RESILIENCE BEFORE DISASTER

California has been hit hard by historic wildfires, extreme heat, and power blackouts, all in the midst of a pandemic. Communities across California are not adequately prepared to respond to increasingly frequent and severe climate disasters. These intersecting crises reveal systemic weaknesses in the social safety net that disproportionately harm vulnerable populations, particularly working class communities of color who have borne the impacts of institutionalized racism and economic injustice.

The time has come to make long-term, deep investments in the resilience of communities with the least material resources. These commitments take leadership. With tight budgets and poor fiscal forecasts, there will be pressure to revert to austerity, cut public expenditures, and exacerbate the conditions that have so severely weakened the safety net. Instead, the state must do exactly the opposite: recover through ambitious investments in communities, public services, and high road jobs to repair the historic legacy of racial, economic and environmental injustice. **We identify two scalable models for community-driven resilience: (1) Resilience Hubs and (2) In-Home Resilience.**

This dual approach to resilience captures the need for both centralized spaces and distributed systems to promote resilience and increase social cohesion within a community. Importantly, these are not models for just disaster response and recovery. **Resilience is built before disaster.**

Although California has recognized the need to proactively promote climate adaptation and resilience, so far these efforts typically focus on improving hard infrastructure– roads, bridges, and other physical infrastructure–to the detriment of social infrastructure, the people, services, and facilities that secure the economic, health, cultural, and social well-being of the community.

We offer recommendations on initial steps to build resilient communities across California. If taken, these steps would represent an unprecedented effort to close the climate gap and invest in social infrastructure for climate resilience.

RESILIENCE HUBS: spaces where communities gather, organize, and access social services on a daily basis and that provide response and recovery services in disaster situations.

IN-HOME RESILIENCE: a community's socially embedded systems, patterns, and practices that increase community members' capabilities and support new growth in response to crisis while staying in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUND RESILIENCE HUBS

California should lead funding efforts to support the development of Resilience Hubs. The report highlights RYSE Youth Center, a youth-led community center in Richmond, which is taking steps toward becoming an innovative Resilience Hub model through a community-led governance approach.

ESTABLISH RESILIENCE HUB NETWORKS

City and county government departments should facilitate local networks of Resilience Hubs. A well-coordinated network can implement community resilience solutions on a regional scale, share best practices, and offer complementary services.

INVEST IN THE CARE WORKFORCE

We need an empowered homecare workforce to assist and support some of the state's most vulnerable residents. California should implement strategies to turn these difficult, low-wage jobs into high road careers.

REBUILD THE PUBLIC SECTOR WORKFORCE

We must commit to growing a robust public sector workforce capable of meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and supporting community resilience. We need a full complement of public health, human services, public works, library, school, parks and recreation, and sustainability workers to achieve our climate goals.

IMPROVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

The state must target resources to the most vulnerable communities, particularly working-class communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by systemic racism and historic economic disinvestment. The state must also develop a comprehensive strategy for protecting medically vulnerable populations in the event of power shutoffs and increase funding for initiatives to improve disaster preparedness and emergency response.

LESSONS FROM COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how disasters exacerbate existing racial, socioeconomic, and health inequalities and disproportionately harm the most vulnerable populations (e.g., elderly, working class communities of color, low-wage workers, people with disabilities). Community resilience measures anticipate increasingly severe and frequent disasters due to climate change and those same measures would protect families in the current health crisis.

- Instead of converting facilities into makeshift emergency centers as some cities are doing, a network of Resilience Hubs would be ready to provide essential services throughout the state.

- In the face of crisis where social distancing is a top priority, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for investments to promote in-home resilience.

For the full report see: http://apen4ej.org/resilience-before-disaster/