

Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

On March 18, 2025, the Los Angeles County (County) Board of Supervisors directed the retention of an independent consultant to conduct an after-action review (AAR) of recovery and repopulation efforts and other related issues following the January 2025 Eaton and Palisades Fires. The review examines the County's performance in six critical focus areas: communications; volunteer and donations management; recovery; repopulation; shelter, housing, and people at higher risk; and public health and access and functional needs. It covers the period from January 7, 2025, to March 31, 2025, focusing on short-term recovery and repopulation operations, many of which remained active well beyond that period.

This report is not an investigation and does not assign blame. It does not assess liability or evaluate individual performance, nor does it intend to state legal conclusions or evaluate legal compliance. It evaluates systems, processes, coordination structures, and operational capabilities, and it recommends the corrective and sustainment actions needed to strengthen the County's readiness for future disasters.

This review follows the earlier *After-Action Review of Alert Notification Systems and Evacuation Policies for the Eaton and Palisades Fires* (2025), which examined alerts, warnings, and evacuation operations during the same fires. This report does not address topics covered in other ongoing reviews, including fire cause and ignition, fire behavior, and immediate suppression operations. Findings are based on evidence gathered for this review, including working group sessions with County and partner stakeholders, stakeholder interviews, internal and public surveys, and County plans, policies, procedures, and response documentation.

As required by the Board's direction, the review also assessed relevant recommendations from the *After-Action Review of the Woolsey Fire Incident* (2019) to ascertain if additional recommendations should be implemented since the report was submitted to the Board.

What the Review Found

This review examined how the County managed recovery and repopulation following the January 2025 Eaton and Palisades Fires across six critical focus areas: communications, volunteer and donations management, repopulation, recovery, shelter and housing, and public health and access and functional needs. It identified 26 substantive findings and 25 actionable recommendations.

County personnel and their partners repeatedly built effective structures in real time. This included an enhanced Coordinated Joint Information Center (CJIC), a unified access pass system, a recovery task force network, a rapid needs assessment, a cash donation pathway, and

one of the fastest debris removal operations on record. But many of those structures depended on improvisation and individual relationships rather than standing plans, codified authorities, and rehearsed systems. The County currently lacks an updated Los Angeles County Operational Area Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan), a formal repopulation decision framework, a countywide volunteer and donations model, and integrated data for reaching vulnerable populations at higher risk. The review did not identify evidence that County agencies intentionally withheld services from any population. Where gaps were identified, they reflected structural or resource-related challenges rather than intentional actions and are addressable through targeted organizational improvements.

The recommendations in this AAR incorporate what the County’s workforce demonstrated it can do under pressure into the County’s existing planning framework, so the next disaster is met with updated and enhanced plans with clear authorities.

None of these findings should obscure the review’s clearest observation that Los Angeles County employees and their partners carried this recovery. Under extraordinary pressure and on compressed timelines, they developed structure and processes concurrently with operational implementation, in real time. Debris teams stood up a Right of Entry (ROE) process quickly and updated it frequently. Recovery center staff solved site problems on their own initiative. Communicators translated technical information into plain language and created visuals, dashboards, and maps because no better tools existed. Donation coordinators routed offers before any model existed to guide them. Where standard processes could not be delivered for residents, staff developed workarounds and, in some cases, set new precedents to keep recovery moving. Many continued to serve while personally affected by the same fires, displaced from their own homes and neighborhoods. This report’s recommendations target systems, not the people who outperformed them.

IN THE COMMUNITY’S WORDS

“I have nothing but good things to say about the County staff. They were very helpful, supportive, and empathetic.”

— Public survey respondent

How to Read This Summary

This summary is organized by the six critical focus areas used throughout the report, so that each section corresponds directly to a chapter in the Findings and Recommendations section. Each focus area section presents what the review found, followed by that area’s proposed recommendations. Two consolidated tables at the end of this summary list every finding and every recommendation, with lead and supporting agencies and proposed implementation horizons. The body of the report includes complete findings and recommendations, with supporting evidence and implementation details.

How to Read the Identifiers

Findings and recommendations are cited by a short code: the focus area, the item type (F for finding, R for recommendation), and the item number. For example, COM-R3 is the Communications focus area, Recommendation #3.

Code	Critical Focus Area	Example
COM	Critical Focus Area #1: Communications	COM-F1 / COM-R1
VDM	Critical Focus Area #2: Volunteer and Donations Management	VDM-F1 / VDM-R1
RCV	Critical Focus Area #3: Recovery	RCV-F1 / RCV-R1
REP	Critical Focus Area #4: Repopulation	REP-F2 / REP-R1
SHP	Critical Focus Area #5: Shelter, Housing, and People at Higher Risk	SHP-F1 / SHP-R1
PHA	Critical Focus Area #6: Public Health and Access and Functional Needs	PHA-F1 / PHA-R1

Figure 1: How to read critical focus area identifiers

Every recommendation carries a proposed implementation horizon. Near-Term actions (11) are generally low- or moderate-cost and largely codify practices already demonstrated during the incident. Mid-Term actions (9) require plan development, program builds, or multi-agency agreements. Long-Term actions (5) involve higher costs, technology platforms, multi-year data and partner integration, or sustained investment.

Critical Focus Area	Findings	Recommendations	Near-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
#1: Communications	4	4	3	0	1
#2: Volunteer and Donations Management	2	2	1	1	0
#3: Recovery	4	4	1	2	1
#4: Repopulation	2	1	0	1	0
#5: Shelter, Housing, and People at Higher Risk	8	8	1	5	2
#6: Public Health and Access and Functional Needs	6	6	5	0	1
Total	26	25	11	9	5

Figure 2: Table of total Finding and Recommendation counts and implementation horizons