD.
- HMIS data can be utilized to determine existing shelter counts, bed usage, service utilization, and housing program availability during disasters, and it can also be used to ensure that individuals have accurate information about impending emergencies.
- Many communities utilize “by-name lists” of residents experiencing homelessness. By-name lists can aid communities during disasters by providing real-time information on people’s locations and necessary assistance, coordinating efforts for transportation, evacuation, and resource allocation for emergency shelters and supplies.



Local disaster planning and response agencies often conduct and develop an analysis or assessment that identifies populations at higher risk for negative impacts of disaster when preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a disaster or emergency.

The homelessness response system can help identify heavily populated areas that emergency planning and response agencies might identify as benefitting from structural reinforcement or flood protection measures, such as near creek beds or other high-risk areas.

In addition, the homelessness response system can assist with developing communication processes to reach people without shelter effectively (Federal Emergency Management Agency & Agarwal, 2022).

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count

- CoCs must conduct a Point-in-Time (PIT) count of people experiencing homelessness on a given night who are sheltered annually and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness every two years.
- The PIT count helps estimate the number of individuals and families in the community experiencing homelessness, including those who may not be accessing services.
- Data collected during the PIT count can be used by the homelessness response system and emergency management agencies in advance of and during a disaster or emergency to anticipate the needs of people experiencing homelessness and living unsheltered.



C C

Contact List for county-level contacts in emergency planning and response agencies, public health, social services agencies, CoCs, and community-based and volunteer partners discussed above.



C C

- Guidelines and Strategies for Inclusive Planning in the EOC (lacounty.gov)



C

- Continuum of Care Dashboard Reports (hudexchange.info)
- Homeless Data Integration System - California Interagency Council on Homelessness

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN CALIFORNIA: AN OVERVIEW

Different types of emergencies call for various types and levels of response. An acute emergency, such as a small fire, may call for only a fire department response. A wildfire or post-rain flooding may require a more significant response from multiple jurisdictions and sectors. A pandemic might require extended support from the state. This section presents emergency management as an integrated system that communities use as a framework to reduce vulnerability to hazards and manage disasters.



- A whole-community approach ensures inclusive emergency planning by engaging homelessness response system leaders, emergency planning and response agencies, private sector, and government representatives.
- Consider documenting specific actions within Emergency Operations Plans for supporting people experiencing homelessness in disaster and emergency.

Whole-Community Approach and Access and Functional Needs

In an emergency or natural disaster, it is crucial for emergency planning and response agencies to adopt a whole-community approach, which involves addressing the needs of individuals with access and functional needs.

Access and functional needs pertain to individuals requiring extra support during an emergency. This group typically includes but is not limited to people with disabilities, older adults, those with limited English proficiency, and people experiencing homelessness.

Taking a functions-based approach offers a flexible framework for emergency planning and response. This approach addresses an individual's access or functional needs during an emergency or disaster instead of relying on perceived vulnerability based on diagnostic categories or population characteristics. There are five functional areas to consider during an emergency, which are:

- 1) Communication
- 2) Maintaining Health
- 3) Independence
- 4) Safety and Support
- 5) Access to Services (Including Transportation)



Emergency Management Structure

California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)

California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) brings together multiple agencies and partners to manage events. It operates through five organizational levels that aim to contain emergencies locally before expanding the response to higher levels as needed. Each level plays a crucial role.

Incident Command System (ICS)

- The Incident Command System (ICS) provides a standardized approach for managing disasters or emergencies at any level.
- The Incident Command System allows for the emergency response to be scaled according to the size of the incident.
- The Incident Command System defines clear roles and responsibilities, streamlines coordination and communication, and promotes response efficiency.
- It is organized into five primary functions:
 - a. Incident Commander,
 - b. Operations,
 - c. Planning/Intelligence,
 - d. Logistics, and
 - e. Finance/Administration.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

- Under the Incident Command System, each level of government operates an Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- The purpose of the EOC is to coordinate communications, resource requests, and information sharing using the Incident Command System (California Department of Social Services, n.d.).

Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

- The EOP is a critical document developed at the county (also known as Operational Area) level that outlines how counties will respond to various emergencies.
- Emergency support functions (ESFs) and annexes supplement the plan and organize and coordinate emergency response for different disaster functions, such as emergency shelter, communications, and transportation.
- The EOP includes specific actions and resources to be used during disasters to protect people and property. It is designed to address gaps in planning and ensure preparedness for new and emerging risks.
- Counties must regularly update their emergency operations plan and submit it to Cal OES.
- Other jurisdictions, such as cities, school districts, or utility districts, may also develop an emergency operations plan, but Cal OES does not review their plans.
- There is no specific requirement regarding how often counties should update their EOP.
- Counties are expected to adopt a whole-community approach and consider all access and functional needs within the local jurisdiction, including those experiencing homelessness, when developing a county EOP.



Exemplary Practice

Tuolumne County developed an Access and Functional Needs Advisory Group that will exist beyond developing the emergency operations plan to cohost, coordinate, and conduct outreach for community engagement forums. The EOP has formalized and included the Access and Functional Needs Advisory Group's purpose, function, and role. By including this in the EOP, the county has identified those experiencing homelessness as a priority. Please review the Tuolumne County Emergency Operations Plan Base Plan and Annexes for the full text.



Collaborative Opportunity

To fully integrate access and functional needs considerations into local EOPs, emergency managers can work with the CoC to:

- Develop comprehensive EOPs inclusive of the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Ensure that access and functional needs-related considerations for people experiencing homelessness are fully integrated into the planning process.

The CoC can provide:

- Feedback and recommendations to local government emergency managers on integrating people experiencing homelessness into EOPs and their annexes.
- Expertise and support to local emergency managers to address the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness within the whole community and access and functional needs framework.

By implementing these action items, local jurisdictions can improve the inclusivity of EOPs and better meet the needs of all community members in emergency planning and response efforts.



Toolkits and Templates

- At-Risk Populations Framework developed by the Los Angeles Department of Public Health
- Tuolumne County Emergency Operations Plan Base Plan and Annexes
- Resilience Builder Toolkit (Los Angeles County Community Disaster Resilience)
- Community Resilience Toolkit (HUD)



Additional Resources

- 2024 State Emergency Plan (California Governor's Office of Emergency Services)
- Community Resilience Plan: reviews county demographics, regions, history, and hazard risk and provides an overview of challenges (Monterey County)
- Disaster Guide for People Experiencing Homelessness - English (listocalifornia.org)
- Emergency Preparedness Guide (California Department of Aging)



SECTION II: GET CONNECTED

This section stresses the need for collaborative partnerships and the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness in emergency planning processes. It emphasizes the importance of involving people experiencing homelessness in the planning process and incorporating their input in decision-making. It also promotes connection points between the homelessness response system and the emergency planning and response agencies to develop capacity, utilize knowledge and expertise, and use available resources best.

STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE PLANNING

8 Steps to Inclusive Planning

- **Build Relationships:** Identifying and connecting with leaders in emergency planning and response agencies and the CoCs and homelessness response leadership is crucial. Incorporating the perspectives and needs of people experiencing homelessness is essential when formulating an emergency operations plan with a focus on inclusivity.
- **Make Connections:** Scheduling introductory meetings between emergency services and the CoCs and homelessness response system is vital. Additionally, hosting introductory meetings between local public safety agencies and homelessness response service providers and attending local planning meetings can facilitate valuable information exchange and help identify gaps in service provision.
- **Understand Emergency Management:**
Participating in FEMA [ICS-100: Introduction to the Incident Command System \(ICS-100\)](#) and [ICS-200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents \(ICS-200\)](#) self-paced training can provide a solid foundation in emergency management. Reviewing the county emergency operations plan and relevant annexes regarding supporting people experiencing homelessness is essential for identifying opportunities or areas that can be enhanced or updated.



Key Takeaways

- Addressing the unique challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness during disasters requires a proactive and comprehensive approach.
- Consider establishing an official Access and Functional Need (AFN) Advisory Committee.
- Clearly define responsibilities for all parties involved in emergency operations to prioritize people experiencing homelessness.
- Consider establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that define specific roles, responsibilities, and tasks for the CoC and homelessness response service providers to take on during response or recovery.
- Integrate a CoC representative into the emergency operations center.



Collaborative Opportunity

During non-emergency times, consider creating mutual aid agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOU), formalize partnerships, and support additional funding for partners to assist during disasters or emergencies.

- **Understand Homelessness:** Gaining insights into where people live, the services they utilize, and the distinct needs and barriers of people experiencing homelessness during disasters or emergencies is crucial. Conducting a landscape analysis of homelessness in the community, including data on concentration areas and special populations, provides valuable input for customizing emergency response plans.
- **Identify Strengths and Share Data:** Assessing each agency's unique strengths and conducting community asset mapping to identify resources, needs/gaps, and potential partners enable more strategic and effective collaboration. Sharing and analyzing data on homelessness trends and service utilization is essential to identify areas requiring support during emergencies.
- **Formalize Roles and Responsibilities:** Establishing clear responsibilities through agreements between emergency response agencies and homelessness response systems fosters a transparent understanding of each party's obligations during an emergency. Implementing regular check-in meetings, sharing email updates, or utilizing common communication platforms ensures ongoing alignment and information dissemination among all involved parties.
- **Conduct Preparedness Education and Expand Training Topics:** Local communities can enhance the overall emergency planning and response strategy by offering disaster and emergency preparedness education and training to people experiencing homelessness to better prepare people for actions they can take during disasters or emergencies. This training could also be expanded to the CoC and homelessness response leadership. Consider conducting disaster preparedness exercises and providing training on emergency services, trauma-informed care, de-escalation, and cultural humility for responders and providers.
- **Invest in Dedicated Support and Expansion:** Consider establishing a salaried, county-funded position to provide ongoing assistance, potentially filled by someone with lived experience of homelessness, which can greatly contribute to inclusive planning. Additionally, appointing a homelessness lead in the EOC ensures coordinated action and resource sharing.

Access and Functional Need (AFN) Advisory Committee

Cal OES recommends that counties develop an official Access and Functional Need (AFN) Advisory Committee. This committee often includes representatives from community-based organizations serving individuals with access and functional needs, disability organizations, aging services, community advocates, and people with lived experience. CoCs and homelessness response service providers are natural partners to participate in this group.

Using an inclusive process such as an AFN Advisory Committee ensures jurisdictions are planning with, not for, the community and results in the development of better plans and stakeholder buy-in. Benefits of inclusive planning include:

- Reducing loss of life and suffering before, during, and after disasters.
- Increasing understanding of jurisdictional dynamics and demographics.
- Empowering the community’s capability to assist throughout the disaster cycle.
- Building relationships of trust between emergency managers and the community.
- Advancing and promoting greater personal preparedness.

When plans consider and incorporate the views, perspectives, and feedback of the individuals and organizations they are designed for, stakeholders are more likely to accept and use them. An inclusive planning process also builds relationships and operating patterns that can be utilized during an emergency.



Many counties’ emergency planning and response agencies have an Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Coordinator or Liaison. Their role is to identify the needs of those with access or functional needs (e.g., people experiencing homelessness) before, during, and after disasters and integrate them into the local emergency management systems. To identify the local AFN Coordinator, please see the Appendix: Contact List: Emergency Response and Homelessness Response Services.



C

- Intergovernmental Roundtable on Disaster Resilience (naco.org)
- Community Engagement for Preparedness Guide (kingcounty.gov)
- ICS-100: Introduction to the Incident Command System (FEMA)
- ICS-200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents (FEMA)[AS1]



C

The Sutter Yuba Homeless Consortium, serving as the CoC for Sutter and Yuba counties, has strengthened collaboration through the development of the Access and Functional Needs (AFN) committee, focusing on emergency and disaster events affecting unsheltered communities. The following outlines key actions taken in each phase of planning and response:

Pre-Disaster Collaboration:

- Facilitated introductions to the office of emergency planning and response agencies and key partners: The AFN meetings have enabled strong relationships within the community, improved coordination between organizations and county services, and proved invaluable during recent floods.
- Provided critical information: The CoC shares critical contact information between existing shelter providers and emergency planning and response agencies.

Disaster Response:

- Activated Communications and Transportation Plans: The successful evacuation during the Lake Oroville dam spillway incident was attributed to close communication and coordination between public transit and the existing shelter system and demonstrated the commitment to including unsheltered communities in emergency response plans.

General Best Practices:

- Fostered strong relationships: Monthly stakeholder meetings with law enforcement and ongoing interactions with county health and human services, and public health ensure coordinated support for those experiencing homelessness in the county.

Replication Potential:

- The CoC plays a crucial role in connecting law enforcement, mental health services, social services agencies, and unsheltered communities to replicate successful models in the event of future disasters.



C C

Strategies for Inclusive Planning Checklist for ideas to prioritize the needs of people experiencing homelessness in EOP.



C C

- Assess Your Community’s Disaster Plans - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Ensure No One Is Left Out: Integrate the Needs of Homeless People in Your Disaster Plans - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Get to Know Your Stakeholders - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Meet with Your Stakeholders - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Execute a Memorandum of Understanding - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Collect Information From Your Network - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Disaster-Specific Memorandum of Understanding (fema.gov)

EMERGENCY SERVICES AND HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE: PARTNERS IN DISASTER PLANNING

Partnerships are crucial for effective emergency response. Local emergency teams and government agencies work with community partners to maintain and provide vital services during disasters. This section provides an overview of the different roles and responsibilities and potential opportunities to integrate community-based partners that support people experiencing homelessness into disaster planning.

Local Government Roles and Responsibilities in Disaster Planning

- Each county has a dedicated Emergency Services Coordinator. The Emergency Services Coordinator and/or planning team typically oversees primary emergency management and planning, including drafting the emergency operations plan and annexes.
- If the designated response planning team is within a larger county agency, the team structure often encompasses regional administrators, deputy regional administrators, as well as outreach and communications coordinators, and other roles deemed critical by the county.
- Elected government officials, such as mayors, city councils, and boards of supervisors, bear the crucial responsibility of ensuring the safety and well-being of residents (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2022).
- During emergencies, the main duty of the local government is to:
 - Notify people and take measures to safeguard lives and property, may instruct people to evacuate if necessary.
 - Lead emergency activities and ensure a coordinated approach to response and recovery.



Collaboration among emergency planning and response agencies, public health, social services agencies, and the homelessness response system is essential for assessing and supporting people experiencing homelessness during disasters.

Designated Response Agencies

- The term "designated response agencies" typically includes:
 - Law enforcement (public safety)
 - Fire services
 - Emergency response personnel (EMT, ambulance)
 - Public health
 - Social services
 - Environmental health
 - Hospitals
 - Healthcare facilities
 - Public works
 - Utility operators
 - Others as designated in the local emergency operations plan

Health and Medical Agencies Roles and Responsibilities in Disaster Planning

- **County Departments of Social Services** are usually the designated lead for mass care and emergency shelter. Sometimes, social services agencies can provide people experiencing homelessness with additional benefits and services, such as emergency cash assistance, to support their recovery and long-term stability following emergencies.
- **Local Health Jurisdictions** play an important role in providing support for people experiencing homelessness. Some of the programs they may offer include vaccination programs, mental health resources, and interventions for substance use disorder tailored to the specific needs of this vulnerable population.
- **The county's Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC)** is responsible for assessing needs and coordinating medical and health resources at emergency shelters and in the community.
- **County Departments of Behavioral Health** support the emotional needs of people experiencing homelessness. They can coordinate to evaluate and assess the mental health conditions and needs of people experiencing homelessness, providing vital mental health crisis intervention and emotional support.
- **Environmental Health Agencies** are responsible for ensuring food safety, maintaining clean drinking water, and managing hazardous materials, all of which are essential for people experiencing homelessness during a disaster. Environmental Health Agencies play an important role in determining the overall safety of areas impacted by disasters and congregate settings. They are responsible for shelter inspections; involved in debris clean-up after a disaster, and vector control. They also play a critical role in handling hazardous materials during and after disasters, as well as in restoring utilities.

Homelessness Response System Roles and Responsibilities in Disaster Planning

CoCs and homelessness response leadership can participate in county emergency and disaster planning, such as Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committees or other Task Forces to ensure people experiencing homelessness are included in disaster planning and response, including young children, youth, unaccompanied youth, and families.

CoCs can:

- Provide input to developing and updating the emergency operations plan and annexes specific to people living unsheltered in the community.
- Integrate a disaster clause into contract agreements with existing shelter providers and outreach teams, allowing swift activation during emergencies. This could include proactively identifying additional emergency shelter sites to deploy and working with providers on what activation looks like (The Housing and Workforce Solutions - Homeless CoC in Riverside County, personal communications, 2024).
- Allocate or redirect funding for outreach, mobile services, and harm reduction resources for individuals without shelter or housing during disasters.
- Ensure homelessness response service providers understand their designated role during emergency response and receive the necessary training to support disaster response as applicable.
- Coordinate with social services agencies to expand potential existing shelters, ensuring inclusive practices and pet-friendliness.

Homelessness response service providers can:

- Help determine the locations of people experiencing homelessness.
- Expand existing outreach networks to identify and connect with individuals living in encampments or unsheltered areas.
- Embed familiar and trusted individuals, such as street outreach professionals, in emergency shelters, warming, and cooling centers.
- Offer safe havens, meals, and emotional support, and provide emergency accommodations, food, clothing, and necessities to people experiencing homelessness.
- Place dedicated staff in emergency shelters to connect people experiencing homelessness to housing and services within their community if they are not already connected.
- Provide resources, supplies, and information to persons exiting emergency shelters without a place to stay.



Exemplary Practice

The Housing and Workforce Solutions-Homeless Continuum of Care in Riverside County incorporated contract language in its agreement with homelessness response service providers mandating that homelessness service providers offer support and coverage for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness during emergencies. Below is sample language that can be utilized.

“In the event of a County declared emergency, natural disaster or event that presents immediate threat to unsheltered homeless people, SUBRECIPIENT will be required to have emergency procedures in place to provide staff coverage for night and weekend street outreach. SUBRECIPIENT will work alongside CoC to identify, respond, and provide services to meet the needs of unsheltered individuals during said event and its immediate aftermath.”



Community Partners

Strong partnerships and collaborations are crucial to ensuring effective coordination and response when preparing for and responding to a disaster. Identifying valuable collaborators can greatly enhance preparedness and response efforts, leading to better outcomes for all involved, including people experiencing homelessness. The following partners may be valuable collaborators in the planning process.

K-12 Schools and School Districts

- Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), also known as school districts, charters, or county offices of education, have dedicated McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons that support the academic access and success of children, youth and families affected by homelessness through a variety of supports.
- Schools can support nutrition, transportation, clothing, and other needs essential for student success, such as medical and dental assistance and necessary educational materials.
- Consider establishing MOUs with schools to support transportation, emergency shelter, or other needs during emergencies.

Disability and Aging Network

- The California Department of Aging (CDA) administers programs for older adults, adults with disabilities, family caregivers, and residents in long-term care facilities. These services are provided locally by contracted agencies, usually through the Area Agencies on Aging. Local CoCs and Area Agencies on Aging can collaborate to support older adults during and after disasters and help those experiencing homelessness navigate systems for emergency shelter, food, medical care, and transportation.
- California Independent Living Centers serve people with disabilities or access and functional needs. They can be valuable partners to integrate into the whole community approach, assessing and meeting people's functional needs, and providing the necessary support during a disaster.



Volunteer/Voluntary Organizations

- California COAD/VOAD (Community Organizations/Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) works to minimize the impact of emergencies by collaborating and coordinating services among members and local emergency management/local government with a focus on the most vulnerable populations in a community.
 - During the planning process, COAD/VOADs often create committees that focus on the specific needs of certain populations within their communities and provide training to member organizations. This training could include effectively supporting persons experiencing homelessness during a disaster or emergency.
 - During a disaster, the role of the COAD/VOAD is to coordinate community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and private sector members in supporting the response and recovery efforts. COAD/VOAD members also directly support the affected communities by distributing food and essential items, setting up emergency shelters, and aiding recovery efforts.
- The American Red Cross works alongside government and healthcare entities to deliver services at emergency shelters, service centers, aid stations, and evacuation points. Often, the county has contracted with the Red Cross to manage volunteers to staff, support, set up, and operate emergency shelters, provide food and emergency aid, and offer other services during disasters. In addition to directly serving people experiencing homelessness at emergency shelters, the Red Cross also recruits and engages licensed mental health professionals to provide disaster behavioral and mental health services. (California Disaster Mental Health Coalition, 2023).
- Salvation Army focuses on fulfilling the basic needs of affected individuals and responders during disaster relief operations. This support mirrors that of COADs/VOADs and the Red Cross and can be instrumental in distributing food and essential items to those experiencing homelessness before a disaster.
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs educate volunteers about disaster preparedness and train them in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, search and rescue, disaster medical operations, trauma-informed care, and help ensure that people experiencing homelessness have access to basic necessities like food, emergency shelter, and medical care during disasters.





Animal Services

- Animal services or other agencies involved in [California Animal Response Emergency Support \(CARES\)](#) can help transport animals, arrange temporary foster care, assist with medical treatment for injured or sick pets, or support animals.
- The [California Veterinary Emergency Team \(CVET\)](#) program rescues animals in California during disasters, supporting and training government agencies, individuals, and organizations to aid domestic animals and livestock during emergencies. It is administered by the UC Davis One Health Institute.



Exemplary Practice

Tulare County's Community Care Coalition is the central hub of Tulare County's constellation model, a network of interconnected groups and individuals working together to integrate the needs of persons experiencing homelessness into emergency preparedness and response activities. This coalition tackles the challenge of filling gaps in support services by fostering information sharing and resource allocation. The following outlines key actions:

Pre-Disaster Collaboration:

- **Diverse Participation:** Regular attendees include representatives from various county agencies, city mayors, community-based organizations, businesses, and concerned citizens. This diverse mix fosters a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives.
- **Organic Growth:** The Coalition thrives on an agenda-free environment, which allows for spontaneous resource sharing and brainstorming during non-emergency periods. Conversely, during disasters, a focused agenda ensures efficient response.
- **Growth Beyond Emergencies:** Initially formed for emergency response, the Coalition has become a vital platform for ongoing community support and collaboration. County officials have taken a hands-off approach, allowing the group to flourish organically.

Disaster Response:

- **Be Prepared:** The Access and Functional Needs Liaison works closely with law enforcement, fire departments, and people experiencing homelessness to ensure everyone is ready for emergencies.
- **Resource Hub:** The Emergency Services Manager keeps a centralized list of available resources from partners, ensuring everyone knows who has what and how to mobilize resources quickly.
- **Quick Sheltering:** Established contracts with known locations allow for swift deployment of temporary emergency shelters whenever needed.

General Best Practices:

- **Start Small, Grow Collaboratively:** Start with a clear objective and regular meetings. Even a small initial group focused on shared concerns and resource exchange can become significant.
- **Invest in Dedicated Support:** Establish a salaried, county-funded position to provide ongoing assistance. Someone with lived experience of homelessness can fill this role.

Lessons Learned:

- **Identify Community Champions:** Engage trusted residents who understand local needs and can advocate for them. These individuals can form subcommittees within resource centers to pinpoint gaps and develop solutions.
- **Continuous Assessment and Planning:** Regularly assess preparedness, plan for future incidents, and train staff and community members.

Replication Potential:

- Tulare County's success is attributed to a collaborative approach, clear communication, efficient resource mobilization, and quick resource activation, focusing on preparedness and trust-building.



Refer to Appendix

Emergency Services and Supports Roadmap for details on local jurisdictions, state agencies, and the roles of the CoC and homelessness response system.



Toolkits and Templates

- Identify Your Stakeholders - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Partners for Disaster Recovery Housing Counseling - Disaster Recovery Toolkit (hudexchange.info)
- Planners and Providers - Bridging the Gap - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.info)



Additional Resources

- Local Elected and Appointed Officials Guide: Roles and Resources in Emergency Management (FEMA)
- Engagement between Local Public Health and Homeless Response Systems (Built for Zero Community Solutions)
- Planning for Natural and Public Health Disasters: Forming an Emergency Response Committee of the CoC (hudexchange.info)
- Emergency Network in Los Angeles, CA (ENLA)
- Incorporating Students Experiencing Homelessness into EOP (National Center for Homeless Education)



SECTION III: TAKE ACTION

Section three focuses on the opportunity for local jurisdictions to adapt and adopt practices in EOPs and annexes that actively integrate the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness with a focus on equity, protecting life, and safety. The following sections will provide considerations for integrating people experiencing homelessness into local planning processes. Additionally, they will provide tools, templates, and exemplary practices that may be replicable locally.

These core components are described in further detail in the following:

- **Effective communications:** Reaching out directly to people experiencing homelessness through familiar channels with accessible information about the emergency or disaster and available resources.
- **Evacuation and transportation assistance:** Offering transportation options and ensuring safe havens for those unable to reach emergency shelters.
- **Emergency Shelter:** Understanding the spectrum of emergency shelter options and unique considerations for people experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters.
- **Essential services and safety:** Providing access to food, water, hygiene facilities, and healthcare, including medication support for those who cannot access temporary emergency shelters or decline to go.
- **Equity:** Acknowledging the disparities and risks people experiencing homelessness face during disasters and tailoring the resources and interventions to address the specific needs of individuals and communities experiencing homelessness.
- **Trauma-informed care:** Integrating trauma-informed approaches when communicating with people experiencing homelessness, reducing the risk of psychological trauma, re-traumatization, and its consequences.
- **Transition to recovery:** Developing strategies in advance can humanely transition people from emergency shelter to a pathway to housing and services post-disaster.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

In an emergency, local agencies must have a plan to communicate with the entire community, including people experiencing homelessness who have limited access to mass media and social media. Information must be brought to where people are instead of assuming they will seek it out. This section highlights important factors to consider, such as the content and messaging of communications, ensuring that they cater to the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Content and Messaging

- **Provide timely messaging:** Communicate the disaster as early as possible. Address the type of disaster or emergency, the specific areas affected, the length of time anticipated, and where and what kinds of assistance can be found.
- **Address specific concerns and needs:** Communications should include emergency shelter availability, safe transportation routes during evacuations, mental health resources, storage for belongings, and pet-friendly options.
- **Communicate before a disaster:** Before a disaster or emergency, communicate with people experiencing homelessness about what resources will be available, where emergency shelter can be found, and where resources can be received for sheltering in place.
- **Create clear and concise language:** Break down complex instructions into actionable steps.
- **Use culturally appropriate messaging:** Consider cultural values and communication styles.



Key Takeaways

- Integrate peer support or outreach workers to bring the messaging and resources to people experiencing homelessness.
- Use clear and concise language and breaking down complex instructions into actionable steps in all communications to people experiencing homelessness.
- Utilize alternative communication methods like multi-lingual flyers in accessible locations and outreach through trusted individuals.



Exemplary Practice

Butte County has outlined specific measures for communicating with residents experiencing homelessness during emergencies in their [emergency operations plan](#).

“People experiencing homelessness may have limited resources to evacuate, stockpile food, store medications, and shelter-in-place. Messages communicated through mainstream media sources may not reach them because many individuals cannot access radio, television, or the Internet. Some may be illiterate or have limited English proficiency, so written communication may also be ineffective with this population. Word-of-mouth is this population’s most common form of communication, leading to inaccurate rumors and misunderstandings that may have severe consequences during an emergency. Some people experiencing homelessness have access to cell phones. However, their use of this technology is based on limited minutes and access to charging.

To communicate disasters to people without homes, jurisdictions should include homelessness service providers in emergency notification systems to help create an effective communication plan that includes accessible messaging. Service providers can quickly and effectively communicate the emergency to people experiencing homelessness who are concentrated near their facilities and deploy outreach teams to notify other people dispersed throughout the community. Outreach teams making notifications can also transport people to emergency shelters or designated pickup points for evacuation. Outreach teams employed by homelessness service providers are familiar with unsheltered communities, have established trust and credibility, and can better negotiate with people who might resist evacuation efforts. Jurisdictions should coordinate outreach teams, drivers, and accessible vehicles in advance and assign them to specific designations as soon as possible to prevent delays during a potentially small time window.”

Accessibility and Reach

- **Utilize multiple communication channels and diverse platforms** beyond traditional methods like TV or radio to ensure access to safety and resource information. Consider:
 - **Street outreach:** Those who have built rapport with people experiencing homelessness, other trusted individuals, or other peer support.
 - **Text messages:** Create a group text explicitly for people experiencing homelessness to be notified in an emergency. This information could be gathered from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) (The County of Santa Barbara Housing and Community Development Division, personal communications, 2024). Texting is the best way to communicate, as many people do not have an internet connection.
 - **Social media:** Utilize Facebook or other social media outlets to ensure communication is reaching as many people experiencing homelessness as possible.
 - **Flyers:** Post in areas where people experiencing homelessness are known to be located.
 - **Partnerships:** Partnering with homelessness response service providers, food banks, libraries, street medicine, and harm reduction services can ensure accurate and timely communications about available services. This may include mobilizing these organizations to go directly to encampments to ensure people are aware and provide support in keeping them safe from disasters.
- **Ensure multilingual information and communication:**
 - Identify common languages within the community and plan to ensure that translation services can be quickly mobilized to translate all written materials into multiple languages.
 - Provide clear and concise instructions in multiple languages and identify contacts at all local non-English language media outlets to quickly alert them to emergency communications. Utilize alternative communication methods like multi-lingual flyers in accessible locations and outreach through trusted individuals. Templates for these can be created in advance.
- **Use data to identify outreach locations:**
 - This may include mapping with homelessness response service provider partners to identify where people experiencing homelessness are to ensure no one is missed.
 - Use heat maps from the most recent Point-In-Time Count and other resources your local CoC and homelessness response leadership created to help in these efforts.
- **Utilize existing connections and knowledge of people experiencing homelessness:**
 - Rely on outreach teams, homelessness response service providers, social services agencies, harm reduction organizations, and others who have spent time building trusting relationships with people experiencing homelessness and can provide targeted outreach and communication before and during emergencies, ensuring people receive vital information about dangers, safe havens, and available resources before disaster.
 - Law enforcement and park rangers may also be able to assist in accessing hard-to-reach spaces, such as riverbanks and levees. However, as there is often distrust of law enforcement, it is recommended that outreach workers or peer support be used to communicate about a disaster or emergency whenever possible. If law enforcement must be present, as recommended by the Cal ICH LEAB on page 10, it is recommended that they should not carry guns to communicate about impending disasters or emergencies, as this can exacerbate fears within the community.



E

The County of Santa Barbara Housing and Community Development's Extreme Weather Protocol is a successful approach to protecting people experiencing homelessness during extreme weather events. The protocol emphasizes clear communication, logistical preparedness, data tracking, and leveraging existing resources. It provides valuable insights for other communities facing similar challenges. The following are key elements of the Extreme Weather Protocol:

Pre-Disaster Collaboration:

- **Develop Partnerships:** Active participation from various stakeholders, including public health, fire departments, homelessness response service providers, and law enforcement ensure a coordinated response.
- **Used a Client-Centered Approach:** Integration of individuals with lived experience provides valuable insights on emergency shelter design, preferred communication methods, and support needs.
- **Created a Communications Plan:** Clear communication channels between Emergency Operations Centers (EOC), existing and emergency shelters, outreach teams, and CoC officials, including pre-developed communication materials such as website updates, social media posts, scripts for outreach workers, and emergency shelter signage, is essential for rapid communication with people experiencing homelessness. Prior collaboration with law enforcement also supports aerial announcements during emergencies with pre-determined messages.

Disaster Response:

- **Be a part of the EOC:** Have a designated homelessness expert within the EOC to streamline communication and confirm needs are addressed.
- **Activate Communications Plan:** Maintain an updated list of cell phone numbers of people experiencing homelessness to communicate with them before and during disasters directly.

General Best Practices:

- **Integrate Existing Resources:** Leverage existing resources whenever possible, such as utilizing established warming centers with staff and infrastructure and partnering with existing street outreach teams who have established rapport with people experiencing homelessness.
- **Be Resourceful:** Have well-stocked first-aid kits, basic cleaning supplies, emergency shelter maintenance tools, and a real-time chart that tracks available existing and emergency shelter bed capacity across the region.

Lessons Learned:

- **Address Funding:** Santa Barbara acknowledged the complexities of securing consistent disaster preparedness and response funding. By braiding funds, Santa Barbara expanded street outreach using HHAP and ERG funds.
- **Track Data and Finances:** A system for tracking and documenting expenses was crucial for potential FEMA reimbursements. Additionally, clear coding guidelines ensured efficient financial management.

Replication Potential:

- The Santa Barbara Extreme Weather Protocol offers a replicable and successful model for protecting people living unsheltered during harsh weather. By addressing communication gaps, strategically integrating resources, and prioritizing client needs, this program provides valuable learnings for other communities facing similar challenges.



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- Integrating a Community Partner Network to Inform Risk Communication Strategies (CDC)
- Planning for an Emergency: Strategies for Identifying and Engaging At-Risk Groups (CDC)
- Surviving Severe Weather: Tools to Promote Emergency Preparedness for People Experiencing Homelessness (NHCHC)
- Risk Communication in Rural Settings (Southeast Health District)

EVACUATION AND TRANSPORTATION



Getting to a safe location quickly is paramount in a disaster or emergency. Effective transportation plans require early and ongoing collaboration between emergency response agencies, transportation agencies, the Continuum of Care and homelessness response leadership, and the community. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined before a disaster.

This section covers the importance of accessibility and inclusivity, addressing the importance of ensuring transportation is accessible to all people experiencing homelessness; this includes but is not limited to those with a disability, those who do not speak English, those who have pets and belongings, and those with mental health needs or substance use disorders. This section also covers considerations for evacuation and relocation, such as when evacuation orders are in place and when people must be transported away from their current location to remain safe. Recognize and plan that it will be challenging for people to leave their belongings behind.



- Identify transportation resources in advance.
- Establish MOUs, contracts with transportation providers, and mutual aid agreements with surrounding jurisdictions and clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- Determine where people are located and overestimate the need for accessible transportation.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

- **Support multiple transportation options:** Consider diverse needs and abilities, including accessible buses, wheelchair-friendly vans, pet-friendly transportation, and options for people to bring their belongings. Consider individuals with active mental health or substance use concerns and ensure safe transportation will be available.
- **Partner with the CoC and homelessness response leadership and outreach teams:** Collaborate with organizations serving people experiencing homelessness to identify needs, establish agreements, and facilitate transportation access during emergencies.
- **Establish formal roles and responsibilities:** Create mutual aid agreements/memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with partners to ensure clear roles and responsibilities to support transportation needs during disasters and emergencies (HUD Exchange, 2021).
- Contracts are crucial for successful evacuation and should address the following:
 - Roles/Responsibilities – Clearly define roles (i.e., who provides evacuation/transportation assistance)
 - Activation – Determine who is activated, when, and by whom
 - Assets – Determine how many and what type of assets are available
 - Response Time and Area – Estimate the time needed to respond, operational hours to serve emergency shelters, and geographical coverage
 - Liability – Determine how liability coverage works
 - Contracts should clearly state that emergency evacuation services will be provided 24/7 via an on-demand taxi-like service at no cost to the user and that resources will include accessible transportation assets.
- **Include pets and belongings:** Provide options to support the transportation of pets and belongings. In disasters and emergencies, people experiencing homelessness may have all of their belongings with them and may have pets. Consider incorporating these into transportation plans (HUD Exchange, 2021).
- **Train and educate transportation personnel:** Train transportation personnel on interacting with people experiencing homelessness, de-escalation techniques, cultural humility, and sensitivity to mental health concerns and neurodiversity (HUD Exchange, n.d.). Training can include trauma-responsiveness and understanding that the disaster event (or interaction with first responders) may activate individuals.
- **Consider rural areas:** Make plans in advance to evacuate and transport people in hard-to-reach places to safety. Have plans for appropriate transportation that can get through tough terrain, such as dirt roads or areas without roads, which can be a barrier to getting people to safety.



Evacuation and Relocation

- **Provide real-time information:** Share evacuation orders and transportation options in multiple languages through multiple channels, such as text messages, social media, and community outreach teams.
- **Prioritize people experiencing homelessness:** Offer targeted assistance and prioritize evacuation for people experiencing homelessness, especially those with disabilities or health concerns.
- **Plan for moving inoperable vehicles:** Partner with tow truck companies to relocate inoperable vehicles to a safer location to keep their inhabitants and belongings safe.
- **Family reunification:** Transport individuals or families to be with family members or trusted relationships for security and well-being during or after a disaster.
- **Continued transportation support:** Provide reliable, cost-free transportation options for people experiencing homelessness during the recovery phase to facilitate access to essential services and resources.



Toolkits and Templates

- Preparedness Checklist: Evacuation and Transportation - Disaster and Recovery Homelessness Toolkit Response Guide (hudexchange.info)
- Disaster Event Checklist: Evacuation and Transportation - Disaster and Recovery Homelessness Toolkit Response Guide (hudexchange.info)

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Communities can support the safety, well-being, and dignity of people experiencing homelessness during disasters by ensuring coordination across agencies in advance and embracing diverse emergency shelter options, partnering with homelessness system leadership and providers where possible to provide supportive services to match individual needs.

Mass sheltering is often led by the County Department of Social Services and supported by emergency services (“California Emergency Support Function 6 Mass Care and Shelter,” 2022). Mass care and shelter is an unfunded mandate for many counties, making collaboration and creative leveraging of partnerships critical.

Please note, it is understood that there are shelters in operation 365 days a year that are referred to within the homelessness response community as “emergency shelters.” It is also understood that there are temporary emergency shelters stood up during times of disaster and emergency often referred to by emergency managers as “emergency shelters.” **To ensure clarity, in the following section whenever the term “emergency shelter” is used, it will refer to shelters stood up during a disaster or emergency.** The term “existing shelter” is used to refer to shelters operating 365 days a year, and not only in times of disaster or emergency.

This section outlines the following elements of emergency shelter: understanding the spectrum of emergency shelter options, unique considerations for people experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters, and considerations for accessible emergency shelters and resources.

This section encourages communities to get creative when thinking about emergency shelter options and supports having multiple options available for people experiencing homelessness, ensuring the needs of the individual are met.



Key Takeaways

- Explore innovative shelter options and connections to services and supports within emergency shelters.
- Consider pets, partners, and possessions when determining emergency shelter locations.
- Make emergency shelters Coordinated Entry Access Points to support individuals on their path towards housing.

EMERGENCY SHELTER OPTIONS

Emergency managers may consider the following emergency shelter options:

- **Existing shelter and interim housing:** Understand the capacity and resources available at existing shelters or other interim housing options within the homelessness response system that are housing people experiencing homelessness, and collaborate with CoCs to increase capacity and implement overflow plans.
- **Emergency shelters (pop-up shelters):** Utilize gymnasiums, auditoriums, schools, fairgrounds, community centers, or other buildings that already exist to establish temporary emergency shelters:
 - Ensure accessibility to all individuals, including people experiencing homelessness, by adjusting or modifying policies and training personnel.
- **Alternative spaces:** Care should be taken with youth and adults identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) or LGBTQIA+ who are experiencing homelessness in terms of having various alternative safer spaces or interim emergency shelter options available that do not re-traumatize the person (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).
- **Creative Solutions for Emergency Shelters:** Explore innovative options such as:
 - Repurposing vacant buildings: Identify and collaborate with owners of city/county-owned spaces to temporarily convert vacant buildings into emergency shelters.
 - Motel vouchers: Integrate motel vouchers as alternatives to traditional emergency shelters to support individuals who may not feel comfortable in congregate settings. (The Housing and Workforce Solutions - Homeless CoC in Riverside County, personal communications, 2024).
 - Cooling/warming centers: Determine if cooling or warming centers may be used as temporary emergency shelters in disasters and emergencies. As part of the planning process, local leadership should determine whether cooling and warming center facilities align with the criteria used for identifying emergency shelters and therefore have the ability to transition to emergency shelter locations during an emergency.
 - Transportation hubs: Turn airports or train stations into temporary emergency shelters, leveraging existing facilities and infrastructure. Convert armories or former military bases into emergency shelters (Tulare County, personal communications, 2024).
 - Public and faith-based facilities: Partner with churches, libraries, or community centers to offer safe havens with additional support services (FEMA, 2020).
- **Accessibility:** In all emergency shelter options consider the diverse needs and abilities of people experiencing homelessness and ensure shelter accessibility for people with disabilities, including people who use wheelchairs.



Exemplary Practice

The Housing and Workforce Solutions - Homelessness Continuum of Care in Riverside County's use of pop-up emergency shelters during Hurricane Hilary offers other communities an example of the effectiveness of a collaborative, well-planned approach to disaster response for people experiencing homelessness. The following are key actions taken by Riverside County's Homelessness CoC:

Pre-Disaster Collaboration:

- **Develop Partnerships:** Build relationships with emergency planning and response agencies, existing shelters, outreach teams, and county departments (social services, behavioral health, public health, Agency on Aging).
- **Modify Sub-Recipient Agreements:** Include emergency response clauses with clear points of contact, funding procedures, and cost-reimbursement options (e.g., for FEMA).

Disaster Response:

- **Activate Pop-Up Emergency Shelters:** Partner with existing shelter providers to quickly set up emergency shelters in safe locations.
- **Coordinate Outreach:** Utilize outreach teams to warn people experiencing homelessness and encourage emergency shelter use. Account for pet needs (e.g., kenneling services).
- **Expand Services within Emergency Shelters:** Work with county departments to offer on-site benefits enrollment, behavioral health support, and public health services (nursing, peer support).
- **Connect with Permanent Housing:** Facilitate connections between emergency shelter residents and permanent housing resources at the emergency shelter location.

General Best Practices:

- **Embrace Flexibility:** Adapt emergency shelter procedures (low barrier approach) to accommodate diverse needs during emergencies.
- **Be Resourceful:** Explore alternative options like hotel vouchers for those who prefer not to stay in emergency shelters.
- **Invest in Training:** Provide multi-disciplinary training for emergency shelter staff on cultural sensitivity, disaster response, and housing first sheltering.
- **Prepare for the Unexpected:** Have pre-established emergency contact lists and processes in place.

Lessons Learned:

- **Contract Language:** Update sub-recipient agreements to address emergency response expectations and funding.
- **Low-Barrier Emergency Sheltering:** Promote a welcoming and flexible environment within emergency shelters during emergencies.
- **Communication is Key:** Maintain clear communication channels with partners throughout the disaster response.

Replication Potential:

- By prioritizing disaster response in contract language, the CoC ensured that service providers are fully prepared to respond during a disaster or emergency.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EMERGENCY SHELTER AND TRAINING

- **Emergency Shelter Safety:**
 - Security: Ensure that all people staying in an emergency shelter are free of physical and emotional harm. Communities and providers may take measures to ensure safety, including hiring security guards or training staff to use harm reduction and de-escalation techniques
 - Expertise: CoC and homelessness response service providers often have pre-established relationships, training, and knowledge that will support a safer environment within emergency shelters.
 - Alternative Options: People experiencing homelessness may be distrustful of or uncomfortable in government-run emergency shelters. Connect people staying in emergency shelters to services that better fit their needs, such as emergency shelters run by community-based organizations that may provide alternative options for people experiencing homelessness.
- **Training Considerations on:**
 - De-escalation: To provide training on de-escalation to allow emergency shelter staff and volunteers to have skills should an event occur within the emergency shelter.
 - Cultural competency: To encourage inclusivity and respect for diverse backgrounds and experiences (Planning for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, n.d.).
 - Discrimination and bias: To provide racial equity and cultural sensitivity training to combat discrimination. Some counties have created online training for county staff and providers in their communities (The Housing and Workforce Solutions - Homeless CoC in Riverside County, personal communications, 2024).
 - Trauma-informed care: To provide compassionate services with an understanding of past trauma and its effects on individuals.
- **Low Barrier Considerations:**
 - Curfew: Consider ways of being flexible with curfew within emergency shelters, keeping as many people safe and sheltered as possible during disasters and emergencies. It also encourages people to seek emergency shelter if they know the emergency shelter will accept them at later hours (Planning for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, n.d.).
 - Awake room: Consider having a room where people can stay awake through the night. People living outside can sometimes remain awake through the night to keep themselves and their belongings safe, and they may be used to sleeping during the day.

- Cigarette smoking/vaping: Consider finding space for those who smoke to do so without having to leave the emergency shelter such as an outdoor patio on-site. If people must leave the site to smoke, consider having a staff member escort them after hours or being flexible to allow them back inside after hours.
- Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS): In times of disaster/emergency, getting people into an emergency shelter safely is the priority. Consider ways to enroll people experiencing homelessness in Coordinated Entry when people are safe and not in a crisis whenever possible (The Housing and Workforce Solutions - Homeless CoC in Riverside County, personal communications, 2024).
- Harm reduction supplies and education: Providing harm reduction supplies and education for emergency shelters is critical for the safety and well-being of people staying in emergency shelters. California is a Housing First State, requiring state-funded existing shelters serving people experiencing homelessness to use harm reduction principles, not discriminate based on drug use and, if applicable, connect people to more appropriate services. While Housing First is a requirement for state-funded homelessness programs, it is an evidence-based model and best practice that should be implemented in all homelessness settings intentionally or tangentially serving people experiencing homelessness. Consider training emergency shelter staff and volunteers in harm reduction principles and maintaining access to Naloxone for overdose reversal.





Exemplary Practice

To create a trauma-informed emergency shelter design that considers the needs of people who have experienced trauma, it is important to consider the physical space, staff training opportunities for cultural sensitivity and harm-reduction, adoption of a people-centered approach, and collaboration with community partners. The following summarizes trauma-informed approaches for emergency shelters.

Design Elements of Trauma-Informed Spaces (Colletti, 2020):

- Create spaces that offer privacy and avoid overcrowding.
- Allow room for movement and comfort. Identify areas that allow for smoking.
- Designate areas where people can find refuge, such as quiet rooms without TV or telephones, specifically to provide comfort and relaxation.
- Consider spaces that minimize outside noise and fluorescent lighting, if possible, for those with sensory integration disorders and combat trauma.
- Ensure privacy during interactions while also providing appropriate space (small, enclosed spaces may be activating for some people).
- Assure individuals that they can take breaks from conversations; if using an impromptu space, it should be easy for the individual or provider to exit quickly without any blocked exits.

Staff Training and Sensitivity:

- Ensure safety within the emergency shelter premises by providing staff and volunteers with trauma-informed training techniques and practices.
- When possible, allow for a choice of staff to interact with. For example, due to previous trauma, a female-identifying person may not be comfortable talking or completing paperwork with a male-identifying staff person.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to approach people experiencing homelessness with empathy and compassion.
- Teach staff and volunteers how to avoid activating traumatic memories.

People-Centered Approach:

- Use person-centered language such as “people experiencing homelessness” rather than terms such as “homeless people” or “the homeless.” People are more than their current circumstances.
- View people experiencing homelessness through a strengths-based lens. People often are experiencing homelessness for a variety of reasons, primarily due to lack of housing (SAMHSA, n.d.), and rarely by choice.
- Give choices whenever possible (Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, n.d.).
- Respect people's choices and autonomy (Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, n.d.).
- Prioritize safety and respect in interactions.

PETS, PARTNERS, AND POSSESSIONS

- **Belongings and Storage:**

- Limited space: Emergency shelters often offer minimal storage, requiring creative solutions like shared storage bins and alternative storage options like lockers or community storage spaces. When possible, plan to include a secure locker in front of the shelter where all possessions can be stored.
- Loss and theft prevention: Consider labeling belongings, utilizing personal locks, and accessing safe deposit boxes for valuables.

- **Pets:**

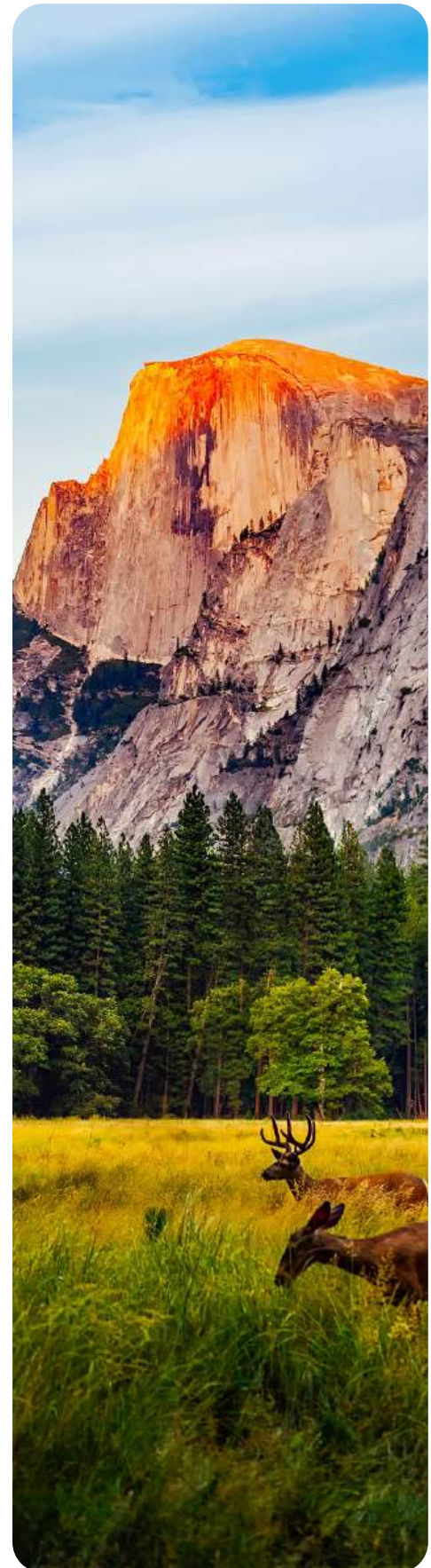
- Pet-friendly policies: For many people experiencing homelessness, their companion animals are their closest friends and source of stability and support. The additional emotional strain of being separated under already stressful circumstances can create unnecessary trauma and disruption. While [AB 781](#) does require each county to have at least one shelter that accepts pets, not all emergency shelters allow pets, necessitating temporary boarding, family separation, or relocation to pet-friendly shelters. During a disaster, emergency shelters may look for ways to ensure that pets can stay with their owners as much as possible. Other considerations would be to coordinate partnering with local animal shelters in advance to provide kennels for all animals, ideally located as close to their owners as possible.
- Pet care and sanitation: Pet food, waste disposal facilities, and veterinary care to maintain animal welfare and emergency shelter hygiene is an important consideration. Whenever possible, keep pets with their owners (National Alliance to End Homelessness et al., 2020). Consider the addition of spaying, neutering, and vaccinating the pets of people experiencing homelessness to emergency sheltering plans if the emergency includes the risk of zoonotic disease.

- **Relationships and Support:**

- Partner support: Emergency shelters may have restrictions on couples, forcing separation or hindering vital support systems. Whenever possible, create opportunities for partners to shelter together during a disaster.
- Maintain family unification: A dedicated family sleeping area helps ensure the safety and comfort of children by keeping the family unit together. Families could be supported by family-specific existing or emergency shelters whenever possible to meet their needs better (Planning for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, n.d.).
- Children and teenagers: Address children's specific needs (e.g., privacy, study spaces) and consider family-friendly emergency shelters offering age-appropriate activities.

- **Harm Reduction and Substance Use:**

- Prepare in advance: It is important to consider harm reduction practices and supplies and plan for addressing substance use of people staying in emergency shelters. This includes having supplies such as sharps containers, safe injection and smoking supplies, and a good understanding of available resources that can be mobilized to support people who use drugs while staying at an emergency shelter. Many people experiencing homelessness are at an elevated risk of medical complications, withdrawal symptoms, or overdose in disasters and emergencies. Local health jurisdictions can provide guidance and support in the preparation of emergency shelters.
- Safer consumption and disposal: Advocate for harm reduction strategies like providing sterile supplies, fentanyl test strips, and safe disposal options to prevent overdose and disease transmission and maintain hygiene.
- Overdose preparedness: Have naloxone on-site at all times. This is a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose of opioids. Train staff on when to use it and how to appropriately respond to an overdose by administering naloxone and performing rescue breathing. [The National Community-Based Naloxone Finder provides information for communities to locate and stock Naloxone.](#)
- Support substance use disorder treatment access: Have resources available to connect individuals to substance use disorder treatment options and support groups that are accessible from emergency shelters. If treatment options are not available at the emergency shelter, individuals can be connected to telehealth programs.





Collaborative Opportunity

Make emergency shelters accessible to all. Ensure all community members are welcome in all emergency shelters, including people experiencing homelessness. Provide anti-discrimination training and written guidance on how all emergency shelter volunteers and workers should support low barrier access to emergency shelters. Consider establishing in advance a support team that can be deployed to help address various situations that arise. Train managers and intake specialists to recognize and respond appropriately to groups with special needs, including adults experiencing homelessness, unaccompanied youth, and families with children (Response Guide - HUD Exchange, n.d.).



Toolkits and Templates

- Low Barrier Existing Shelter Models for People Using Drugs (Homeless and Housing Resource Center)
- Stay Over Program (SOP) A School-Based Existing Shelter (San Francisco Unified School District)



Additional Resources

- Resilience Hubs (Urban Sustainability Directors Network)
- Warming/Cooling Centers - Interim Guide to Health Equity-Centered Local Heat Planning (California Department of Public Health)
- Improving Outcomes in Homelessness: Keeping People and Pets Together (National Alliance to End Homelessness)
- Administering Naloxone (California Department of Public Health)

ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND SAFETY



While emergency shelters play a vital role in disaster response, people experiencing homelessness may choose not to utilize them due to various concerns about privacy, safety, discrimination, or incompatibility with their specific needs (Addressing Disaster Vulnerability Among Homeless Populations During COVID-19, 2021). There should be plans in place to ensure the hygiene and safety of people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies, including those who remain outside (Edgington, 2009).

The following section focuses on considerations that support keeping people experiencing homelessness who continue sleeping outdoors safe during disasters and emergencies.



- Support people in various forms of homelessness, including people living in RVs, cars, and tents and those unsheltered from climate and weather-related dangers.
- Ensure basic nutritional needs, medical care, and survival supplies for people experiencing homelessness are met.
- Provide access to restrooms, handwashing, showers, and laundry, providing trash receptacles and regular trash pickup, and providing safe syringe disposal and exchange.

PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SERVICES

- **Food and Water Distribution**

- Consider a stockpile of emergency supplies to ensure resources can be quickly distributed to people experiencing homelessness during a disaster (Morris, 2020).
- Partner with outreach teams to deliver essential supplies.
- Consider establishing mobile food pantries and accessible water distribution points in familiar locations frequented by individuals without shelter or housing.
- Partner with existing community kitchens to provide hot meals.
- Collaborate with local school districts to plan for food distribution to students and their families experiencing homelessness.

- **Medical Care**

- Implement mobile medical units or collaborate with existing clinics to offer basic healthcare services, including hygiene kits, wound care, and medication refills (Morris, 2020).
- Ensure medical teams and volunteers are trained in trauma-informed care practices.
- Connections to services can be facilitated through county behavioral health who can connect people with their existing mental health provider or initiate services for the first time.
- Medication support may also be offered to assist individuals who have lost their medication due to the disaster, preventing further health complications (California Department of Public Health, 2020).
- Consider medical care for pets and partner with animal services organizations who can support them by providing animal services and supplies such as pet food, vaccinations, spaying and neutering, and interim shelter (Planning for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, n.d.).

- **Sanitation and Hygiene**

- Install temporary restroom facilities and handwashing stations in areas frequented by individuals without housing or shelter (Network for Public Health Law, 2018).
- Provide access to personal hygiene products and laundry facilities.
- Include trash receptacles and coordinate regular trash removal.
- Consider collaborations with community-based organizations to increase public hygiene and sanitation access. For example, businesses could be offered a license fee to open toilets and other relevant facilities to the public (Network for Public Health Law, 2018).
- Communicate with local public health, environmental health, or vector control to minimize exposures to vectors (e.g., mosquitos, rodents) that could lead to secondary disaster impacts or diseases.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFETY

- **Safer Spaces**

- Consider alternative options such as safe camping sites for those who do not want or cannot go to existing or emergency shelter but may not feel safe staying at their current location.
- Consider cultural values and communication styles and make accommodations whenever possible.
- Identify and designate weather-protected, secure locations where individuals can seek temporary refuge during extreme weather events or dangerous situations.

- **Safety Planning**

- Create a safety plan with those who do not want to evacuate or seek existing or emergency shelter at the time that it is offered (Planning for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, n.d.). Ensure they know how to ask for assistance or enter existing or emergency shelters should they change their minds.
- Ensure people in areas frequented by individuals without housing or shelter have a means of communication in case of additional emergency or crisis.
- Battery-operated radios may support keeping people up to date with current disaster or emergency conditions.
- Consider peer-to-peer safety initiatives and community watch programs.



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- Health Justice for People Experiencing Homelessness: Confronting the U.S. Public Sanitation and Hygiene Crisis (The Network for Public Health Law)

EQUITY IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE



It is crucial to prioritize equity in emergency response for people experiencing homelessness, as they are already marginalized and face unique challenges. It is also imperative to consider and address the needs of specific sub-populations of people experiencing homelessness, which may include:

- Youth and families
- Unaccompanied youth
- LGBTQIA+ individuals
- Migrant workers
- Survivors of violence
- Others from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- LGBTQIA+-affirming emergency shelters
- Culturally sensitive support services
- Language accessibility
- Targeted outreach to communities of diverse backgrounds and survivors of violence

By incorporating equitable strategies into emergency planning, communities can better serve and support those in the most precarious situations.



- Prioritize equity as a strategic goal and allocate resources accordingly.
- Embed equity into local response systems at every level, including the emergency operations center.
- Provide comprehensive equity training to all staff and volunteers.



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Cal ICH LEAB members emphasized the importance of having real-time access to disaster plans and ensuring that these plans are up-to-date and inclusive of diverse needs, such as those of transgender individuals.

EMBEDDING EQUITY

Having a dedicated equity staff person integrated into the emergency operations center and written into the emergency operations plan has been shown to increase access to care and services during disasters or emergencies for marginalized groups, such as people experiencing homelessness (The Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative and The Public Health Alliance of Southern California, 2020). Other ways to embed equity in emergency management planning may include:

- Local governments allocating funding to embed equity-based roles and practices within the local incident command structure and emergency operations center.
- Emergency response agencies hiring equity staff to coordinate with the CoC and homelessness response leadership to provide training for community-based organizations.
- Social services agencies providing longer-term support and benefits for marginalized communities.
- Public health agencies gathering, reporting, and monitoring detailed demographic data on equity that may be absent from many public data dashboards.
- CoCs informing emergency planning and response agencies and county leadership of needs and effective strategies for reaching and supporting people experiencing homelessness in an equitable way.

In addition, an equitable approach to disaster planning may also include:

- **Anti-discrimination policies:** Developing clear anti-discrimination policies that extend planning and services to people experiencing homelessness (Addressing Disaster Vulnerability among Homeless Populations during COVID-19, 2021).
- **Staff and volunteer training:** Prioritizing learning and development to overcome unconscious bias (SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center et al., 2018). Cultural humility or other stigma reduction training can help responders and volunteers communicate with people experiencing homelessness, so they better understand how to prepare and respond to a disaster or emergency (SAMHSA, n.d.).
- **Low barrier/Housing First approaches:** Align policies with Housing First, an evidence-based model and best practice, to ensure participants are accepted regardless of preconditions (e.g., sobriety, criminal history, financial history, separation of belongings or pets) and are connected to supportive services that meet their needs. State-funded existing shelters are required to comply with the State's Housing First law ([Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) Section 8255](#)). The [Cal ICH Guide to California's Housing First Law](#) provides guidance on implementing Housing First. For shelters stood up during emergencies, consider integrating low-barrier, Housing First approaches to the greatest extent possible when serving people experiencing homelessness (Riverside County Housing and Workforce Solutions - Homeless Continuum of Care Division, personal communications, 2024).



Toolkits and Templates

- Embedding Equity in Crisis Preparedness and Response in Health Systems action planning workbook (ama-assn.org) begins on p.129
- Equity Impact Review Tool, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (kingcounty.gov)
- Ensuring Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Crisis Communication (thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov)



Additional Resources

- Equity Response Annex (kingcounty.gov)
- Embedding Equity in Crisis Preparedness and Response in Health Systems (ama-assn.org)
- Embedding Equity into Emergency Operations (phasocal.org)

PRIORITIZING PEOPLE: INTEGRATING TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE



People experiencing homelessness are already facing high-stress situations that affect their safety and well-being every day. Emergencies and disasters can trigger and retraumatize people experiencing homelessness. Incorporating a trauma-informed approach and modifying policies, procedures, and practices to reduce obstacles and integrate trauma-informed practices and knowledge into services during a disaster is vital to reducing trauma or re-traumatization.

SAMHSA's six guiding principles to define a trauma-informed approach are:

- safety
- choice
- collaboration
- trustworthiness
- empowerment
- cultural, historical, and gender issues

In this approach, individuals are treated with unconditional positive regard and are viewed as the experts in their own lives. People are empowered to make informed decisions that best suit their needs.



Key Takeaways

- Use trauma-informed approaches to reduce the risk of psychological trauma, re-traumatization, and long-term mental health consequences.
- Modify policies, procedures, and practices to reduce obstacles and integrate trauma-informed practices and knowledge into services.
- Build awareness and train staff to recognize and avoid re-traumatization.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

Several approaches and strategies exist for providing trauma-informed care to people experiencing homelessness. The goal is to establish a respectful, nonjudgmental relationship with the person, prioritize basic needs, ensure privacy and safety, use clear and simple language, recognize signs of distress, and provide ongoing mental health support and assistance in accessing housing and stability (SAMHSA, 2023). Key aspects of this are detailed below.

1. Build trust and rapport:

- Establish a respectful and non-judgmental relationship with people experiencing homelessness.
- Maintain the individual's privacy and treat all information as confidential.
- Show empathy and compassion. Acknowledge and validate feelings (SAMHSA, 2023).
- Listen to people who want to share their emotions or stories; don't provide simple assurances or opinions about personal behaviors, actions, or feelings (Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, n.d.).

2. Assess immediate needs:

- Prioritize basic needs such as food, water, emergency shelter, and medical attention.
- Address safety concerns, including exposure to extreme weather.
- Provide practical suggestions that encourage self-efficacy. Information should be simple and accurate and may need to be repeated (Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, n.d.).
- Consider any existing health conditions or medications.
- Maintain family unity, keep families together, children with caregivers/parents, and help people contact friends or loved ones (Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, n.d.).

3. Trauma-informed communication:

- Use clear and simple language.
- Use person-first language to emphasize the person, not the situation or condition, such as saying "people with disabilities" instead of "disabled person."
- Avoid re-traumatization triggers, such as forcing people to share their stories.
- Be aware of all parties' body language and facial expressions (SAMHSA, 2023).
- Be patient and allow time for processing. It may take several efforts or repeating the information given (SAMHSA, 2023).
- Engage as an active listener, not listening to respond.
- Whenever possible, offer choices and follow the individual's lead as the expert of their own life.

4. Address Mental Health Needs:

- Recognize signs of distress (e.g., anxiety, panic).
- Promote coping strategies (deep breathing, grounding techniques). Offer guidance and information on tactics to reduce anxiety and stress, such as breathing techniques (SAMHSA, 2023).
- Connect people with mental health professionals.
- Train staff and volunteers when to initiate advanced protocols that require mental health expertise (e.g., mental health crisis or breakdown).

5. Cultural Sensitivity:

- Work with local community groups to grasp cultural subtleties before providing aid or services (SAMHSA, 2023).
- Understand the diverse backgrounds and cultural norms of those in the community.
- Respect individual preferences and beliefs.
- Adapt communication styles accordingly.
- Connect survivors to culturally appropriate resources (language, services) (SAMHSA, 2023).

6. Provide Information and Education:

- Provide accurate information about the disaster and relief efforts to help people understand the situation (Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, n.d.).
- Explain emergency response and recovery procedures and direct people to available services.
- Share resources for coping with trauma for all ages, from young children to youth and families.

7. Long-Term Support:

- Recognize that trauma effects may persist beyond the immediate crisis.
- Advocate for ongoing mental health support and connect with available services, including locating a therapist or support group or getting someone signed up for healthcare insurance (SAMHSA, 2023).
- Assist with accessing housing and stability, such as enrolling a person in CE, which provides access to vouchers, rapid rehousing, or other housing resources.

Integrating trauma-informed approaches into disaster planning and response is more successful when local jurisdictions work closely with other service providers, such as mental health, substance use disorder, and the CoC and homelessness response leadership.



Refer to Appendix

Trauma-Informed Approaches Checklist for strategies that can be integrated into the planning process.



Toolkits and Templates

- Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines (nvoad.org)
- Trauma-informed Organization Assessment Manual (National Healthcare for the Homeless Council)



Additional Resources

- Psychological First Aid (PFA) Online Training (nctsn.org)
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training (mentalhealthfirstaid.org)
- Trauma-Informed Care Training Videos (Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center)
- Facing the Facts: Trauma-Informed Practices in Homeless Intervention Services (Family & Children's Trust Fund of Virginia)

TRANSITION TO RECOVERY

An estimated 60% of people in an emergency shelter will have access and functional needs and will need support services and access to housing as they transition out of an emergency shelter (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

Various local and state agencies, departments, and other service providers can play a pivotal role in helping people experiencing homelessness access housing and other services following disasters or emergencies. Supports can include connecting individuals with housing solutions and support services, transitioning out of emergency shelters, and accessing resources such as financial assistance.



Key Takeaways

- Extend care and emergency shelter to limit displacement of people experiencing homelessness post-disaster.
- Focus on connecting people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing solutions.
- Support inclusive recovery by prioritizing people experiencing homelessness the same as businesses, landlords, previously housed residents, and homeowners.
- Consider reallocating funding for housing and services for people experiencing homelessness.
- Compensate and integrate people experiencing homelessness as subject matter experts to deeply inform pre- and post-disaster efforts and long-term recovery.

- **Consider establishing an Emergency Shelter Transition Team and develop a Shelter Transition Annex inclusive of people experiencing homelessness:** Include people experiencing homelessness to learn how to prioritize needs better and provide access to services (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).
- **Coordinate in advance:** Identify potential partners and recovery resources to create opportunities for people to move from emergency shelters to permanent housing solutions (HUD Exchange, n.d.). These existing relationships could culminate in establishing onsite resource fairs/local assistance centers at emergency shelter locations or creating access points for services through CE, the County, and other local resources to assist people experiencing homelessness in recovering from the disaster/emergency to transition to housing and services.
- **Create data sharing and privacy agreements:** It's essential to establish clear and explicit data sharing and privacy agreements in order to efficiently connect people to services, especially in the aftermath of a disaster. By creating data sharing and privacy agreements, individuals who have experienced homelessness can gain access to housing and supportive services that they may not have been connected to before the emergency. This involves setting up a central record-keeping system for each occurrence, allowing for sharing case details with relevant providers while complying with regulations such as the Privacy Act, HIPAA, and other applicable guidelines (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).
- **Connect to coordinated entry and case management services:** The CoC's CE process allows people experiencing homelessness to be appropriately assessed and prioritized for housing and services. Case management services will connect people experiencing homelessness with wraparound support they may need, such as obtaining identification and social security cards, and connections to additional resources, including mental health services, primary care, or alcohol or drug services.
- **Extend Emergency Shelter Closures:** Local jurisdictions can develop emergency shelter exit standards before the disaster (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). Exit standards ensure that every occupant is connected on a pathway to housing upon exiting an emergency shelter or other shelter provided during a disaster.
- **Expand existing resources:** Consider working with existing shelters to maximize space available for people experiencing homelessness exiting emergency shelters. This may mean opening winter shelters early, expanding existing shelters, identifying suitable vacant housing units, and providing alternative housing or motel vouchers (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).

- **Limit displacement:** As emergency shelters close, many communities may not have sufficient resources. Ideally, services and emergency shelter or housing are provided within the community or as close as possible so that people can reengage with their communities and return to work, school, doctor appointments, and other critical life activities (FEMA, 2020).
- **Support self-preservation:** Transitioning people out of emergency shelters should also consider the preservation of life. This includes developing strategies in advance to connect people to housing options, supportive services, and supplies.
- **Identify and understand funding options:** CoCs can use HUD funding (e.g., HOME, CDBG, CoC, and ESG) to help people leaving emergency shelters.
 - CoCs can also reach out to public housing and subsidized properties to find available units (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).
 - For large-scale disasters, understanding how FEMA Individual Assistance can be used and, where possible, to help pay for interim housing (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).
 - Communities that receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and CDBG Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds can collaborate with CoCs to provide rental assistance and case management to decrease homelessness within a region (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).
- **Redirect funding:** A slight increase in funds can significantly help homelessness response service providers scale up to meet recovery needs (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). Providing staff with training and materials that inform them of what funds are available and how those funds can be used to support people at risk or experiencing homelessness can help expand resources (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).
- **Collaborate with job placement providers and actively recruit people experiencing homelessness for employment opportunities (HUD Exchange, n.d.):** Integrating people with lived experience can help inform recovery strategies, such as trauma-informed practices and resources, to transition people out of emergency shelters (County of Santa Barbara – Housing and Community Development Division, personal communications, 2024). Roles may also include direct support through peer support or case management services during the recovery process and transition from emergency shelter.

Preventing Disruptions in Benefits and Services

Any disaster or emergency may lead to disruptions in benefits and critical services for those experiencing homelessness. One example of how disruptions can occur is when documents are lost during a disaster or emergency. Lost documentation due to a disaster can significantly impact individuals and families, compounding these impacts for those experiencing homelessness (HUD Exchange, n.d.). CoCs can be an important partner in helping people connect or reconnect with public benefits and services.

- **Contact Information:** HMIS captures important information such as contact information for individuals and families. This may include phone number(s), email, mailing addresses, last known location, and case manager contact information. Access to this information can assist in providing documentation and important case management contact information.
- **Recent services accessed:** HMIS systems show which service providers an individual or family has worked with most recently. This information can help identify needs pre- and post-disaster, allowing providers to communicate and coordinate service delivery.
- **Alternative identification:** Some CoCs have started implementing a CoC service card. This card has a person's name and photo and is connected to their profile in HMIS. This card is helpful if someone has lost other identifying documents during a disaster. The card is being accepted at some locations as a photo ID, such as specific Post Offices so that individuals can get their mail by general delivery (Butte Countywide Homeless CoC, personal communications, 2024) facilitating access to critical services across participating providers.
- **Medi-Cal numbers:** Some Cal Aim service providers have started entering participants' Medi-Cal numbers into profiles in HMIS. Due to confidentiality rules, only the provider who enters the number can access it. However, any provider can see that a number has been entered and which agency entered it, allowing participants to be directed to the correct provider to obtain their number(s). This information may allow the individual to access medical and other services without a Medi-Cal card with participating providers.



Refer to Appendix

Transition to Recovery Checklist for a list of actions local jurisdictions can take as they transition to recovery.



Exemplary Practice

The CoC Service Card implemented by the Butte Countywide Homeless CoC has revolutionized service delivery by providing streamlined access to social services agencies for people experiencing homelessness. This card has a person's name and photo on it (clients must have a photo in HMIS to be provided a card) and is connected to their profile in HMIS.



Individuals scan the card when they access services from participating service providers. An open HMIS system allows approved providers to view information from clients who have consented to share their data across providers and services.

Pre-Disaster Collaboration:

- **Develop Partnerships:** Collaboration with the postmaster allows the CoC service card to be used for mail services.
- **Build Relationships:** The CoC's HMIS/CE Committee effectively communicates the card's benefits and showcases real-world implementation stories from participating service providers.

Disaster Response:

- **Reduced Contact & Improved Efficiency:** The card facilitates contactless sign-in and information gathering, promoting social distancing and saving staff time.
- **Modify Attendance Tracking:** Emergency shelters and programs utilize "attendance-only modules" that include lists with minimal information, usually a name for cross-referencing those accessing services. This allows volunteers to quickly and easily scan and sign in people with the card, freeing up case management staff and emergency shelter monitors to focus on critical tasks during disasters.
- **Reduce Trauma:** Clients no longer need to repeatedly provide personal information, minimizing trauma.



Butte County Exemplary Practice Continued...

General Best Practices:

- **Ensure System Compatibility:** An open HMIS system that allows data access by multiple service providers is essential. Pilot testing with various agencies is recommended.
- **Request Informed Consent:** Clients must provide informed consent for data sharing in the open HMIS system.
- **Identify Funding:** Identify funding for HMIS licenses, card printers, and ongoing training. Potential sources include the Emergency Solutions Grants Program, Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Grant Program, and HUD HMIS Program Component Grants.
- **Provide Set-up and Training:** Set up card printers for service providers, and provide training with attention to those with minimal computer experience.
- **Account for Lost Cards:** Measures to address lost cards include using unique identifiers for clients that can be provided even without a card and enabling service providers to reprint cards. Costs for card replacement materials should be budgeted.

Lessons Learned:

- **Achieve Program Buy-in:** Building trust through positive client experiences is essential for adoption.
- **Collaboration:** Existing relationships fostered during past disasters can facilitate stakeholder collaboration.
- **Training:** In-person training can be more effective than solely relying on explanations.

Replication Potential:

- The CoC Service Card implemented in Butte County demonstrates strong potential for replication in other communities seeking to improve access to social services agencies for people experiencing homelessness through partnerships, technology integration, and disaster response preparedness.



Toolkits and Templates

- Funding Guide: Recovery Resources to Provide Housing and Services to Persons Experiencing Homelessness - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.org)
- Emergency Management Check List for Shelter Transition (Transition to Alternate Sheltering and Housing Solutions), see page 13/Tab B
- Weather-specific informational flyers for people living outside created by people experiencing homelessness (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, Inc.)



Additional Resources

- Including People Experiencing Homelessness in Disaster Preparedness: Lessons Learned from Alameda (Cal ICH)
- Recovery Guide - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.org)
- Strategies for Immediate Action - Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (hudexchange.org)
- Transition to Alternate Sheltering and Housing Solutions (National Mass Care Strategy)
- Your Playbook on How to Support Children, Youth, and Families During and After a Wildfire (California State University, Chico)
- What Relief Agencies Should Know About the Educational Rights of Children Displaced by Disasters (National Center for Homeless Education)

HOW TO TIE IT TOGETHER

California is experiencing more frequent and severe disasters each year, whether it be wildfires, flooding, earthquakes, extreme weather, or other emergencies. People experiencing homelessness encounter disproportionate challenges in disaster, such as displacement, instability, and increased difficulty connecting with long-term housing solutions. People living unsheltered often lack resources and access to services, making them the most susceptible and most severely affected group during disasters. (Gin et al., 2020). This may include access to information, transportation, emergency shelter, limited financial and material resources, increased violence and safety risks, as well as stigma and discrimination, among others.

Without careful planning, people experiencing homelessness end up as an afterthought in a disaster or emergency, causing unnecessary harm and risking the safety of people living unsheltered in the community. Creating space for collaborative efforts to brainstorm in the “blue sky” days prior to a disaster or emergency allows for the gathering of experts, including people with lived experience, to give thoughtful responses on how to support people experiencing homelessness during a disaster or emergency. As stated throughout the toolkit, community collaboration and partnerships are essential to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness in disasters and emergencies. The communities that have had the most success are the ones that lean upon each other and leverage one another’s strengths.

STEP-UP encourages local jurisdictions and their partners to consider the following action steps to ensure there is safety and support for people experiencing homelessness during disaster and emergency:

1. **Foster** partnerships and coordination among local, state, and federal organizations to ensure a more comprehensive emergency response system that supports people experiencing homelessness.
2. **Engage** local government officials in maintaining an emergency operations plan (EOP) that is inclusive of people experiencing homelessness.
3. **Build** relationships between the emergency planning and response agencies and homelessness response system leadership, integrating a representative from the homelessness response system into the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness during a disaster or emergency.
4. **Encourage** cross-sector collaboration by co-creating a shared vision, defining clear goals and timelines, and maintaining open communication about agency limitations and group commitment to problem-solving.
5. **Clarify** the roles and responsibilities of local agencies, including public safety agencies, public health departments, social services agencies, CoCs, and other relevant organizations.
6. **Incorporate** the voices of those with lived experiences of homelessness in the emergency planning and development processes to enhance the plan's effectiveness.

By taking these action steps, local jurisdictions can create a more resilient and supportive framework for their communities by meeting the needs of some of their most exposed community members, people experiencing homelessness.



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Appendix: Strategies for Inclusive Planning Checklist

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Acronyms

This comprehensive list of acronyms is designed to facilitate understanding of the abbreviations frequently used in the toolkit. In some instances, certain acronyms are linked to external websites. These links provide additional information or context that may be beneficial for a deeper understanding.

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADAAG	Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines
AFN	Access and Functional Needs
AREP	Agency Representative
Cal ICH	<u>California Interagency Council on Homelessness</u>
Cal OES	<u>California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services</u>
Caltrans	<u>California Department of Transportation</u>
Caltrans OEM	California Department of Transportation Office of Emergency Management
CalWORKs	<u>California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids</u>
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDA	<u>California Department of Aging</u>
CDAA	<u>California Disaster Assistance Act</u>
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CDBG-DR	Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery
CDC	<u>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</u>
CDE	<u>California Department of Education</u>
CDPH	<u>California Department of Public Health</u>
CDSS-HHD	<u>California Department of Social Services Housing and Homelessness Division</u>
CDSS-DSB	California Department of Social Services Disaster Services Branch
CERC	Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CHP	<u>California Highway Patrol</u>
COAD	Community Organizations Active in Disasters
CoC	Continuum of Care
COE	<u>County Offices of Education</u>
CSTI	<u>California Specialized Training Institute</u>

DHCS	<u>California Department of Health Care Services</u>
DHS	<u>United States Department of Homeland Security</u>
DHV	<u>California Disaster Healthcare Volunteers</u>
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
ERF	<u>Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) Program</u>
ESF	Emergency Support Functions
ESG	<u>Emergency Solutions Grants Program</u>
FAST	<u>Functional Assessment Service Team</u>
FEMA	<u>Federal Emergency Management Agency</u>
FHC	<u>Family Homelessness Challenge (FHC) Grant</u>
HHAP	<u>Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Grant Program</u>
HOME	<u>HOME Investment Partnerships Program</u>
HUD	<u>United States Department of Housing and Urban Development</u>
HDIS	<u>Homelessness Data Integration System</u>
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
ICS	Incident Command System
ILC	Independent Living Center
LAC	Local Assistance Centers
LEA	Local Education Agency
LHJ	Local Health Jurisdiction
MAC	Multi-Agency Coordination
MHCC	Medical Health Coordination Center
MHOAC	Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Medical Reserve Corps
NAEH	National Alliance to End Homelessness
NCH	National Coalition for the Homeless
NCHE	National Center for Homeless Education
NHCHC	National Health Care for the Homeless Council
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NRF	National Response Framework
NVOAD	National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

OA	Operational Area
OAFN	Office of Access and Functional Needs
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PIT Count	Point-in-Time Count
SAMHSA	<u>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration</u>
SEMS	Standardized Emergency Management System California
Tribal OES	Tribal Offices of Emergency Services
VEST	<u>Volunteer Emergency Services Team</u>
VOAD	Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters

Applicable Laws and Statutes

By understanding the legal landscape governing emergency preparedness and response efforts, stakeholders can effectively navigate their roles and responsibilities to ensure equitable access to essential services for people experiencing homelessness amidst emergencies. This section provides an overview of key laws and statutes that underscore the importance of inclusive emergency planning and response strategies, identifying the legal framework underpinning efforts to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies.

State Statutes

For an overview of bills introducing new requirements regarding county emergency plans, please see Updates to County Emergency Plan Legislation Fact Sheet.

- **Assembly Bill (AB) 2311:** Passed in 2016, AB 2311 mandates that each county in California and the City of San Francisco integrate access and functional needs into their subsequent updates of emergency plans. This legislation aims to ensure that emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts are inclusive and consider the specific requirements of individuals with access and functional needs. Specifically, jurisdictions must address how they will serve these communities in emergency communications, evacuations, and sheltering.
- **Assembly Bill (AB) 477:** Passed in 2019, AB 477 requires counties in California to include representatives from the access and functional needs population, as defined, in the next regular update to its emergency plan, including but not limited to social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, and transportation providers.
- **Senate Bill (SB) 160:** Passed in 2019, SB 160 mandates that county Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) incorporate cultural competence by addressing how culturally diverse communities are served by emergency communications, including the integration or interpreters and translators; evacuation and sheltering, mitigation and prevention; planning involving diverse community representatives; and preparedness using culturally appropriate resources and outreach techniques.
- **Assembly Bill (AB) 2968:** Passed in 2020, AB 2968, an amendment to California Government Code section 8593.9, requires Cal OES to develop best practices for counties developing and updating a county emergency plan, by January 1, 2022. The State of California Planning Best Practices for County Emergency Plans aims to meet the requirements of that law.
- **Assembly Bill (AB) 2386:** Passed in 2020, AB 2386, an amendment to California Government Code Section 8610, requires Cal OES to annually review a minimum of 10 emergency plans to determine if the plans substantially conform to or exceed specified recommendations made by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The bill requires Cal OES to prioritize in its review a plan submitted by a county determined to be at a high risk of wildfire disaster.

- **Assembly Bill (AB) 580:** Passed in 2021, [AB 580](#) amends existing law and mandates the appointment of representatives from the access and functional needs population, with a majority from specified groups, to serve on related committees. It also requires counties to send a copy of its emergency plan to Cal OES by March 1, 2022, and upon any update to the plan after that date. OES will review the plans upon request to ensure they meet best practices, and counties must revise their plans based on OES's recommendations. Cal OES review of the plans shall include an evaluation of the status of the county emergency alert system, evacuation routes and plans and shelter-in-place plans, community outreach to prepare communities and individuals to take action in an emergency, large animal evacuation plans, and plans to ensure the health and safety of citizens during power outages.
- **Senate Bill (SB) 781:** Passed in 2023, [AB 781](#) mandates updates to emergency plans to designate shelters able to accommodate pets; if opened, designate at least one emergency shelter that can accommodate persons with pets; if opened, designate at least one cooling or warming center that can accommodate persons with pets, as practicable. The bill requires emergency shelters designated as able to accommodate persons with pets to comply with safety procedures. The bill also requires public information on cooling and warming centers, including pet accommodation details, and mandates the provision of pet emergency preparedness information on city or county websites.

For a comprehensive overview of state laws regarding emergency planning and disaster management, [please see the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services' The Access and Functional Needs \(AFN\) Minute, November 2023 issue.](#)

Federal Statutes

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** Passed in 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs receiving federal financial assistance, including emergency preparedness and response initiatives. Enforced by the United States Department of Justice, this statute safeguards the rights of individuals with disabilities, ensuring their inclusion in all facets of emergency planning and response efforts.
- **The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act:** Passed in 1988, the Stafford Act is a United States federal law providing the statutory framework for the federal government's response to and recovery from major disasters and emergencies. Enacted in 1988 and later amended, the Stafford Act authorizes the President to issue disaster declarations, which unlock federal assistance and resources to support state and local governments and individuals and businesses affected by disasters and emergencies. It establishes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as the primary agency responsible for coordinating federal disaster response efforts and provides guidelines for the types of assistance available under various disaster scenarios.
- **American with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Passed in 1990, [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in many areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and many public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life. The ADA also mandates compliance with accessibility standards in all aspects of emergency management, ranging from notification procedures to sheltering and medical care.

This comprehensive legislation, overseen by entities like the Los Angeles County Public Health Department, ensures that emergency preparedness and response activities cater to the needs of individuals with disabilities, including those experiencing homelessness. For more information [and guidelines regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act](#), please see the [2010 Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines \(ADAAG\)](#), established by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2010, sets forth minimum standards for accessible design across various domains, including buildings, facilities, transportation, and communication.

- **Individuals with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness Executive Order 13347:** Passed in 2004, Executive Order 13347, titled "Individuals with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness," was issued by President George W. Bush on July 22, 2004. This executive order aimed to improve the coordination of federal agency efforts to provide appropriate assistance to individuals with disabilities during emergencies and disasters and emergencies. It directed federal agencies to ensure that their emergency preparedness and response plans address the needs of individuals with disabilities, including access to information, facilities, and services. The order also established the Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities to advise the President and federal agencies on issues related to emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities. For more valuable insights into ensuring that disaster response initiatives are inclusive and responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities, aligning with broader efforts to enhance accessibility and equity in emergency management, please see the FEMA [Grant Programs Directorate Information Bulletin No. 361](#).
- **Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act:** Passed in 2006, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, together with the Stafford Act, authorizes federal disaster assistance and emphasizes the necessity of inclusive planning and response. These acts, administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Council on Disability, underscore the importance of considering the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, including people experiencing homelessness, in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and recovery efforts.
- **Executive Order 13407:** Passed in 2006, Executive Order 13407 requires the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to "include in the public alert and warning system the capability to alert and warn all Americans, including those with disabilities and those without an understanding of the English language."

Contact List: Emergency Response and Homelessness Response Services

The section below is a comprehensive list of important contacts for emergency response operations and disaster preparedness in California, encompassing local contacts and state-level divisions. While direct points of contact may not be available for all local contacts listed below, the names and organizations for each may help make connections locally.

Local-Level Contacts

Local-level contacts may be used to bring together key partnerships in the community to ensure a whole community approach to emergency and disaster response. The contact lists provided below incorporate both county and district-level contacts within local jurisdictions.

- [California Emergency Response Operations by County](#)
 - o This contact list provides a Cal OES Regions map connecting to contact information for Emergency Services Coordinators by county.
- [California Continuums of Care \(CoC\) Contact List](#)
 - o This contact list provides points of contact for all 44 Continuums of Care in California.
- [California Local Public Health Department Contacts by County](#)
 - o This contact list provides primary points of contact for communicable diseases and other health-related diseases within county local health departments are listed.
 - o Each Local Public Health Department will also have an Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) coordinator. Although there is no specific contact list for a local PHEP, contact the local Public Health Department to connect locally to identify a specific contact.
- [California Local Environmental Health Departments by County](#)
 - o This contact list provides phone and website information for county and local environmental health departments throughout California.
- [California County Social Services/Health and Human Services Contacts by County](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for social services and health and human services agencies by county throughout California.
- [California Medical Health Operational Area Coordination Contact List by County](#)

- o This contact list provides contact information for the Medical Health Operational Area Coordination (MHOAC) which provides immediate response notification to essential emergency management partners, monitors the system, coordinates resource requests, and facilitates the implementation of the operational area (OA) medical and public health response plans.
- [California COAD/VOAD \(Community Organizations/Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster\)](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for voluntary organizations active in disasters available throughout California to respond to agencies needing resources.
- [California Area Agencies on Aging](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for the Area Agencies on Aging by county.
- [California Independent Living Centers](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for the 28 Independent Living Centers with 65 offices across all counties in California.
- [California Disability Disaster Access & Resource Centers](#)
 - o This contact list provides the geographic area served and contact information for each Disability Disaster Access and Resource Center (DDARC) in California.
- [California Healthcare Coalitions/Hospital Preparedness Programs](#)
 - o This page provides a list of California Health Care Coalitions (HCCs) throughout California.
- [California School District/County Office of Education McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons for each county office of education in California. County Office of Education homeless liaisons can connect families and agencies with district and even school site McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons.
- [Caltrans District Encampment Coordinators contacts](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for the Caltrans Encampment Coordinators for each of the 12 Caltrans districts within California. A district map is also available to check which county falls within which district.
- [California Higher Education Student Housing Resource Guide](#)
 - o This resource guide includes resources for each public California college campus, including basic needs center contacts and campus housing programs.
- [California Veterinary Emergency Team \(ucdavis.edu\)](#)
 - o This contact list provides contact information for California Veterinary Emergency Team (CVET), which helps rescue animals in disasters wherever they strike in California. The program,

administered by the UC Davis One Health Institute (OHI) within the School of Veterinary Medicine, supports and trains a network of government agencies, individuals, and organizations to aid domestic animals and livestock during emergencies. The website provides a CVET Resource Guide, county outreach resources, and volunteer opportunities to join response efforts. To contact CVET assistance during disasters, call 1-844-UCD-CVET (823-2838).

State Departments and Agencies

The state department and agencies below can be used to identify state department resources and support that can assist local jurisdictions in preparing for and responding to disasters and emergencies.

- California Office of Emergency Services, Office of Access and Functional Needs

- o The Cal OES Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) aims to identify the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access or functional needs before, during, and after disasters and to integrate considerations into the State's emergency management systems.
- o The website provides guidance, recommendations, and best practices for accessible communications, integrated evacuation and transportation, AFN-specific interactive tools, partner organizations, inclusive sheltering considerations, and resources to integrate access and functional needs before, during, and after disasters.
- o To find the Cal OES Regional Contact by county, refer to the Cal OES Regional Contacts Viewer.

- California Department of Education, Homeless Education

- o The Integrated Student Support Programs Office within the California Department of Education administers the Education for Homeless Children and Youth grant, along with ensuring the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act for Homeless children, youth, unaccompanied homeless youth, and students displaced by natural disasters.
- o The California Department of Education Homeless Education website provides free resources, tools, and trainings: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>.
- o To email the Program Office, refer to this link: HomelessEd@cde.ca.gov. For a contact list of Homeless Liaisons by county refer to the Homeless Education Liaison Contact List.

- California Department of Public Health, Center for Preparedness and Response
 - The Center for Preparedness and Response (CPR) coordinates overall emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts for the California Department of Public Health. This includes overseeing statewide public health disaster planning; provides support and distributes funding to local health jurisdictions; manages the Medical Health Coordination Center, operates the California Health Alert Network and collaborates with other state agencies in preparedness and response efforts.
 - This website provides information on disaster planning and is designed to assist Californians in preparing for catastrophic threats to public health.
 - To contact the EPO directly, check the contact page online.
- California Department of Social Services Disaster Services Branch
 - The Disaster Services Branch (DSB) works closely with all 58 counties/ Operational Areas (OAs) across California in preparedness, response, and recovery.
 - The website provides emergency management resources and support to mass care and shelter coordinators in preparedness, response, and recovery.
 - To contact CDSS DSB directly, refer to the contact page online.
- Caltrans Homelessness and Encampments
 - The Office of Homelessness and Encampments is part of a collaborative effort across Caltrans to combine programs to address homelessness while looking for creative, sustainable solutions.
 - The website provides resources for power outages, fire recovery, and extreme weather.
 - To contact the Office directly, call 916-657-5060.
- California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH), Local Initiatives
 - The Local Initiatives Team is housed within Cal ICH and focuses on strengthening partnerships and enabling connections through the delivery of resources and information, the amplification of best practices, and acting as a conduit for communication across systems to support local communities in preventing and ending homelessness in California.
 - The Cal ICH website provides a resource library to share resources and tools highlighting evidence-based and promising practices, a calendar of events from Cal ICH state partners, and data tools and reports.
 - To contact Cal ICH directly, email Calich@bcsh.ca.gov.

Emergency Services and Supports Roadmap

In California, emergency response is initiated at the local level until locals anticipate that they will exhaust their resources. At that point, the response is elevated to the county, regional, state, and, finally, federal levels. State agencies and departments serve as the coordination and communication link between the regions and the state and between the state and the federal disaster response systems.

When an emergency or disaster is elevated to the state level, agencies and departments with emergency roles are empowered to carry out activities designated in the California Emergency Support Functions. This plan outlines 16 emergency support function annexes (California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, 2024).¹ Nationally, there are 14 active emergency support functions (National Response Framework, 2021).

Counties have the flexibility to align their emergency operations plan and functional annex structure to those used nationally or by the state, adding additional annexes or fine-tuning annex titles as necessary. This adaptability empowers local authorities to tailor their plans to their specific needs (FEMA, 2021).

The following information summarizes five of the 16 California Emergency Support Functions found in the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services 2024 State Emergency Plan. These five areas are the most relevant to integrating the needs of people experiencing homelessness into disaster planning:

CA-ESF 5: Emergency Management Annex

CA-ESF 15: Public Information Annex

CA-ESF 1: Transportation Annex

CA-ESF 6: Mass Care and Shelter Annex

CA-ESF 8: Executive Public Health Annex

The National Response Framework (NRF) is a guide to how the nation responds to all types of disasters and emergencies. The National Response Framework includes: Emergency Support Functions that describe federal coordinating structures that group resources and capabilities into functional areas most frequently needed in a national response. For more information visit National Response Framework | FEMA.gov.

² Information was compiled and summarized from the California State Emergency Operations Plan, California's Emergency Support Functions, state agency websites, and numerous county emergency operations plans, and is intended to provide examples of varying roles and responsibilities that can be identified and formalized before disasters. The California State Emergency Operations Plan outlines state roles and responsibilities for the State's 135 agencies and departments in detail.

This informational roadmap can be used to better understand roles and responsibilities at local and state levels of government, along with additional considerations for integrating the Continuum of Care and homelessness response leadership into the emergency operations plan and annexes. This information may also be useful in making connections with varying agencies or divisions within a county that support people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies.

CA-ESF #5 Emergency Management Operations: Leading emergency activities and ensuring a coordinated approach to response and recovery.

Emergency management operations involves leading emergency activities, ensuring a coordinated approach to response and recovery, and working with local jurisdictions and state agencies/departments. Local emergency planning and response agencies, elected officials, law enforcement branches, Cal OES, and California Highway Patrol all have specific responsibilities for emergency management operations.

Local Jurisdictions

Emergency planning and response agencies are responsible for:

- Developing and implementing the local emergency operations plan, which should be inclusive of all community members, including sections addressing the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Coordinating resource allocation and personnel deployment for emergency response.
- Developing evacuation plans and identifying safe areas in public spaces where people experiencing homelessness can relocate.
- Receiving and evaluating disasters or emergencies and determining the need for and level of activation of the Emergency Operations Center.

Elected Officials, such as Boards of Supervisors, are responsible for:

- Providing policy direction to the emergency planning and response agencies to secure necessary resources and personnel for effective response.
- Allocating funds for emergencies.
- Proclaiming a local emergency.
- Overseeing communications to the community.

Homelessness Response System

The Continuum of Care can collaborate to:

- Engage in county emergency and disaster planning, such as Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committees or other Task Forces that should include people experiencing homelessness during disasters, including young children, youth, unaccompanied youth, and families.

CA-ESF #5 Emergency Management Operations: Leading emergency activities and ensuring a coordinated approach to response and recovery.

- Provide input to developing and updating the emergency operations plan, support functions, and annexes.
- Include a disaster clause in provider contracts - language that outlines responsibilities for homelessness service providers to provide or activate services during disasters or emergencies.
- Allocate or redirect funding for street outreach, mobile services, and harm reduction resources specifically for individuals without shelter or housing during disasters.
- Ensure homelessness response service providers understand their designated role during emergency response and receive the necessary training to support disaster response.

State Agencies/Departments

The Governor's California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) is required to:

- Develop the California State Emergency Plan, including sections addressing the needs of people with access and functional needs, including people experiencing homelessness.
- Manage the state's Emergency Operations Center.
- Coordinate the delivery of services under the California Disaster Assistance Act.
- Maintain a mass care and sheltering supply inventory.
- Activate its regional- and state-level response functions.

The Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch is required to:

- Serve as the lead agency for coordinating fire and rescue and law enforcement

CA-ESF #15 Public Information and Alerts: Ensuring effective communication and managing information dissemination.

Emergency communications and alerts require efficient and accurate information dissemination to support effective emergency response. Key roles include managing information dissemination during emergencies, ensuring efficient and accurate communication to all relevant parties, and effectively responding to and managing emergencies.

Local Jurisdictions

Incident Command System Public Information Officers are responsible for...

- Managing all aspects of emergency communications and warnings.
- Developing and disseminating key messages to the media, key community stakeholders, and the public.
- Identifying, anticipating, and recommending communications strategies for disproportionately impacted population groups, including people experiencing homelessness.
- Providing alternative and accessible forms of communication.
- Advising and recommending strategies for reducing inequitable impacts on disproportionately impacted individuals during disaster response.

Community Leaders and Elected Officials are responsible for...

- Communicating with their constituents, including addressing concerns and conveying important updates. This includes ensuring that people living unsheltered are informed about impending disasters and any resources available.

Emergency Operations Center Incident Command System partners collaborate to...

- Ensure consistent messaging and coordination.
- Disseminate information about evacuation orders, curfews, and self-protection actions.

Local Libraries can collaborate to ...

- Partner with outreach teams for information dissemination, including distribution via bookmobiles in harder-to-reach locations.

CA-ESF #15 Public Information and Alerts: Ensuring effective communication and managing information dissemination.

The Continuum of Care can collaborate to ...

- Support the creation of messaging that will effectively reach people experiencing homelessness.
- Determine where people are concentrated in the community and provide this information to the local emergency planning and response agencies.
- Compile a list of contacts, including key homelessness response service providers and partners who can assist during an emergency.
- Disseminate information to homelessness response service providers.
- Develop outreach plans in coordination with homelessness response service providers to support individuals without shelter or housing before and during disasters.
- Create a contact list of people experiencing homelessness to text directly with updates and information during a disaster or emergency.

State Agencies/Departments

Cal OES is required to...

- Monitor and provide updates to the public and emergency responders.
- Facilitate the flow of critical information among various emergency planning and response agencies.
- Coordinate public warning and alerting systems during emergencies.
- Ensure that essential information, such as safety instructions, updates on the situation, and resource availability, is readily accessible.

California Department of Social Services can collaborate to...

- Share informational resources with housing and homelessness program grantees, including best practices on outreach to unsheltered populations, as well as opportunities to leverage CDSS housing and homelessness programs during a disaster.

California Department of Public Health can collaborate to...

- Assist local public health jurisdictions with rapid needs assessments and provide epidemiological assistance or environmental health investigation support.

Governor's Priority Populations Task Force can collaborate to...

- Develop and provide shared guidance and messaging across state departments and local jurisdictions during disaster or emergency.

CA-ESF #1 Transportation: Ensuring safe and efficient movement of people and supplies.

Providing safe and reliable transportation options for individuals and ensuring the efficient movement of essential supplies to support those in need is a core element of emergency management and disaster preparedness. This involves coordinating transportation services, maintaining infrastructure accessibility, and addressing transportation barriers to help community members including people experiencing homelessness access shelter, vital resources, and support. The primary entities involved in transportation and evacuation include emergency planning and response agencies, transportation providers, as well as public safety agencies, such as law enforcement, fire services, and emergency medical services.

Local Jurisdictions

Emergency planning and response agencies are encouraged to...

- Identify transportation resources in advance.
- Establish mutual aid agreements with transportation providers that outline clear roles and responsibilities.
- Determine where people, including those experiencing homelessness, are located and the number of people who may need accessible transportation.
- Allocate enough time for people to move to a safe location.

Local Law Enforcement are usually responsible for...

- Enforcing evacuation orders.

Local transportation departments can...

- Collaborate with local emergency planning and response agencies and others to identify and establish available transportation and evacuation options.

Homelessness Response System

The Continuum of Care can collaborate to...

- Activate existing outreach networks to locate and assist in transporting individuals living in encampments or unsheltered areas.
- Establish mutual aid agreements with the county to provide transportation and transportation assistance to shelters or safe spaces.

State Agencies/ Departments

Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch is required to...

- Oversee evacuations.

Caltrans is required to...

- Focus on making roadways and transit systems accessible for travel and transport.
- Collaborate with local transportation departments, law enforcement, and the private sector to ensure a coordinated and effective response.

CA-ESF #1 Transportation: Ensuring safe and efficient movement of people and supplies.

Research property options for local governments to support shelter and/or feeding centers on Caltrans property.

California Highway Patrol can...

- Secure routes, regulate traffic flow, and enforce safety standards for evacuation and re-entry into evacuated areas in coordination with local agencies.

California Department of Social Services can collaborate to...

- Communicate with licensed facilities, including Adult and Senior Care, Children's Residential, and Child Care, about current conditions and unmet needs and facilitate relocation as needed via the Community Care Licensing Division.

CA-ESF #6 Mass Care and Shelter: Establishing and managing safe havens for displaced individuals and families.

The key roles and functions of mass care and shelter include providing temporary shelter, ensuring safety and security, offering necessities, and coordinating resources to support disaster survivors. The primary agencies involved in mass care and shelter efforts include government health and human services/social services, community-based organizations specializing in emergency shelters, housing and homelessness program providers, and community-based volunteer groups. These entities work collaboratively to ensure the safety and well-being of displaced individuals and families before, during, and after disasters.

Local Jurisdictions

Local Health and Human Services/Social Services are responsible for...

- Meeting the immediate shelter and essential needs of affected individuals and communities during disasters or emergencies.
- Locating and establishing varying shelter or facility agreements and knowing the capacity and resources available at each local emergency shelter facility.
- Ensuring emergency shelter facilities can accommodate household pets ([California AB781](#)).
- Coordinating food, emergency first aid, disaster mental health assistance, disaster information, and bulk distribution of relief items.
- Deploying and managing County FAST and disaster services workers and/or requesting state FAST and VEST volunteers.
- Providing longer-term support and benefits to ensure sustained assistance and recovery for people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations.

CA-ESF #6 Mass Care and Shelter: Establishing and managing safe havens for displaced individuals and families.

Local Jurisdictions

Local environmental health departments are responsible for...

- Ensuring emergency shelters are safe to open immediately following an event (e.g., after the earthquake, flood, or fire).
- Confirming adequate sanitation and hygiene (e.g., ratio of bathrooms, cot spacing), safe food preparation areas, wastewater/sewer is adequate and working, waste/medical waste is managed, and the animal area is managed.
- Arranging for safe drinking water, toilet (e.g., porta-potties), and hygiene.

Local Libraries can collaborate to...

- Act as safe havens or cooling or warming centers during emergencies, offering charging stations, Wi-Fi or internet access, and critical information about available resources to people experiencing homelessness.
- Provide space and other resources for emergency response staging, potentially including temporary or daytime sheltering, etc.

Homelessness Response System

The Continuum of Care can collaborate to...

- Maintain updated inventories of shelter capacities and available resources.
- Include language in provider contracts to support emergencies or disasters, which might include pop-ups, shelters, or other services during emergencies (HUD Exchange, n.d.).
- Create contingency plans for services and programs (e.g., meals, showers, shelter) that might be shut down during an emergency or disaster.
- Assist with staffing or volunteering at emergency shelters.
- Reduce criteria for assistance through Coordinated Entry and other systems.
- Support the transition to permanent housing and stable environments.

State Agencies/Departments

The Disaster Services Branch (DSB) of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is required to...

- Coordinate and lead state mass care and sheltering support for local jurisdictions, providing requested resources (including personnel) to shelters, emergency operations centers (EOCs), and disaster recovery centers (DRCs).
- Provide limited quantities of equipment to support evacuees.
- Support counties and Tribal Nations in providing temporary shelter, feeding, and other services for those affected by a disaster or emergency.

CA-ESF #6 Mass Care and Shelter: Establishing and managing safe havens for displaced individuals and families.

California Military Department (Cal Guard) may collaborate to...

- Provide shelter space throughout California at California National Guard (CNG) armories.

Department of Education may collaborate to...

- Establish MOUs with counties to provide services, such as shelter, food, or transportation during a disaster or emergency.
- Promote the use of school property for public agencies during disasters.
- Provide food supplies, hygiene kits, educational materials, and connections to schools of origin during an emergency through designated McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons.
- Provide support to ensure a connection to the school community, i.e., teachers, peers, etc.

Functional Assessment Service Team (FAST) can be deployed to...

- Ensure that individuals with disabilities and/or access and functional needs obtain the resources needed to live as independently as possible while at an emergency shelter (California Department of Social Services, n.d.). The California Department of Social Services Disaster Services Branch oversees that state FAST Program and provides training and support for county FAST Programs.
- Coordinate with counties to stockpile emergency supplies and equipment.
- Deploy FAST volunteers to identify persons with disabilities and/or access and functional needs and their unmet needs at evacuation points and shelters.

Volunteer Emergency Services Team (VEST) can be deployed to...

- Assist with mass care and shelter operations, including support at emergency shelters, disaster recovery centers, or emergency operations centers. VEST members will be temporarily reassigned to the California Department of Social Services Disaster Services Branch during an emergency or disaster response.
- Be temporarily reassigned to the California Department of Social Services Disaster Services Branch during an emergency or disaster response. The California Department of Social Services Disaster Services Branch oversees VEST. Members may be called upon to assist with mass care and shelter operations, including support at emergency shelters, disaster recovery centers, or the Department Operations Center.

CA-ESF #8 Public Health and Medical Services: Protecting and promoting public health through disease prevention, sanitation, and medical care.

Public health and medical services' key roles and functions include protecting and promoting public health through disease prevention, sanitation, and medical care. This involves implementing strategies to prevent the spread of diseases, ensuring clean and safe living conditions, and providing medical and behavioral health care. The primary local emergency planning and response agencies involved are public health and healthcare services. California Health and Human Services is the coordinating agency, and the California Department of Public Health is designated as a CA-ESF #8 co-lead. CDPH jointly oversees ESF #8 with Emergency Medical Services to coordinate planning and support to address needs in relation to a medical or public health emergency or an event with health-related impacts.

Local Jurisdictions

Local Public Health Jurisdictions are responsible for...

- Implementing measures to prevent and control outbreaks of infectious diseases.
- Providing preventative healthcare services, vaccinations, and mental health support.
- Deploying and managing Medical Reserve Corps, which are community-based volunteers that work closely with local agencies, first responders, and support organizations, including the American Red Cross, to supplement existing emergency and health resources.

Homelessness Response System

The Continuum of Care can collaborate to...

- Connect local response agencies to community-based organizations and other homelessness response service providers to distribute essential resources like food, water, blankets, and hygiene kits to areas where people without housing or shelter may be concentrated, ensuring equitable access across impacted areas.

State Agencies/Departments

California Department of Public Health can collaborate to...

- Support public health guidance and protocols for shelters and other emergency facilities serving people experiencing homelessness, focusing on sanitation, environmental safety, and prevention of disease transmission.
- Deploy staff to the field if needed.

California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) can collaborate to...

- Ensure the availability of medical and behavioral health services.

CA-ESF #8 Public Health and Medical Services: Protecting and promoting public health through disease prevention, sanitation, and medical care.

- Manage medical supplies, personnel, and patient transportation.
- Support harm reduction measures through the Naloxone Distribution Project and provide Naloxone, syringe services, and Bupropion injections for people with opioid use disorders.

Additional Resources

- 2024 State Emergency Plan (California Governor's Office of Emergency Services)
- Disaster Management 101: California's Emergency Support Functions (California Governor's Office of Emergency Services)
- California Disaster Behavioral Health Plan (California Department of Public Health)

Strategies for Inclusive Planning

Checklist

This checklist outlines essential steps to foster collaboration, establish clear responsibilities, and prioritize the needs of people experiencing homelessness within emergency operations plans. Following these guidelines aims to create a more inclusive and prepared community response to emergencies and disasters.

Be Informed

- **Build Relationships:** Identify and connect with leaders in emergency planning and response agencies and homelessness response service providers.
- **Gain Understanding of Emergency Management:** Participate in IS-100.C: Introduction to the Incident Command System, ICS 100 and IS-200.C: Basic Incident Command System for Initial Response, ICS-200 self-paced trainings for a foundation in emergency management.
- **Gain an Understanding of Homelessness:** Learn more about where people live, the services utilized, and the distinct needs and barriers of people experiencing homelessness during disasters or emergencies. Prepare landscape analysis of homelessness in the community (i.e., data, concentration areas, special populations).
- **Read Local Emergency Plans:** Review the county Emergency Operations Plan and relevant annexes regarding supporting people experiencing homelessness. Identify any opportunities or areas that can be enhanced or updated.
- **Identify Communication Strategies:** Find the best ways to reach and connect with people experiencing homelessness.
- **Explore Shelter Options:** Learn about existing shelters and potential expansion opportunities.
- **Determine Transportation Options:** Understand transportation support available for people experiencing homelessness during disasters.
- **Safeguard Basic Needs and Safety:** Consider how critical services such as food and water, medical care, sanitation, and hygiene will be accessed or provided, especially for those who don't seek shelter during an emergency.
- **Develop Recovery Plans:** Review disaster emergency shelter exit standards if they exist, understand resources available for housing post-disaster, and identify how to lessen the impact of service disruptions.

Get Connected

- **Make the Connections:** Schedule an introductory meeting between emergency services and the Continuum of Care/homelessness response jurisdictional leadership. Determine if there is an Access and Functional Needs Coordinator. Host introductory meetings between local public safety agencies and the Continuum of Care/homelessness response leadership.
- **Attend Local Planning Meetings:** Attend local Access and Functional Needs planning meetings to exchange information and identify service provision gaps.
- **Connect with the Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee:** Connect with local stakeholder workgroups to foster inclusive and integrated emergency planning. These workgroups, often organized and facilitated by a jurisdictional Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Coordinator, can consist of various representatives such as Area Agencies on Aging, the local Independent Living Center, regional centers, disability advocacy groups, community-based organizations, and other resource providers in addition to designated response agencies and emergency managers (Cal OES, 2023).
- **Include People Experiencing Homelessness in Planning:** Establish a supportive atmosphere, invite participation, and allow for input when making decisions. It is important that decisions are made in collaboration with people experiencing homelessness rather than on their behalf. This will improve the efficacy of the local emergency plan by incorporating the perspectives of those with firsthand experiences.
- **Identify Strengths:** Assess each agency's unique strengths and benefits to the partnership, allowing for a more strategic and effective collaboration. Conduct community asset mapping to identify resources, needs/gaps, and potential partners.
- **Share Data:** Share and analyze data on homelessness trends and service utilization to identify areas requiring support during emergencies.

Take Action

- **Include Persons Experiencing Homelessness as a Priority Population in Emergency Operations Plans:** Review and update plans to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- **Formalize Roles and Responsibilities:** Establish clear responsibilities through agreements between emergency response agencies and homelessness response systems (Gin et al., 2020). Host regularly scheduled check-in meetings, email updates, or shared communication documents. Keep the plan updated with names, positions, agencies, and role clarity about who is responsible for what in an emergency.

- **Invest in Dedicated Support:** Consider establishing a salaried, county-funded position to provide ongoing assistance. Someone with lived experience of homelessness can fill this role.
- **Expand the Emergency Operations Center:** Appoint a homeless lead in the Emergency Operations Center to ensure coordinated action and resource sharing.
- **Map Resources:** Identify emergency shelters, food banks, transportation, and essential services for people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies.
- **Develop a Joint Communications Plan:** Share information and resources with people experiencing homelessness before, during, and after emergencies (Edgington et al., 2009).
- **Conduct Preparedness Education:** Provide information and resources in advance about emergency preparedness measures for people experiencing homelessness (Findings from Intergovernmental Roundtable on Disaster Resilience (2023)).
- **Expand Training Topics:** Explore the feasibility of disaster preparedness exercises. Provide training on emergency services, trauma-informed care, de-escalation, and cultural humility for responders and providers.
- **Plan for Post-Disaster Support:** Access housing assistance, financial aid, and other essential services after a disaster.

Trauma-Informed Approaches Checklist

Integrating trauma-informed approaches into disaster planning and response is more successful when local jurisdictions work closely with other service providers, such as mental health, substance use disorder, and homelessness. The following are key actions for integrating trauma-informed approaches into disaster planning:

Build capacity:

- Emphasize the importance of trauma-informed approaches.
- Establish partnerships with local Behavioral Health departments for onsite support.
- Establish partnerships with street outreach programs or other programs familiar to persons experiencing homelessness.
- Assist law enforcement in cases of emergency or disaster to build trust and ensure effective response.

Educate emergency personnel and volunteers:

- Understand the impacts of trauma, de-escalation techniques, and available trauma therapy or counseling services.
- Integrate trauma-informed training for emergency planning and response agency personnel, emergency responders, and volunteers.
- Use existing resources in health and community-based organizations for training.
- Train on topics such as monitoring nonverbal communications, reflective listening, and validation of feelings.

Provide psychological support and resources:

- Embed familiar and trusted individuals in emergency shelters and warming/cooling centers.
- Share information about available resources using existing networks.
- Create an advanced set of resources for emergency personnel and volunteers.
- Provide training on using resources in a trauma-informed way.
- Connect people experiencing homelessness to new services through social services staff.
- Connect disaster survivors with experienced service providers for ongoing care.

Transition to Recovery Checklist

The Transition to Recovery Checklist outlines essential steps for communities to support people experiencing homelessness during the recovery period after a disaster or emergency. It emphasizes coordination, data sharing, privacy agreements, and transitioning from emergency shelters to permanent housing solutions. The checklist also underscores the significance of integrating people with lived experience, providing support services, and collaborating with a diverse range of community organizations to foster a more inclusive recovery process for all individuals impacted by homelessness after a crisis. The following are key actions for communities to support people experiencing homelessness following a disaster or emergency:

Coordinate in advance:

- Establish a Shelter Transition Team and develop a Shelter Transition Annex inclusive of people experiencing homelessness.
- Include members representative of the whole community approach: Continuum of Care, Public housing authority, Area Agencies on Aging, Independent Living Centers, child welfare, schools, VOAD/COAD, transportation, legal services, private sector, social services, etc.
- Integrate people with lived experience to inform recovery strategies, such as trauma-informed practices and resources.
- Coordinate housing and services funding for people experiencing homelessness within the community.

Create data sharing and privacy agreements:

- Establish a primary record-keeping system for each event.
- Ensure compliance with the Privacy Act, HIPAA, and other regulations.

Create opportunities for people to move from emergency shelter to a permanent housing solution:

- Provide direct support through peer support or case management services during the recovery process and transition from shelter.
- Create access points for services through Coordinated Entry, the county, and other local resources to assist people experiencing homelessness.
- Establish onsite resource fairs/local assistance centers at shelters.
Provide additional benefits and services, such as emergency cash assistance, to people experiencing homelessness to support their recovery and long-term stability following emergencies.
- Collaborate with job placement providers and actively recruit people experiencing homelessness for employment opportunities.



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