

# IMPACT OF THE 2018 CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

**IN 2018, CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCED IT'S MOST DESTRUCTIVE AND DEADLIEST WILDFIRE SEASON ON RECORD. COMMUNITIES ARE STILL REELING FROM THE DESTRUCTION.**

## The Hurricane Worsened the Affordable Housing Crisis

Before the recent wildfires, Butte County in Northern California as well as Ventura and Los Angeles Counties in Southern California were already experiencing a severe shortage of affordable, accessible homes available to the lowest income people. According to [research from NLIHC](#), 76% of California's poorest families paid more than half of their income on rent, leaving few resources to evacuate or sustain themselves during the recovery. For every 100 of the lowest income households in California, there were just [21 affordable homes](#) available for them. The Camp Fire destroyed 14,000 homes, or 14% of the county's housing supply, displacing nearly 35,000 residents. In Southern California, the Woolsey fire destroyed over 1,000 homes.

## Lack of Housing Assistance Increased Homelessness

In past disasters, both Republican and Democratic administrations activated the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) to provide the lowest-income survivors with the rental assistance and wrap-around services they needed to get back on their feet. After the Camp Fire - and other recent disasters - FEMA refused to activate the program. Instead, FEMA relied on its Transition Shelter Assistance (TSA) motel program, which many low-income survivors cannot access due to financial and other barriers. With few participating motels, only 646 families - out of an estimated 7,000 displaced households - have been served through the TSA program. Without DHAP, low-income survivors are still living in tents, sleeping in cars, doubling or tripling up with other low-income families, or paying far too much of their limited incomes on rent. Homelessness increased in Butte County by 16 percent and California's existing homeless and housing services have been stretched thin.

## FEMA Denied Assistance to Survivors with the Greatest Needs

Out of the 27,000 California survivors who applied for FEMA assistance after the fires, fewer than 8,000 had been approved. FEMA programs are designed to serve middle-class families, not those with the greatest needs. In addition to flatly refusing to provide aid to individuals experiencing homelessness prior to the fires, FEMA failed to recognize that many older low-income individuals and farm workers in California live in mobile home parks and typically do not have documents showing proper title and registration. As a result, those with the greatest need found aid much harder to get.

## Disaster Aid is Slow to Arrive

More than 7 months passed after the Camp Fire before Congress approved more than \$2.4 billion in Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds for California and other impacted areas, further delaying the recovery.

## HURRICANE MARIA TIMELINE



## BY THE NUMBERS

- **99 killed in fire-related deaths, including 88 from the Camp Fire**
- **Over 23,300 homes destroyed, including 14,000 from the Camp Fire**
- **\$24.5 billion in damage, including \$16.5 billion from the Camp Fire**

For more information, contact Sarah Mickelson, NLIHC Senior Director of Public Policy, at [smickelson@nlihc.org](mailto:smickelson@nlihc.org), or by calling 202-662-1530 ext. 228

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