Rising from the Ashes:
The Role of IHSS in Disaster Response

Casey Rockwood

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017 wildfires in Northern California demonstrated the value of county government in disaster response. The wildfires proved disproportionately fatal and injurious to older adults and people living with disabilities. Therefore, adult and aging services divisions, particularly In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) programs, are uniquely positioned to support the most vulnerable residents before, during, and after an emergency. Sonoma County Adult and Aging Services has implemented disaster response protocols from which Napa County can learn. Napa County Comprehensive Services for Older Adults must take steps to improve the utility of IHSS disaster preparedness data, collaborate more effectively with the broader county response efforts, and engage with community organizations to represent the needs of residents with access and functional needs.

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Introduction

In the early morning of October 9, 2017, 21 major fires erupted throughout northern California due to unusually high winds and dry conditions. The wildfires broke out throughout Lake, Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, Butte, and Solano counties. By October 14, the wildfires had destroyed over 210,000 acres, caused $14 billion in damages, forced 90,000 residents to evacuate, killed 44 people, and hospitalized 192 others.[1] The series of wildfires became the most destructive, costly, and deadliest in California history.[2] Most destructive to Sonoma and Napa counties were the Nunns, Atlas, and Tubbs fires.

The devastating disaster highlighted the critical role that county government occupies in disaster response. Sonoma County was able to care for 4,162 evacuees in 43 shelters, respond to 52,372 calls to its emergency hotline, issue over 4,000 replacement documents to clients which saved those victims over $250,000 in costs, and serve 11,204 residents at their local assistance center. Napa County recorded serving 3,344 clients at their local resource center. County government is integral in establishing and supplying evacuation shelters, facilitating communication to residents, and providing health and assistance services.

Despite response efforts, the wildfires had a tremendous impact on the residents of Sonoma and Napa counties, particularly on older adults and people with disabilities. In Sonoma and Napa counties, 31 residents lost their lives. Of these, 26 were either over 65 years of age or living with a disability, and one was a dedicated caregiver.[3] This local example of the disproportionate impact on older adults and adults with disabilities is consistent with findings that this population is more vulnerable and less prepared than the broader population in the event of a disaster.[4,5]

Given the disparate threat that disaster events pose to the older adult and disabled population, adult and aging services divisions within human services agencies, and, in particular, the In-Home Supportive Services Programs (IHSS), are in a unique position to support the most vulnerable citizens in the event of a disaster. It is imperative that Napa County learn from its own experience in this recent natural disaster as well as the experience from neighboring counties to identify ways in which it can better prepare older and disabled adults for emergencies and improve its support for them during and after a disaster event. The Napa County IHSS Program must reevaluate its disaster response protocols to improve data quality, improve disaster response outreach, and ensure it designs response services with, and for, people with access and functional needs.

1. *California Statewide Fire Summary.* Retrieved from http://calfire.ca.gov/communications/communications_StatewideFire Summary.

2. Cooper, Jonathan J. (2017, December). October's Wine Country Fires Were the Costliest Ever. *TIME Money.* Retrieved from http://money.com/money/5054103/octobers-wine-country-fires-were-the-costliest-ever/

3. *Press Democrat* Staff. (2017, December 27). Remembering the Victims of the North Bay Fires. *The Press Democrat.* Retrieved from https://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/7808264-181/remembering-the-victims-of-the

4. Hoffman, Sharona. (2009). Preparing for Disaster: Protecting the Most Vulnerable in Emergencies. *UC Davis Law Review,* 42-1491. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1268277

5. Al-Rousan, T.M., Rubenstein, L.M., & Wallace, R.B. (2014). Preparedness for Natural Disasters Among Older US Adults: A Nationwide Survey. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(3), 506–511. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2013.301559

Elements of the 2017 IHSS Disaster Response in Napa and Sonoma Counties

In-Home Supportive Services Disaster Preparedness Report

The Sonoma County IHSS Program serves over 6,000 recipients who are cared for by 5,500 care providers.[6] Recipients are low-income and have functional limitations that place them at risk for needing out-of-home placement in residential care facility. The IHSS program stores critical data on some of the most vulnerable people who continue to live independently in the community. In addition, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) mandates that county IHSS programs collect information specific to disaster preparedness information for each recipient.

In both Sonoma and Napa Counties, the 'Disaster Preparedness' data report is produced monthly and shared with their offices of emergency services and other critical departments. In the event of an emergency, responders, shelters, and emergency staff have information that might be critical to the care of at-risk individuals. Likewise, IHSS and other Adult and Aging Division staff use the Disaster Report to make calls to IHSS recipients to ensure their safety, coordinate a response if needed, or direct them to available resources.

Sonoma and Napa Counties had protocols in place for use of the 'Disaster Preparedness' report when fires broke out in 2017; however, the experience highlighted the necessity for those protocols to be updated. The IHSS 'Disaster Preparedness' report has potential to provide extremely useful data on vulnerable IHSS recipients, but it requires a uniform process of data entry by IHSS Social Workers to be meaningful. Lack of uniformity in data entry led to disparities in meaning between similarly-entered data on the report. Stemming from the lack of uniformity in data entry and training, collaborating departments underutilized the report during the 2017 wildfire response. Furthermore, in order to

implement an outreach effort effectively, it is necessary to define a process for triaging response calls from adult and aging services staff and for staff to know what resources are available to offer to recipients. With no identified uniformity in defining a triage strategy, outreach depended heavily on social workers' knowledge of clients' situations to inform this process.

In response to some of these challenges, Eric Glentzer, Sonoma County Section Manager over IHSS, prioritized improving the IHSS Disaster Response protocols. Irene Nolan, Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst, led a project to reevaluate the methods by which IHSS social workers would enter disaster preparedness coding into the case management system (CMIPS II) and the action plan that would be triggered in the event of a disaster. The result was a defined method for entering data into CMIPS II and a plan for triaging outreach.

The Sonoma County IHSS disaster preparedness coding uses the 'contact degree' data field to triage recipients and determine how soon a client must be contacted in the event of an emergency. The contact degree field contains seven possible entries, three of which indicate the need for a response. Sonoma County defines them as: (A) Critical (contact client within 24 hours), (B) Urgent (contact client within 48 hours), or (C) Moderate (contact client within 72 hours). Other entries on the disaster preparedness screens, the 'SOC 864 Individualized Back-Up Plan and Risk Assessment' form (SOC 864), and the social worker assessment of social support networks all factor into determining the contact degree field. When responding to an emergency, outreach staff use the contact degree field to triage response.

Sonoma County finalized these protocols in August 2018 and subsequently trained all IHSS social worker staff on how to assess and uniformly enter disaster preparedness coding. As a result, the IHSS disaster reports are far more useful as a method of triaging response calls to IHSS recipients and mobilizing resources most efficiently. As of November 2018, the Sonoma IHSS program was still developing an action plan protocol that would

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6. California Department of Social Services. *March 2019 Program Data*. Retrieved from http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/IHSS/Program-Data

outline the process for performing the outreach during a disaster. Having uniform and meaningful data provided the foundation for developing an effective disaster response.

Access and Functional Needs Committee

The Olmstead decision of the Supreme Court in 1999 affirmed the right of individuals with access and functional needs (AFN) to live in their own communities instead of being forced to live in institutional settings.[7] The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public agencies to provide services in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities.[8] These mandates mean that people with disabilities are a part of the community and that public service agencies must respond to the needs of people with AFN in disaster response efforts.

Access and functional needs in the context of disaster response refers to inclusion of those with AFN in all facets. This includes considerations for communication, evacuation, sheltering, and care. According to California Office of Emergency Services (CALOES), individuals to consider when evaluating AFN include those with physical, developmental, or intellectual disabilities, chronic conditions or injuries, limited English proficiency, older adults, children, low-income individuals, homeless and/or transportation-disadvantaged individuals, and pregnant women.[9] When considering the range of the population included in the AFN definition, it becomes clear people with AFN are not a small subset of the population, but rather a considerable portion thereof. Disaster planning without considering AFN would result in services that only worked for a select group.

The Sonoma County IHSS Public Authority Director Mike Humphrey participates in an AFN Committee. The committee, comprised of local nonprofit, government, and private agencies, advocates

for AFN issues in disaster response. They coordinate Functional Assessment Services Team (FAST) trainings, which are conducted by CALOES. These trainings aim to establish local experts who are able to assess shelters and response plans for accessibility standards. They participate in the development and review of Sonoma County emergency response planning, provide trainings to organizations active in disasters on AFN considerations, and provide education to the community at large on how best to prepare for disasters.

Napa County IHSS Disaster Preparedness Implementation and Recommendations

Disaster Preparedness Recommendations for the IHSS Assessment Process

The Napa County IHSS program must reevaluate its current disaster preparedness protocols. A workgroup should be formed that will focus on developing protocols for data entry into the disaster preparedness screens of CMIPS II, effective use of the SOC 864, and for prompt and efficient deployment in the event of a disaster. It is recommended that Napa County base their disaster preparedness data entry protocols on what Sonoma County has already developed. Napa County IHSS should also consider improving the utility of the SOC 864. This form should prompt a longer conversation during the IHSS assessment interview to engage recipients in specific strategies for disaster planning. There are a number of resources available to residents for disaster planning and IHSS social workers are in unique position to educate vulnerable residents and connect them to those resources. The SOC 864 is a tool that social workers can use to engage IHSS recipients in those conversations and specify what they are going to do and who they are going to depend on in an emergency.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Mapping and Expanded Collaboration

One of the primary challenges to using the disaster preparedness data to implement a response is

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7. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/98-536.ZS.html

8. https://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm

9. https://www.caloes.ca.gov/Governments-Tribal/Plan-Prepare/Access-Functional-Needs

triaging calls based on geography. During the 2017 fires, Napa County IHSS staff had no way of accurately limiting their outreach calls to recipients living in affected areas. Napa County OES was able to produce accurate GIS maps of fire-impacted areas; however, the IHSS disaster report only contained address information for recipients. It was difficult to determine whether a recipient was in an affected area or not and it was impossible to sort based on geographical criteria.

It is recommended that Napa County IHSS propose a project to Napa County Information Technology Services to develop an automated GIS mapping application based on IHSS disaster preparedness data. In the event of a disaster, this tool will be able to produce accurate lists of affected recipients based on any number of criteria in the disaster preparedness report and geographic data. This tool can also be used to overlay any available disaster area maps created by local or state OES onto IHSS recipient data to determine affected clients with even greater accuracy. With accurate and uniform data entry on the front end of the assessment and integration with a GIS mapping tool, producing accurate and triaged response lists from which to make calls will be more efficient.

Meaningful, uniform data that is easy to interpret and visualize should also help improve collaboration with the broader Napa County emergency response. Currently, the raw disaster preparedness reports are saved monthly in a shared folder accessible by key staff in Napa County Public Health, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Comprehensive Services for Older Adults (CSOA). However, during the 2017 fires, the IHSS program was the only entity to utilize the report to make calls to recipients to verify safety and provide information. The data are extremely valuable in an emergency situation and there must be ways for other county departments to utilize it. Improving the quality of the data and using a GIS mapping tool may facilitate increased collaboration and use of the data. It is recommended that Napa County explore ways in which the IHSS disaster preparedness report can be

integrated into the response efforts of Napa County Public Health, EMS, and Napa County OES.

One area in which this collaboration has already begun in Napa County is in response to the de-energization plans from Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E). PG&E will begin shutting down power to tiered zones during potentially hazardous wildfire conditions.[10] These shutdowns could potentially last days depending on weather conditions and the time needed to inspect lines before returning power. In collaboration with Napa County Public Health and EMS, IHSS social workers are now entering data for each recipient regarding health conditions that require the use of powered medical devices. CSOA, EMS, and Public Health will use this data to help residents prepare for planned power shutdowns.

Community Organizations Active in a Disaster (COAD)

The Napa Valley COAD was formed in 2016 following the devastating 2014 earthquakes and 2015 Lake County fires. Their mission is to enhance partnerships for communication, coordination, and collaboration amongst the whole community, including non-profit and faith-based organizations, government agencies, and the private sector during all phases of disaster.[11] Napa County Health and Human Services is a member organization and a representative from Napa County Public Health sits on the executive committee. It is important that CSOA participate in the activities of COAD to represent the interests of older adults and adults with disabilities.

Recently, COAD formed an AFN subcommittee to focus on developing accessible services and preparing for the needs of the entire community. A representative from the Napa County IHSS program will attend these subcommittee meetings. This

10. Stoneberg, D. (2019, May 3). PG&E to Napans: Plan for Power Shutdowns this Fire Season. *Napa Valley Register*. Retrieved from https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/pg-e-to-napans-plan-for-power-shutdowns-this-fire/article_cee56824-1090-5c0d-ac83-2da7f89f7637.html?utm_content=buffer0361a&utm_ medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=LEEDCC#tracking-source=home-top-story

11. http://napavalleycoad.org/about-us/

committee has already begun planning for a FAST training from CALOES for Napa County responders. Furthermore, it has initiated the development of a comprehensive supply inventory identifying further needs and launched a training for local agencies regarding FEMA-reimbursable activities. Napa County should continue its participation in the AFN subcommittee and work to incorporate its recommendations and initiatives into the broader emergency response planning.

Conclusion

Napa County is vulnerable to a variety of natural disasters, as evidenced by recent flooding, wildfires, earthquakes, and sustained heat waves. The 2017 wildfires highlighted the need for Napa County IHSS to reevaluate its disaster preparedness and action plan protocols. Napa County has learned from its own experience and from the experiences of Sonoma County. Napa has begun redefining its IHSS disaster preparedness coding, strengthening the conversation related to the SOC 864 during IHSS home visits, exploring the development of a GIS mapping tool for triaging response, collaborating with other county divisions to use valuable data effectively, participating in COAD to strengthen collaboration with community partners and expand knowledge of resources, and participating in the AFN subcommittee to ensure that the expertise of the CSOA program staff can be used to advocate for the needs of the population that it serves. These are the first steps to ensuring that Napa County is responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable residents when the next disaster strikes.

Acknowledgements