

Climate Change and Homelessness

Steve Berg

National Alliance to End Homelessness

@sberg0

Climate Change:

What it portends over the next several years

por·tend (verb)

be a sign or warning that (something, especially something momentous or calamitous) is likely to happen.

Reliable sources of information

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) international UN agency
- Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) nonprofit
- Climate.gov (NOAA)
- NASA <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/>

Looking for peer-reviewed research

Basics of climate change

- World-wide, temperature definitely rising (2024 the hottest year)
- Causes are carbon, other chemicals like methane, carbon sinks like forests disappearing
- Feedback loops eg ice melting, forests burning
- It's global warming, not NYC warming – displacing polar air can make some places colder
- A way of measuring, broadly used – worldwide annual average in degrees Celsius sustained above the preindustrial (1850-1900) average

Mark Lynas, Our Final Warning: Six Degrees of Climate Emergency

One degree – we're there and have been for while – wildfires, floods from storms, sea level rise, rain, leaving people homeless, dangerous heat

(1.5 degrees – What IPCC called on nations to stop at – we were there in 2024, not yet sustained but enough carbon has already been release

Mark Lynas, Our Final Warning: Six Degrees of Climate Emergency

2 degrees – What IPCC said the world should avoid if we can't stop at 1.5. Predicted by mid-2030s to mid-2050s. Food supplies threatened (better food production a big factor in reducing world-wide deep poverty), rural workforce displaced). The end of Arctic ice. So floods even worse, ocean warmer. Diseases spread north.

3 degrees – by end of century, hotter than human beings have ever experienced

Time frames not reliable

Most predictions about the impact of warming have turned out to be too optimistic, largely due to feedback loops that weren't anticipated.

Biggest uncertainty is the human response

One thing: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*: Humans always want to respond to immediate crises, but not long-term systemic failures.

The novel: “Individual moral adventure,” politics of self-discovery, authenticity

Protestantism: Individual salvation and sin

Other religions? Japan and South Korea, Buddhists influence? Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* 2015.

Biggest uncertainty is the human response

The other thing: Most useful thing would be to massively reduce carbon emissions.

But there's big, well-funded opposition to cutting out oil and coal and replacing energy infrastructure. How bad will it have to get before those industries can no longer stop it?

Meanwhile, it's important to help people survive, and housing is a big piece of that.



NATIONAL LOW INCOME
HOUSING COALITION

The Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition

Led by NLIHC, a group of over 900 organizations dedicated to equitable disaster recovery

- The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC)
- Founded in 1974
- “Solely dedicated to achieving racially and socially equitable public policy that ensures people with the lowest incomes have quality homes that are accessible and affordable in communities of their choice.”
- [Advocates Guide](#)
- [The Gap](#)
- [Out of Reach](#)

Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC)



- An NLIHC-led group of over 900 local, state, and national organizations working to ensure that all disaster survivors receive the assistance they need to fully recover.
- Federal Advocacy
- Info Sharing
- Technical Assistance
- Advocacy Support

Case Study: Hawaii Wildfires



- Extractive farming and development practices created pressure on Maui's environment, creating drought conditions that made wildfire likely amid rising temps.
- A blaze on August 8, identified but tore through the community of Lahaina, HI. 102 people killed and 2,207 structures destroyed.
- Maui was experiencing severe levels of homelessness/housing instability. Fire destroyed 78 long-term and temporary housing units operated by a homeless resource center
- Initially permitted to remain in hotels, individuals experiencing homelessness at the time of the fire were removed by authorities.
- A congregate sheltering location was identified but was insufficient.
- Individuals unable to access government assistance on the island were rendered homeless.
- FEMA programs designed to place survivors in housing on Maui created an additional spike in rent prices and drove displacement

Agenda

- Climate Change?
 - Impact on affordable housing
 - Impact on people experiencing homelessness
- What is a Disaster?
- How do we Respond to Disasters?
- Who Gets Left Behind?
- Tips
- Advocacy

What is Climate Change?



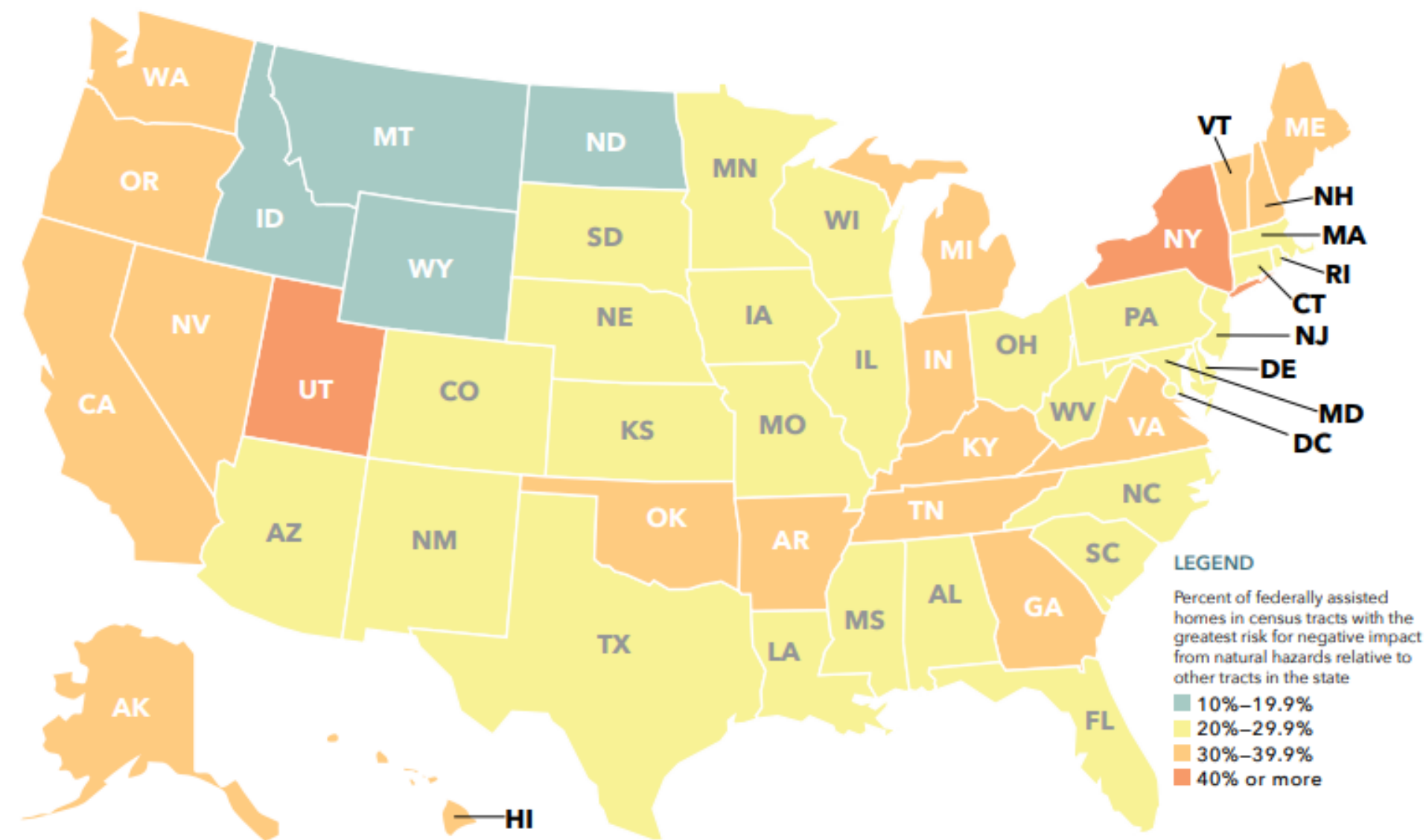
- Climate change is the long-term change in average weather patterns that define local, regional, and global climates.
- Created by long-term trends in human activities, like burning fossil fuels, which increases greenhouse gas levels in earth's atmosphere, warming its surface – known as global warming.
- Global Warming drives Climate Change – which can increase the intensity and frequency of extreme weather, but the two are distinct terms.
- Not every single weather event is driven by climate change or global warming – a freak flood can just be a freak flood.
- It is imperative to connect worsening intensities and frequencies of extreme weather to climate change

Projected Impacts on Homelessness & Housing



- Rising Temperatures will impact health outcomes of those living unsheltered
- Additional and stronger climate disasters further strain safety net
- Analysis by NLIHC and PAHRC show that around a third of federally assisted homes are in census tracts with the greatest risk for extreme weather
- In 8 states, more than half of the federally assisted housing stock are in high-risk areas
- This risk is higher in rural communities
- Too many bad things to get into right now

Percent of Federally Assisted Homes in Census Tracts with the Greatest Risk in Their State for Negative Impacts from Natural Hazards



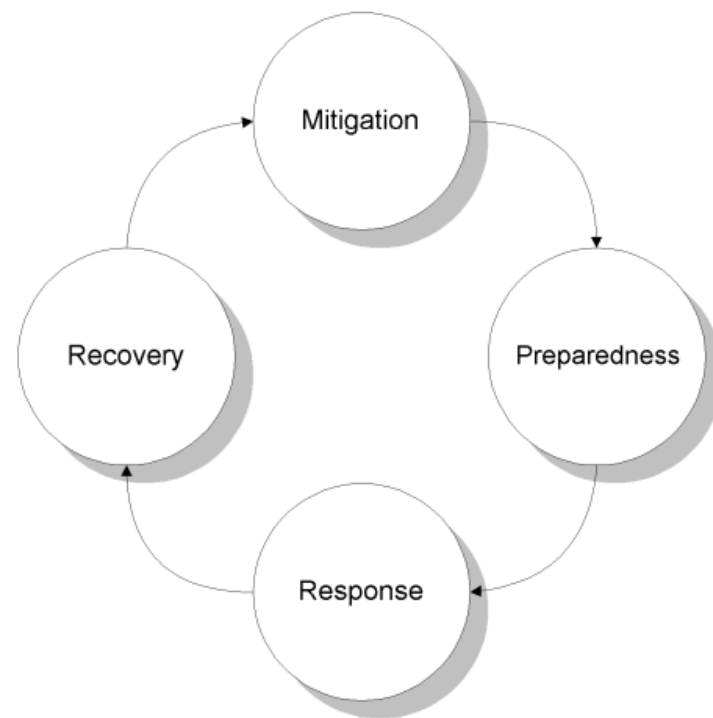
Sources: National Housing Preservation Database (January 2023), National Risk Index (March 2023)

What is a Disaster?

- Definition still evolving but the consensus is: A disaster occurs...
 - when a “hazard” (wind, rain, godzilla)...
 - meets the “built environment” (where we live and work) and causes conditions that...
 - overwhelm the community’s ability to effectively withstand and respond to it while continuing to function.
- #nonaturaldisasters
- A disaster might exist but not be designated as such, or something might be designated a disaster which is not a disaster. This is because disasters are political in nature.

4 Phases of Emergency Management

- **Mitigation:** Actions taken to prevent or reduce impact and consequence of disaster
- **Preparedness:** preparing plans/drilling for what to do/go/call for during a disaster
- **Response:** Trying to keep everyone alive and safe
- **Recovery:** Restoring the community to regular operations



Hybrid Response to Disasters



Fed Level Damage Assessments

Governor requests disaster declaration

President approves request

Federal government provides assistance

- FEMA works with state and local governments
- Individuals can apply for assistance through FEMA, Small Business Administration, Department of Agriculture, and more

Congress provides additional funding as necessary

Long-term disaster recovery funded through HUD's Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program

Disaster

State Level Damage Assessments

State and local Govs respond

- Operates emergency shelters
- Works to restore basic services
- Coordinates federal and donated resources

State and Local Govs direct recovery

- Directs which programs are activated
- Assists in implementing assistance programs
- Collects data for long-term recovery

State and Local Govs implement long-term recovery

- Decides goals for long-term recovery and program design
- Implements federal recovery programs directly

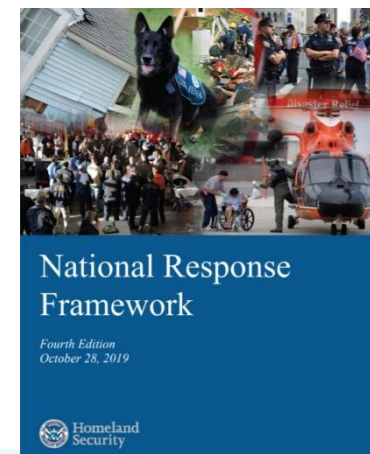
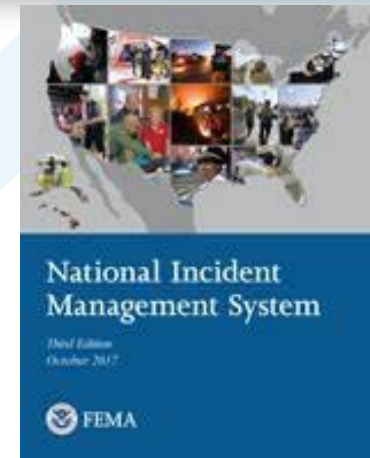
Preparedness - Housing



- Most states and territories have a disaster housing recovery plan
- None have more than a scant mention of affordable housing, public housing, or homelessness
- Those experiencing homelessness before a disaster are typically treated as part of “vulnerable populations” together with recent immigrants and individuals living with disabilities
- These plans are created typically in conjunction between state emergency management agencies and supporting agencies
- There was a joint effort by HUD and FEMA to facilitate better housing preparedness plans labeled the “Pre-Disaster Housing Planning Initiative” that seemed promising

Preparedness – Response Planning

- Core principles and concepts for disaster response are held within the National Incident Management System (NIMS) – which aligns key roles and responsibilities for response across the country.
- Response Doctrine is held within the National Response Framework (NRF) and fleshes out NIMS to help the multitude of orgs involved in response coordinate.



Response – Local Management

- The immediate response is coordinated by the state and local governments via Local Emergency Management Agencies (LEMAs)
- The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) will coordinate LEMAs and respond directly in areas without a LEMA.
- Initial response is focused around restoring Community Lifelines

- Safety and Security
- **Food, Water, Shelter**
- Health and Medical
- Energy
- Communication
- Transportation



- If a federal disaster is declared, FEMA will provide operational support to state and local efforts – like communications, emergency supplies, expertise, and assisting local and state EM's in coordinating with federal partners.

Response - Emergency Support Functions



- The effort to restore community lifelines is coordinated by Emergency Support Functions (ESFs)
- There are 15 identified in the NRF
- ESF #6 is Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing, and Human Assistance
- This is a federal structure staffed by HUD and other federal agencies but a similar body will exist at the state level
- They identify resources, guide where they go, assist in program implementation and the like.

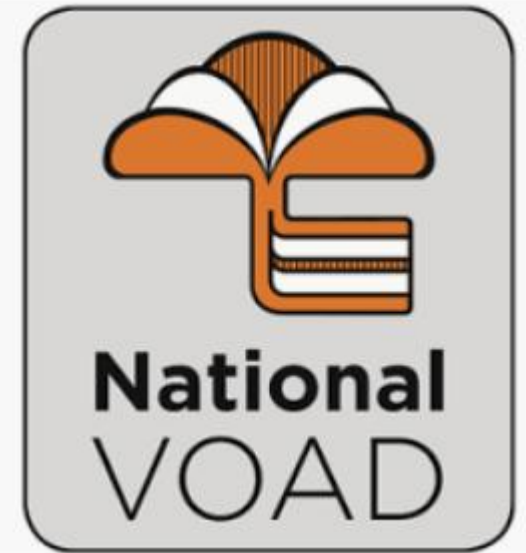
Response – Mass Care

- Immediately after the disaster, seven Mass Care and Emergency Assistance Activities begin. These activities have no eligibility requirements and are typically conducted by VOADs. They include:
 - Sheltering
 - Feeding
 - Distribution of emergency supplies
 - Support to individuals with disabilities
 - Reunification services
 - Support to personal support animals
 - Mass evacuee Support
- ^NOTE: Does not include “housing support”



Response: State and VOAD Programs

- In addition to FEMA programs, state and local governments sometimes fund their own housing programs – either to supplement FEMA assistance or with separate eligibility requirements.
- These can include the placement of travel trailers, paying for hotel rooms, home repair assistance and a wide variety of other uses.
- The Red Cross also facilitates recovery programs occasionally. These mostly include non-congregate sheltering at hotel rooms or other small-dollar assistance for disaster losses.
- Sometimes Jurisdictions handle their own



Transition - Sheltering



- As “Response” becomes “Recovery” those that were experiencing homelessness are often left behind.
- Emergency Mass Care shelters that close often attempt to initiate a “shelter transition” – that is, directing those with FEMA eligibility to FEMA-assisted housing solutions, and individuals who are ineligible to the conventional shelter and homeless service system
- The cooperation of CoCs and existing homeless service programs is critical here – Red Cross will have a team in place to do this.

Transition – Temporary Housing



- In addition to the 7 Mass Care and Emergency Assistance supports – FEMA *may* authorize, upon request by the state, the Transitional Shelter Assistance Program (TSA) – FEMA FAQ: [Transitional Sheltering Assistance | FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov/transition-sheltering-assistance)
- This program provides funds for hotel rooms at participating hotels for disaster survivors. It is available to those who have applied for FEMA assistance and have verified occupancy inside the disaster-declared area and are displaced.
- Unlike emergency non-congregate shelter, survivors have to book their own rooms using a list provided by FEMA and must adhere to any check-in requirements by the hotel. FEMA pays up front for the room. TSA is only active from 30-180 days after the disaster – unless extended.
- Due to high use of hotels after disasters survivors must commonly travel long distances to find open hotel rooms – the program allows for survivors to stay out of state.
- TSA is designed to house disaster survivors as their initial applications are being reviewed by FEMA. Continued eligibility for FEMA assistance is a requirement to staying in the TSA program. Eligibility checks occur at 14 day intervals – so if within a 14 day period it is found that they are not eligible for FEMA assistance they will be removed from the program.

Transition – Shelter Support



- HUD's Rapid Unsheltered Survivor Housing Program (RUSH) created to fill gaps in FEMA's TSA program.
- Uses Recaptured ESG funds to allocate out funding for homeless services in disaster impacted areas
- Not a ton of money but its something
- Allocated 2 times – once during response, and the other during recovery
- Funds allocated via the ESG process, jurisdictions will need to amend their action plan, issue an RFP, etc...
- Important to note that the existence of these funds can be confusing for disaster survivors used to directly applying for assistance.

FEMA Assistance Provides Short-Term Recovery Aid



Individual Assistance

Individuals and Households Program Assistance

Mass
Care/Emergency
Assistance

Displacement
Assistance

Serious Needs
Assistance

Housing Assistance

Other Needs Assistance

Emergency
Sheltering and
Food, etc...

Cash assistance
for
displacement
needs

\$750 for
emergency
needs

Financial: Rental
Assistance, Home
Repair
Assistance

Direct:
Temporary
Housing Units,
Direct Lease

Assistance for
medical costs,
child care, etc.

Critical Needs
Assistance

FEMA Eligibility for People Experiencing Homelessness



Homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “FEMA does not provide Housing Assistance (Rental Assistance, direct assistance, Home Repair Assistance, or Home Replacement Assistance) to applicants experiencing homelessness because the need for housing was not caused by the disaster.” – FEMA IAPPG• “Applicants experiencing homelessness pre-disaster may be eligible for certain types of ONA (Transportation Assistance, Medical & Dental Assistance, Funeral Assistance, & Child Care Assistance).” – FEMA IAPPG
“Resident of Non-Traditional Housing” (e.g. Tents, huts, lean-tos)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If verified by a credible source and can verify occupancy – can get initial rental assistance (extremely high bar)• If not verified, only eligible for ONA

FEMA Public Assistance



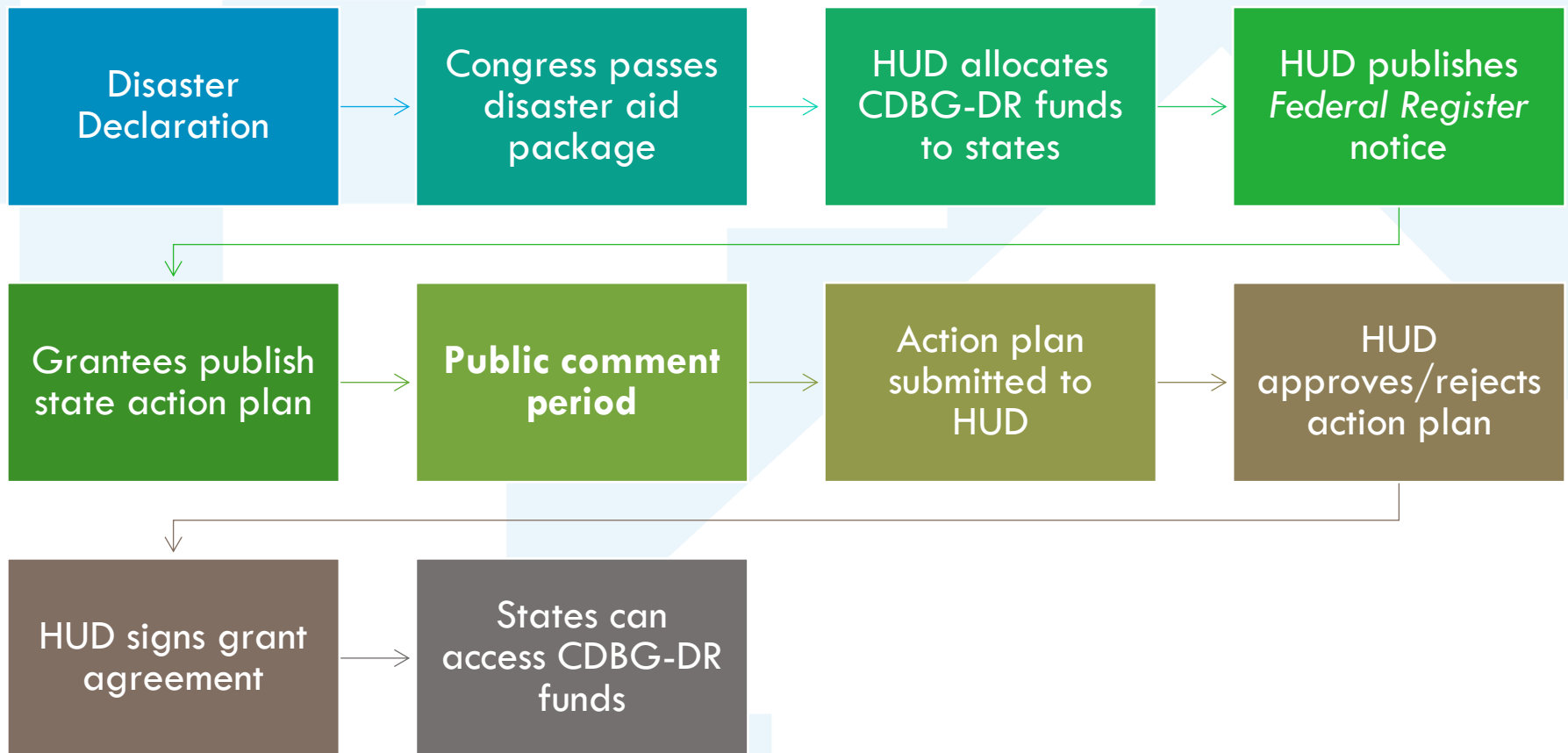
- FEMA Public Assistance is activated upon request by a governor and provides assistance directly to local and state governments for activities related to disaster response. It is typically reimbursed at 75% of cost.
- It is available for:
 - Emergency Work
 - Debris Removal (Category A)
 - Emergency Protective Measures (Category B)
 - Permanent Work
 - Includes Hazard Mitigation, repair and relocation of gov buildings, flood plain management
 - Roads and Bridges (Category C)
 - Water Control Facility (Category D)
 - Buildings and Equipment (Category E)
 - Utilities (Category F)
 - Parks and Rec (Category G)

Long Term Recovery



- Long-term recovery is dominated by the HUD Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program – which is currently the only long-term recovery funding available from the federal government.
- Because the program is not permanently authorized, Congress must directly approve the use of funds for the program. This slows down the long-term recovery process and means that many disaster-impacted areas will receive funds years after disasters or not at all depending on the political situation in Washington.
- While funding is slow to arrive, the number of permitted uses for the funding is impressive, this makes it all the more important to be involved in the CDBG-DR process, to ensure that recovery funds reach those most in need of assistance.

CDBG-DR Timeline



HUD Assistance Provides Long-Term Recovery Aid



CDBG-DR Requirements

- MUST Address a Presidentially-declared disaster impact
- MUST be a CDBG eligible activity
- MUST meet a CDBG national objective
- 70% of total allocation MUST benefit Low and Moderate Income Households

Examples

- *Housing*
 - New Construction
 - Rehab/Reconstruction
- *Infrastructure:*
 - Road and Bridge Repair
 - Repair of Water & Wastewater Facilities
- *Economic Development*
 - Job training
 - Business Loans
 - Commercial District Improvement

A note on LTRGs...



- In addition to HUD funds, Long Term Recovery Groups or LTRGs are often created in the aftermath of a disaster and short-term recovery phase.
- An LTRG is a cooperative body that typically made up of representatives from faith-based, non-profit, government, business, and other organizations working to assist their community in recovering.
- An LTRG typically has a fiscal sponsor with a certain amount of funds devoted to long-term recovery – and their actions will typically correspond with the amount of funds available, leadership style, and community support.
- In some areas, the local emergency management office may help pull together the first couple meetings of the LTRG.

How it Actually Goes

- Not surprising: system leaves those experiencing homelessness and individuals at risk of homelessness behind. Created by:
 - FEMA's prohibition on providing housing assistance to individuals who were experiencing homelessness at the time of the disaster
 - An assistance process with barrier for those that were precariously housed before the disaster.
- This creates a 2 stage issue for service providers – 1) how to care for those that were experiencing homelessness during the disaster, and 2) as individuals are denied assistance and fall into homelessness.

Lived Experience

- Vickery, J., Errett, N., Bostrom, A., Sweeney, W., & Wendlandt, H. (2022). Risk Communication Planning: Learning From Lived Experience of Homelessness. *Natural Hazards Center Weather Ready Report Series*. Boulder, CO: Natural Hazards Center, University of Colorado Boulder. Available at: <https://hazards.colorado.edu/weather-ready-research/risk-communication-planning-learning-from-lived-experience-of-homelessness>

Lived Experience

- Issues with communication:
 - From EM: "I think the other piece that's really a challenge in this population and these service providers... is staff turnover. **Always trying to stay on top of who is the right person at each organization is a full-time job within itself.**"
 - Org: "the city decided to... at the last minute, create a severe weather shelter... And the way people were finding out about it was through two officers who sit on... the Homeless Outreach Team. And then, they also informed the shelter and service providers, but **none of them actually do any outreach. So it was like, "How are people outside even knowing about this?"**"
 - Org: "that's basically how they operate when it comes to considering anything for the unhoused community, last minute or they don't think about it at all – It's **completely ineffective.**"

Lived Experience

- Issues with lack of resources:
 - ""[T]here has [sic] to be alternatives ... "You should go to the severe weather shelter. Make sure that you stay warm," and they're like, "I got kicked out of the severe weather shelter, so what else should I do?" And as someone with housing, it makes me uncomfortable to get that question because... **the reality is I don't have anything to tell them.**""
 - ""if there aren't [accessible] options for people, then what you're saying to people is, "Hey, there's going to be this thing that's going to impact you greatly. And there aren't a ton of options for you to mitigate it. But just want you to know, you're going to have a hard time breathing. You might freeze to death.""

A note on Emergency Management

- Emergency Managers coordinate resources, manage disaster activities, and plan
- Being “in the room” where decisions are made can often be more helpful than a full advocacy campaign.
- Emergency managers have a difficult job. At the local level, their offices often have low budgets and are understaffed/underprioritized
- Funding issues at local/state levels
- Rising interest in community engagement – use it!
- EMs have an inherent fear of being sued by us



A Failure of Communication

- Both shelter providers and emergency managers:
 - Cash strapped
 - Underappreciated but under a microscope
 - Overworked
 - Dealing with disasters everyday
- Working together is a way forward here



Practice Tips - Response



- Pre-disaster: Make contact with VOADs/EMs in your state to set up points of contact for disaster response
- Work with EMs to ensure coverage for individuals experiencing homelessness
 - Evacuation points for encampments
 - Tracking system to make sure providers know where evacuees were taken
 - Different options for evacuations
- Work with EMs to ensure that there are qualified case workers at assembly points and on transportation
- Work with Mass Care shelter providers to ensure easy transition
- Make sure you can continue to function if there's a disaster!!

Practice Tips - Recovery

- Focus on both those made homeless by the disaster and individuals made homeless (or at risk) by indirect impacts – job loss, rent hikes, etc...
- Ensure that case managers can access disaster shelters or temporary housing locations
- Ensure a presence at mass care shelters and disaster recovery centers placed by FEMA
- Ensure that those experiencing homelessness are eligible for state and HUD funded programs
- If it is a major disaster, start planning for long-term recovery CDBG-DR funds and lay the groundwork for programs funded via that tranche.



Hands Off HUD!



- DOGE Cuts are already happening in HUD Field Offices across the country
- Would reduce HUD CPD by 85%
- The agency would be unable to get disaster funding out the door. \$12 billion in the most recent allocation alone!

Solutions

- Immediate

- Save FEMA
- Save HUD!
- Ensure adequate recovery funds are appropriated by Congress
- Track where recovery funds are going
- If funds are being used inequitably organize around it
- City/State-level eviction moratoriums

- Long-term Reform

- Permanent authorization of CDBG-DR
- Remove administrative burdens to accessing FEMA Assistance
- Reestablish DHAP
- Expand HUD RUSH program
- Household-level mitigation programs

Advocacy Tips

- If conversations with EMs are not fruitful – different tactics may elevate the issue with them.
- Foster connections with other organizations working around DR
- Work with Disability Justice orgs
- Be aware that organic organizations may appear – utilize them instead of work against them.
- Utilize events such as meet-and-greets, neighborhood tours, and the like.
- More available [via NLIHC](#)



Resources



- [National Response Framework](#)
- [National Disaster Housing Strategy](#)
- [TSA Interim Policy](#)
- [FEMA Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide](#)
- [FEMA Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide](#)
- [Public Housing Agency Disaster Readiness, Response, and Recovery Guidebook](#)
- CDBG-DR [Fact Sheet](#) from NLIHC
- [Materials from HUD on CDBG-DR](#)

Contact

Noah Patton

National Low Income
Housing Coalition

npatton@nlihc.org