

The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

March 17, 2025

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Message from the Chief



L. Vance Taylor testifying at the joint legislative oversight hearing

On March 5th, 2025, I had the opportunity to testify, along with Deputy Director, Lori Nezhura (Planning, Preparedness, and Prevention, Cal OES), at a joint legislative oversight hearing that highlighted California's ongoing efforts to advance the way we plan, prepare, respond, and recover with the whole community in mind.

We called attention to Cal OES-sponsored initiatives that enhance support for the whole community, such as the development of comprehensive toolkits, planning guides, and the establishment of key groups including the California Statewide Access and

Functional Needs Advisory Committee and the Priority Populations Task Force, which work to identify and address gaps, provide community-driven recommendations, and promote best practices before, during, and after disasters. We also addressed the creation of alert and warning guidelines to help local jurisdictions deliver timely and accessible emergency communications that can be understood by all recipients.

Also highlighted within our respective testimonies was information about the robust inclusive planning-related training opportunities available through the California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI). Courses on developing accessible messaging, integrating access and functional needs into emergency management, and creating inclusive communications, evacuation/transportation, and sheltering strategies all serve to advance inclusive planning and operations. In addition, information was shared about valuable resources like the Disaster Response Interpreter program, the AFN library, and the updated State Emergency Plan, which reflects a whole community-based approach to preparedness and response.

California continues to build upon its inclusive emergency management system, which means an ever-present commitment to forward progress that expands and promotes the safety, security, and independence of all people.

-Vance

L. Vance Taylor

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

Whole Community Recovery Workshop



L. Vance Taylor with Cal OES partners Justin Murphy and Kelly Rogers during a visit to the Disaster Recovery Center in Los Angeles

In recent years, California has experienced a high volume of natural disasters. While these events affect everyone, they create unique challenges for individuals with disabilities and people with access or functional needs.

To assist individuals with access and functional needs in Los Angeles County who were impacted by the wildfires, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and FEMA are hosting a web-based **Whole Community Recovery Workshop** on **March 20, 2025, from 10:00am – 11:00am**. This Workshop is designed to empower the whole community to successfully navigate the recovery process.

The Whole Community Recovery Workshop will feature participants from:

- Cal OES Office of Access and Functional Needs
- FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination
- FEMA and Cal OES Individual Assistance Teams
- FEMA and Cal OES Public Assistance Teams
- Small Business Administration

Register for the Workshop at:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Dsl5F6h4TKCCIUCDKXy2TA

FEMA Extends Deadline to Apply for Wildfire Disaster Assistance



An alert sign featuring the word "ALERT"

Los Angeles County homeowners and renters impacted by the January wildfires now have until **Monday, March 31, 2025**, to apply for federal disaster assistance, following an extension by FEMA.

FEMA's Individual Assistance program offers support for various recovery needs, including rental assistance, temporary housing, home repairs, personal property losses, medical and dental expenses, childcare, and other disaster-related costs not covered by insurance. Notably, FEMA grants do not require repayment, are not taxable, and will not affect eligibility for federal benefits like Social Security or Medicaid.

Residents should file insurance claims for property, belongings, and vehicles before applying for FEMA aid, as FEMA can't duplicate other assistance. This support can help cover immediate needs and aid in long-term recovery. We encourage you to apply before the March 31 deadline.

Ways to Apply for FEMA Individual Assistance:

- Online at DisasterAssistance.gov (fastest option).
- On the [FEMA App](#) (available at the Apple App Store or Google Play).
- By phone on the FEMA Helpline at **800-621-3362**. If you use a relay service, give FEMA your number for that service. Helpline operators speak many languages: press 2 for Spanish or press 3 for an interpreter who speaks your language. Lines are open from **7 a.m. to 10 p.m. 7 days a week**.
- Visit a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) location. For locations: [DRC Locator](#).

For the latest information about California's recovery, visit
fema.gov/disaster/4856.



The Listos California Logo

Visit [Be Disaster Ready, California – Listos California](#) to learn lifesaving tips for different types of disasters. Get the latest on current emergencies and find help to recover after surviving a disaster.

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