

The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

September 18, 2025

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Message from the Chief



L. Vance Taylor with Cal OES Summer Interns at their graduation ceremony

All,
Throughout the summer, individuals across the state have been impacted by multiple overlapping hazards, including extreme heat, fast-moving wildfires, flash floods, Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events, and dry thunderstorms. Each of these hazards has distinct and disproportional consequences for people with disabilities and individuals with access or functional considerations.

To address these hazards, Cal OES has been operating at an Enhanced Watch posture, which is one step below an official

activation, at various times throughout the summer. This level of readiness enables the closer monitoring of changing conditions and facilitates a quicker response as events unfold. Even when the State Operations Center is not fully activated, the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) continues to provide vital services and coordination to ensure inclusivity throughout the emergency management process.

OAFN's work during this time has included:

- **Extreme Heat:** Working with local jurisdictions to ensure inclusive operations at cooling centers, sharing key weather-related information throughout the community, providing resources for individuals who rely on electricity for medical equipment, promoting hydration and safe indoor environments, and outlining accessible transportation options.
- **Wildfires:** Coordinating with Independent Living Centers (ILCs) to identify the emergency evacuation needs of clients and consumers who are transportation disadvantaged, promoting preparedness materials, and supporting language services.
- **Flash Floods:** Working with regional partners to identify areas at greatest risk, supporting accessible evacuation planning, and ensuring that alerts and warnings are communicated in ways that can reach and be understood by everyone.
- **PSPS Events:** Partnering with utility providers and community-based organizations to help ensure customers have access to backup power, receive timely notifications, and know where to find assistance during outages.
- **Dry Thunderstorms:** Monitoring the potential for lightning-sparked wildfires and sharing preparedness information with the Cal OES Statewide AFN Advisory Committee.

OAFN's work is strengthened by close collaboration with state agencies, including the Department of Rehabilitation, the Department of Aging, and the Department of Developmental Services. Together, we coordinate outreach with government and non-government partners serving older adults and people with disabilities. OAFN also works closely with the Department of Social Services to ensure that shelters are both physically and programmatically accessible, so they meet the needs of the whole community.

By maintaining constant contact with Regional Centers, community-based organizations, and state partners, OAFN can identify unmet needs and provide real-time solutions. This may include ensuring transportation is available, confirming that shelters meet accessibility needs, or verifying that alerts and warnings are issued in formats that reach everyone.

It is by working together in close partnership that we are able to respond quickly, identify needs, and protect the safety, security,

and independence of all Californians.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to this work.

Together, we are making a difference.

-Vance

L. Vance Taylor

Chief, Office of Access and Functional Needs

California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Supporting All Californians During Disasters



L. Vance Taylor with emergency managers at a planning table during an operational briefing

A key element of the Office of Access and Functional Needs' (OAFN) disaster response capability is the role of Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Coordinators. An AFN Coordinator works with emergency management teams to support individuals, including:

- People who are blind or have low vision;
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- People with physical, developmental, or intellectual disabilities;
- People with limited English proficiency; and
- People who are economically depressed or experiencing homelessness

OAFN staff, including the AFN Coordinator, undergo rigorous

training. They complete hundreds of hours of training in emergency operations and disaster response. For example, one team member, Bobbie Ray, has been a key liaison for OAFN at the State Operations Center (SOC) since 2022. In her role at OAFN, Bobbie has worked tirelessly to connect people with the services they need while earning credentials in emergency management along the way.

The training and credentialing process ensures OAFN staff are ready to act quickly and effectively during emergencies. The goal is to ensure everyone on the team can support the whole community before, during, and after disasters.

Time To Get Ready



SEPTEMBER IS

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

Icons of emergency items and a go-bag with the text “September is National Preparedness Month”

September is National Preparedness Month, a nationwide effort to raise awareness about the importance of disaster readiness. As we move through the month, Cal OES and the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) encourages everyone to strengthen their personal preparedness while also supporting neighbors, friends, and community members.

It's important to remember that, especially for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with access or functional considerations, preparedness is not a “one size fits all” approach. To be effective, preparedness efforts need to be inclusive, accessible, and tailored to meet individual needs.

Please consider the following important tips:

- [Create a Personalized Emergency Plan](#): Factor in medical needs, assistive technology, service animals, and accessible transportation. Share your plan with care providers, family, or neighbors who may support you in an emergency.
- [Stay Connected with Accessible Communication](#): Have multiple ways to receive alerts, such as texts, phone calls, or using visual notifications. Also, plan for power outages with backup options like a portable radio.
- [Build an Emergency Kit that Works for You](#): Include spare batteries, chargers for mobility or communication devices, copies of medical information in accessible formats, and items that support independence and safety.
- **Practice and Review Regularly**: Test your plan by learning evacuation routes, identifying accessible transportation options, and practicing responses for different disasters such as wildfires, earthquakes, and extreme heat events.

Prepare today, so you can ensure your safety, security, and independence tomorrow.



A YouTube thumbnail image a CBS Mornings Report

Check out this [CBS Mornings](#) report on how to prepare for an emergency. The report outlines tips, recommendations, and best practices to keep you and your family safe.

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