

The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

February 10, 2026

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Message from the Chief



L. Vance Taylor presenting to emergency management professionals

All,

With the Super Bowl in our rearview mirror, it felt appropriate to take a moment to reflect on what events like this represent for emergency management more broadly.

Large events such as the Super Bowl are the result of extensive planning and coordination by local, state, federal, and private-sector partners. Their success depends on alignment, trust, and a shared commitment to safety, security, and community support. Long before the first fans arrive,

countless conversations, tabletop exercises, and planning meetings take place to ensure systems are ready to operate at scale.

One of the most encouraging developments has been seeing access and functional needs integration increasingly treated as a standard part of event planning. Ahead of the Super Bowl, conversations with partners such as the National Football League, combined with the sharing of guidance informed by years of experience, helped inform planning. It was wonderful to see those considerations reflected as part of a broader safety and security approach.

Just as important, these conversations do not end when an event is over. The lessons learned, relationships strengthened, and expectations set through efforts like the Super Bowl help inform ongoing coordination for future large-scale events. That continuity allows partners to build on what works, identify areas for improvement, and approach each new event better prepared than the last.

What stands out is that this expectation now extends beyond government. Seeing partners like the National Football League, FIFA, and Olympic and Paralympic governing bodies embed accessibility and inclusive planning into their operations speaks volumes about how far we have come and reinforces that we are moving in the right direction when it comes to ensuring safety, security, and access for all.

The same principles that support a safe and accessible large event also strengthen how we respond to everyday emergencies across California. I want to express appreciation to the emergency managers, planners, first responders, advocates, and partners who carry this work forward every day. Your commitment to coordination, inclusion, and service makes a meaningful difference in this ongoing mission.

Thank you.

-Vance

L. Vance Taylor

Chief, Office of Access and Functional Needs
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

A New Tool in California's Response Toolbox: IMAT



Cal OES's OAFN and IMAT Teams

California has a new tool in its response toolbox. **The Cal OES Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT)** is a full-time, deployable team designed to strengthen local response operations during major emergencies and complex incidents.

IMAT serves as a force multiplier for local emergency managers by deploying directly into Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs), supporting jurisdictional operations, and strengthening coordination between local EOCs and the State Operations Center (SOC). A key part of this support is helping ensure Access and Functional Needs (AFN) considerations are integrated across EOC functions and operational decision-making, rather than treated as a standalone issue. To support this work, IMAT partners closely with the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) to build a shared understanding of AFN principles and how they apply in real-time response operations. This collaboration helps ensure IMAT teams are equipped to support inclusive practices in the field and reinforces consistent AFN integration across local, regional, and state coordination structures.

By embedding with local EOCs, IMAT helps sustain operational tempo, improve situational awareness, and support effective decision-making during periods of increased demand. IMAT brings expertise across critical mission areas, including EOC operations, incident stabilization, situation status reporting, action planning, public information coordination, resource ordering and logistics, disaster finance support, recovery transition planning, and lessons-learned capture.

Grounded in collaboration before, during, and after incidents, the Cal OES IMAT reflects California's commitment to coordinated and inclusive emergency management. By planning together, training together, and responding together, IMAT, OAFN, and local partners are strengthening California's ability to support all communities when it matters most.

Building Awareness Through an AFN Lens



Wooden blocks labeled "RISK" stopping a row of falling dominoes from hitting a small family of wooden figures

Awareness plays an important role in building safe, inclusive communities. In emergency management, understanding how needs can change during disasters helps strengthen preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, especially for individuals with access and functional needs (AFN).

During emergencies, disruptions such as evacuations, sheltering, caregiver separation, or limited access to transportation and services can increase risk related to a range of non-disaster-related harms. These may include abuse, neglect, exploitation, or human trafficking, particularly when normal supports, routines, and oversight are disrupted. Approaching preparedness and response through an AFN lens helps ensure these risks are considered alongside traditional life safety priorities.

Cal OES supports this work through coordination and partnership. The Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) helps jurisdictions integrate AFN principles into planning and response through guidance, training, and practical tools that emphasize communication access, continuity of care, and personal safety. In parallel, [Cal OES victim services programs](#) help connect individuals to accessible, trauma-informed supports such as housing assistance, counseling, legal services, and help navigating complex systems.

Awareness and prevention are most effective when they are built into everyday operations. Emergency managers should intentionally incorporate this awareness into planning, training, and field operations by maintaining situational awareness in shelters and recovery settings, ensuring accessible reporting pathways, and coordinating early with community, disability, and victim service partners. Doing so helps reduce

risk, protect dignity, and reinforce inclusive systems before, during, and after disasters.



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