

FEBRUARY 2024

# CALIFORNIA STORMS AND FLOODS **ONE-YEAR UPDATE**



**American  
Red Cross**

A LETTER FROM

## Denise Everhart, Pacific Division Disaster Executive

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A year ago, devastating storms and flooding drenched California over several months, destroying homes and businesses. This intense precipitation — the result of atmospheric rivers — is extremely rare in California, so areas that normally wouldn't flood, like the community of Pajaro in Monterey County, home to migrant farmworkers, and large portions of Tulare and Kern counties, were completely inundated. While the relentless rain affected much of the state, this disaster took a severe and disproportionate toll on the most vulnerable.

Across California, we offered people the reassurance that they would have a safe place to go when dangerous floodwaters threatened their well-being, homes and livelihoods. One of our most profound impacts during this response was a major and far-reaching shelter operation. We opened 82 shelters in January alone, then 32 more during the second round of flooding in March. Along with providing refuge, we served over 222,000 nourishing meals and snacks in our shelters and through community distribution, and gave out thousands of relief supplies to help people muck out their houses. Of course, we also offered a caring shoulder to lean on.

As the clouds cleared, we worked with our partners to help people make their flooded and mud-filled homes livable. Not only did the Red Cross and our partners find teams to clean out homes and support residents, but we provided financial assistance — coupled with casework — to help families replace waterlogged furniture and restock their refrigerators.

We are so grateful for our generous donors, compassionate community partners and dedicated volunteers for everything they have done to help us deliver relief and comfort throughout this monthslong response. This vital work is only possible because of your support.

*Denise Everhart*

Denise Everhart



## Supporting California Communities Facing Life-changing Losses

From December 2022 through March 2023, intense rainfall and flooding displaced thousands of people across California. These damaging atmospheric rivers spurred landslides and tore apart homes, inflicting financial losses and destroying irreplaceable, precious memories. For migrant agricultural workers and others, the saturated land also limited their ability to earn a living. Up and down California, the damage was stark. In the community of Pajaro in Monterey County, a levee break in the middle of the night flooded most of the town. Farther south, in Tulare County, a long-dry lake returned due to intense rain.

Throughout this monthslong disaster and in the year since, the Red Cross has stood with affected communities, first helping residents to weather the storms and then helping them rebuild their lives. At the height of the disaster, and in the months that followed, thousands of evacuees found refuge in our shelters, where we served warm meals, provided health and mental health care, and offered casework to help residents plan their next steps. We were also out in impacted neighborhoods distributing warm meals, along with relief supplies to help residents clean out their waterlogged homes.

A key aspect of disaster relief is bringing services and supplies to people who may be unaware of them, unable to reach them or hesitant to seek them out. To make our services more accessible to impacted Latino communities, we deployed the Red Cross Latino Engagement Team, which includes workers who speak Spanish and are experienced in serving diverse communities.

Using information from our residential damage assessments, we established an Immediate Assistance program, providing cash directly to families to help with essentials like replacing clothing, buying diapers and more. In the following months, our focus shifted to recovery. In April, we began offering a second round of financial assistance, called Bridge Recovery Assistance, to severely affected individuals and families who faced additional barriers to recovery. Our community recovery work has also included grants to local nonprofit organizations to support mold remediation as well as grocery distribution.

Above: Red Cross volunteer Amy Beck helps carry a bin with cleanup supplies for Grace Wyatt. Photo by Jaka Vinsek/American Red Cross

### RESPONSE AT A GLANCE



More than **222,000** meals and snacks provided with partners



Reached an estimated **55,000** people with relief and recovery assistance



More than **30,600** overnight shelter stays provided with partners



Nearly **17,250** households provided with relief supplies

\*All numbers are cumulative and represent Red Cross storm and flood responses in California from December 27, 2022, to December 27, 2023.

# Responding to California Storms and Floods With 5 Operations Over Several Months

Over 3.5 months, we launched **five disaster responses** to help people throughout the state impacted by relentless storms and floods.

## DECEMBER 31, 2022, AND JANUARY 2023

- **86** Red Cross and partner emergency shelters open
- **63,000** meals and snacks served with partners
- **6,400** households reached with relief services

## FEBRUARY 2023

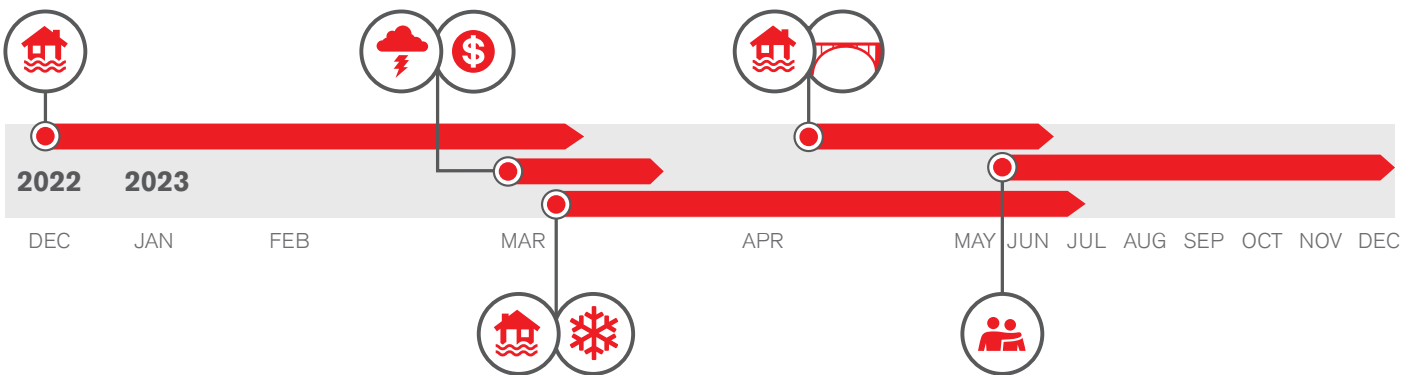
- **20** Red Cross and partner emergency shelters open
- **2,850** meals and snacks served with partners
- **132** households reached with relief supplies

### Immediate Financial Assistance Opens

## APRIL 2023

- **3** Red Cross and partner emergency shelters open
- **190,000** meals and snacks served with partners

### Bridge Recovery Assistance Opens



## MARCH 2023

- **30** Red Cross and partner emergency shelters open
- **155,000** meals and snacks served with partners
- **10,600** households reached with relief supplies

## MAY–DECEMBER 2023

**Robust recovery programs, including partnerships to clean out homes and provide fresh groceries, help families get back on their feet.**

### TIMELINE KEY



Disaster response to flooding and related weather



Disaster responses to rainstorms and related weather



Disaster response to snowstorms and related weather



Immediate Financial Assistance



Bridge Recovery Assistance



Recovery programming

Numbers represent totals per month, not cumulative totals. A disaster response can encompass more than one disaster event.

## Helping Survivors Rebuild Their Homes and Lives

### Red Cross Bridge Assistance Helps Severely Impacted Residents Recover

**“Boy, is that appreciated, what the Red Cross and everyone else did. I can’t even put into words.”**

**JOANNE JACKSON,  
PAJARO, CALIFORNIA**

**JOANNE’S STORY:** The Bridge Recovery Assistance that Joanne Jackson, 79, received from the Red Cross after her Pajaro, California, home flooded was “desperately needed,” Joanne recalled. While her insurance helped to fix the structural damage to her home, it didn’t cover an issue with her septic tank, which needed to be emptied. Bridge funds helped her take care of that.

Joanne also shared her deep appreciation for the support of Red Cross responders earlier on. She and her husband, who live on limited incomes, said Red Cross meal and supply distribution “filled the gaps” in the wake of the disaster.

“Boy, is that appreciated, what the Red Cross and everyone else did,” Joanne said. “I can’t even put into words. The word ‘thank you’ was becoming shallow to me, I said it so much.”

**MARI’S STORY:** For Mari Nunez, a full-time student with two small children, Bridge Recovery Assistance is one of the reasons she didn’t have to drop out of school to support her family in the storms’ aftermath.

The flooding tore through her home, leaving it waterlogged and moldy. Her children’s beds were destroyed, and many of their clothes were ruined. When the family returned home, the kids were sleeping on air mattresses, and Mari would wake in the middle of the night, fearing the house was flooding again. But with help from the Red Cross, Mari was able to buy two beds, a desk for her middle school-aged daughter, a vacuum and other household items.

“I was so lost,” Mari said. But the Red Cross assistance “helped to set me on my feet.”

**“I was so lost,” Mari said. But the Red Cross assistance “helped to set me on my feet.”**

**MARI NUNEZ,  
SALINAS, CALIFORNIA**



Mari Nunez poses with her children. She credits Red Cross Bridge Recovery Assistance with helping her stay in school after the storms. Photo courtesy of Mari Nunez.

**Helping communities recover from a disaster like this is a team effort.**

## Grants to Nonprofits Power Local Recovery

Helping communities recover from a disaster like this is a team effort. Through strategic grants to local nonprofit organizations, we boost our ability to serve those in need and support them on their journey to becoming whole again.

**The Food Bank for Monterey County.** Monterey County, California, home to hard-hit Pajaro, has the highest rate of food insecurity in the state, and to help families put food on their tables as they recovered from this costly disaster, the Red Cross gave funds to The Food Bank for Monterey County. With this grant, the food bank distributed fresh groceries to 300 families weekly for four weeks through May 31. For residents unable to earn a living during this disaster or who faced expensive repairs, these deliveries gave them peace of mind that their families would not go hungry.



Red Cross volunteers distribute relief supplies to help residents clean up their waterlogged homes. Photo by Jaka Vinsek/American Red Cross

**Hope Crisis Response Network.** Once weather conditions improved, some residents faced the devastating news that their homes had been infested with mold—a threat to their health and a barrier to recovery. To help them safely return to their houses, the Red Cross provided funds to the Hope Crisis Response Network to support mold remediation and the associated repair of approximately 75 homes, preventing people from being displaced.



Gustavo Baez hugs Cindy Huges, of the Red Cross. Photo by Jaka Vinsek/American Red Cross



## Generous Donors Help Californians in Need

Powered by the compassionate commitment of our donors, the Red Cross has raised \$3.5 million — including the value of critical donated goods and services — designated for our response to help people impacted by the California Storms and Floods. As of December 27, 2023, the Red Cross had already spent or made commitments to spend approximately \$8.7 million of donated funds on emergency relief and recovery efforts for these storms and floods.

We are grateful for the support of our Annual Disaster Giving Program and Disaster Responder members, whose incredible generosity allowed us to provide constant support over months of unrelenting atmospheric rivers. Their advance commitment also helped us stand ready to respond at a moment's notice as new storms and flooding events cropped up.

Above: Red Cross volunteers distribute food to Pajaro, California, residents. Photo by Jaka Vinsek/American Red Cross



*Thank you!*



**American  
Red Cross**

The Red Cross must be ready for every disaster, big or small, and we respond to an average of more than 60,000 disasters each year—including home fires, severe weather, floods and wildfires. Those in need turn to the Red Cross in their darkest hours because they know they can depend on us right after the disaster and throughout their recovery. Your donation helps us fulfill this promise. We are grateful for your trust.

Above: Red Cross volunteers Mark Montgomery and Chris Bozdech unload cleanup supplies to be distributed to residents affected by the California atmospheric rivers.  
Photo by Jaka Vinsek/American Red Cross