

United Way Response to Southern California Wildfires

United Way improves lives by mobilizing the caring power of our communities. In times of disaster, United Way's role in coordinating, networking and marshaling resources becomes even more critical. United Way's work in crisis advances the common good through strategies in education, financial stability and health that improve the quality of life for individuals and families, and benefit society overall.

United Way of America's Coordinated National Response Team

- This cross-functional team at United Way of America comprises staff members from areas such as Community Impact, Field Leadership, 2-1-1, Brand Leadership, Information & Technology, United eWay, Investor Relations and Finance, who are activated to offer technical assistance to local United Ways experiencing disaster. This team is lead by Lynn Pharr, Director of Crisis Preparedness, Response & Recovery at United Way of America.
- On October 23rd, United Way of America President and CEO Brian Gallagher convened the first conference call with members of the team and CEOs of the local United Ways affected by the wildfires.
- Daily conference calls provided an opportunity for local United Ways to report their current status and projected needs, addressed immediate ways of helping the region's 2-1-1 system deal with the increase in call volume, and allowed United Ways a forum for discussing collaboration in long-term recovery efforts.
- Given the local United Ways' reports of their immediate needs, members of the team provided support including: a "click & give" page for gifts through United eWay, templates for press releases, public service announcements (PSAs) and talking points, web support, an event-specific listserv and updates to the United Way system.
- The Director of Crisis Preparedness, Response & Recovery at United Way of America spent a week in Southern California to provide direct technical assistance to the local United Ways involved. She worked with them on protocol for disaster funds, issues involving long-term recovery and effective community partnerships, etc.

2-1-1 and the AIRS/United Way Disaster Response Team

- On Wednesday, October 24th, the six affected Southern California 2-1-1s *answered* over 41,000 calls, which is 764% the number of calls from the previous Wednesday, with a 13.4% abandonment rate.
- Over a five-day period, the centers answered nearly 130,000 calls.
- Spanish-speaking callers were able to access information from 2-1-1 specialists who speak Spanish.
- As call volumes in the area soared, the AIRS/United Way Disaster Response Team (DRT) activated to provide extra 2-1-1 specialists to staff the busy lines.
- Supported by funds from United Way of America, 22 DRT members arrived between October 24 and 27. The DRT volunteers came from Florida, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Hawaii, Colorado, Minnesota, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia, Michigan, Oregon, North Carolina and other parts of California.

Community Partnerships

- United Way is a member of both the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN), formed to coordinate relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters, and the Major Relief Agency Consortium (MRAC) co-chaired by American Red Cross and UWA.
- Within this network, the initial response to disasters is led by the American Red Cross while United Way takes the lead in long-term recovery.
- Red Cross and United Way are joined by partners such as Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), Salvation Army, AIRS, FEMA and many others in this critical work.
- Local United Ways in Southern California have been convening community partners to discuss strategy concerning long-term recovery efforts.

MRAC and Long-term Recovery

- On October 31st, American Red Cross President and CEO Mark Everson declared that Red Cross had met their expected costs for the wildfires response and would no longer initiate fundraising activities specific to the wildfires. He encouraged support for the organizations involved in long-term recovery.
- American Red Cross has demonstrated a strong commitment to the MRAC partnership with this bold step.
- United Way will now take the lead in long-term recovery and will be here as long as it takes to rebuild the lives, homes and communities of people who have lost so much in this tragedy.

United Way Southern California Wildfires Recovery Fund

United Ways across Southern California launched a united [regional fund](#) to help the affected communities recover. The United Way Southern California Wildfires Recovery Fund differs from other funds in two key ways:

- The Fund represents a collaboration between United Way of San Diego County, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, Inland Empire United Way, Orange County United Way, United Way of the Inland Valleys, Arrowhead United Way, United Way of Santa Barbara County, United Way of Ventura County and United Way of California.
- United Way has activated a local volunteer committee of community leaders from all of the involved counties to develop strategies to address the long-term needs of the people and communities affected.

If Asked How People Can Help

Financial Donations

- Financial donations to the United Way Southern California Wildfires Recovery Fund are, by far, the best way to assist these communities and the people whose lives have been devastated by the fires.
- Financial donations can be made to the Fund at: www.unitedway.org, or by phone at 1-866-404-5826.
- Questions can be directed to Carol Williams at 858-636-4177, or by email to, socalfund@uwsd.org.

Volunteering

- If people are interested in volunteering and live in the state of California: **Dial 2-1-1.**
- California is not looking for out-of-state volunteers at this time.

Product Donations

- Unsolicited, spontaneous donations of goods and services from individuals and community groups, though well intentioned, have hidden costs and pose a number of complications for recovery efforts. **United Way is unable to accept such donations at this time.**

Organizations Accepting Product Donations

- **AidMatrix Network** – Aidmatrix is working with the California Office of Emergency Services on relief efforts for the wildfire victims. Find out more at: www.aidmatrix.org, or call 1-469-357-3185.
- **Gifts In Kind International** – Gifts In Kind works primarily with corporate donors who give in large amounts. Find out more at: www.giftsinkind.org, or call 1-703-836-2121.

If you have questions, please contact Lynn Pharr, Director, Crisis Preparedness, Response & Recovery at lynn.pharr@uwa.unitedway.org or visit www.unitedway.org to read about the United Way Southern California Wildfires Recovery Fund.