

The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

June 2, 2023

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Message from the Chief

A photo of Vance Taylor



As California continues to plan, respond, and recover from a wide array of disasters, the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) remains committed to providing jurisdictions with the technical knowledge, expertise, and support needed to advance inclusive emergency management practices that serve the whole community.

Through the trust, hard work, and commitment of emergency managers, community-based organizations, private sector partners, and the diverse stakeholders we have the privilege of partnering with on this mission; California continues to lead the way on this life-impacting and life-saving effort.

To all who have, who continue, and who will join us in this effort, OAFN thanks you and looks forward to pressing forward together.

With appreciation.

L. Vance Taylor

Debris Removal Operations

Debris piled up in front of a restaurant following the 2023 Winter Storms in Capitola, Calif.



For Californians impacted by the 2023 Winter Storms, dealing with the aftermath of record flooding and snowfall presents significant barriers. The State has been working to repair impacted waterways, mend battered roads, fill sinkholes, and re-enforce levees, but for many Californians, much of the help needed has centered around debris removal.

Cal OES stood up a Debris Removal Task Force to coordinate support and empower jurisdictions to address unmet debris-related needs. To ensure the considerations of individuals with access and functional needs are integrated throughout the debris removal process, the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) is embedded within this Task Force.

Working in partnership with the Cal OES Regional teams and the Cal OES Recovery Division, every declared county was contacted to determine how each respective jurisdiction was making their debris removal programs accessible for all survivors.

Bringing emergency managers together with community-based organizations (CBOs), OAFN emphasized the importance of ensuring that individuals with access or functional needs who were unable to muck and gut their homes, carry debris to their street curbs for pick up, or load debris in vehicles for drop off at centralized locations were able to receive assistance doing so.

Government and CBOs stepped up in incredible ways to improve the physical landscape of impacted areas and to remove the debris-related barriers faced by individuals with access or functional needs. As recovery continues, the Debris Removal Task Force will continue to

provide technical assistance and support to jurisdictions performing debris removal.

For information on debris removal assistance, resources, and support available in impacted areas, members of the community should visit their respective local county website.

Disaster Recovery Centers

A Disaster Recovery Center in California after the 2023 Winter Storms.



California remains committed to maximizing State and Federal aid to assist individuals who have been adversely impacted by the February and March storms. Resources available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) include doing door-to-door assessments, community outreach, and the operation of Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs.)

DRCs are accessible facilities where survivors in declared counties can go for information about federal disaster programs, to apply for disaster assistance, or to ask questions about the recovery process. DRCs are typically located near impacted areas and are staffed with specialists from FEMA, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and a variety of disaster recovery representatives from state, local, and voluntary agencies.

DRCs provide survivors with key information regarding such things as federal grants that may be available to help homeowners and renters pay for:

- Temporary housing for those displaced from their disaster-damaged primary homes.
- Essential repairs to owner-occupied primary homes including structural components such as foundation, exterior walls and roof, and interior areas such as ceiling and floors.
- Replacement of personal property including specialized tools for employment, household items, appliances and vehicle repair or replacement.
- Other serious disaster-related needs not covered by insurance including medical, dental, moving, child-care expenses, funeral, and transportation expenses.

Each DRC provides the following standard accessibility resources:

- American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation
- Assistive listening devices (Pocket talkers)
- Manual wheelchairs
- Language translation services
- People who can assist survivors to read/write/complete forms

To find a DRC near you, visit [DRC Locator \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov/drc-locator).



Priority Populations Task Force

To advance greater integration and equity throughout ongoing disaster planning, response, and recovery operations; the State stood up a Priority Populations Task Force, which is co-chaired by Cal OES and California Health & Human Services (CHHS).

The Task Force coordinates state resources, identifies and addresses unmet needs, closes gaps, and promotes comprehensive operational preparedness, response, and recovery in support of impacted Californians at greatest risk before, during, and after events.

The Priority Populations Task Force focuses on underrepresented communities, including the following populations:

- Individuals who are homeless or unsheltered;
- Individuals with visible and non-visible disabilities;
- Individuals who are older;
- Individuals residing in medical and non-medical congregate facilities;
- Individuals from migrant communities;
- Individuals whose primary language is not English; and
- Individuals with other access or functional needs

The Priority Populations Task Force continues to integrate the needs of all Californians into every aspect of the State's operations, including how issues such as agricultural, infrastructure, economic, and housing-related recovery are addressed.

Did you know people don't have to visit a Disaster Recovery Center to apply for assistance through FEMA? Individuals can go to [DisasterAssistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov), use the FEMA mobile app, or call the FEMA Helpline at 800-621-3362. If you use video relay service (VRS), captioned telephone service, or other accessible services, give FEMA your number for that service. Helpline operators are available from 7:00am – 11:00pm daily. Press #2 for Spanish. Press #3 for interpreters who speak additional languages. For an accessible video on how to apply for FEMA assistance, visit [FEMA Accessible: Three Ways](#)

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