




CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Date: September 5, 2024

To: Honorable City Council Members

From: Carol P. Parks, General Manager 
Emergency Management Department

Subject: **RESPONSE TO COUNCIL FILE: 12-1690-S20**

The following information is submitted in response to Council File 12-1690-S20, title: Augmented Winter Shelter (AWS)/Program Improvements/Weather-Related Emergency Management

Overview:

On December 12, 2022, Mayor Karen Bass signed a local declaration of emergency and activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) regarding homelessness, with a mandate to “...move Los Angeles in a new direction, with an urgent and strategic approach to solving our city’s toughest challenges and creating a brighter future for every Angeleno.” The declaration of emergency recognized the depth and severity of the housing crisis in Los Angeles and created new initiatives to enhance the ability of the City to provide services to People Experiencing Homelessness (PEH), and the ability to provide affordable housing.

The City of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department (EMD) leads the City’s innovative emergency management efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from all disasters. To accomplish this, EMD supports and coordinates with partner agencies to provide resources for PEH communities, to meet the target goals and initiatives of Mayor Bass’ proclamation during disasters and pre-planned events requiring activation of the EOC and/or Department Operational Centers (DOCs).

Although playing a vital role, EMD does not lead the PEH response efforts during emergencies, but instead serves as a conduit of information, providing support and coordination functions to the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Homelessness Solutions (MOHHS) and Los Angeles Homeless Services Agency (LAHSA).

LAHSA is an independent joint powers authority, formed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Los Angeles Mayor and the City Council in December of 1993.

LAHSA's mission is to "drive the collaborative strategic vision to create solutions for the crisis of homelessness grounded in compassion, equity, and inclusion." This mission is implemented through LAHSA's values, which include accountability, collaboration, compassion, equity, and integrity. Through collaboration and partnership with MOHHS and EMD, LAHSA is able to break down communication silos and connect the appropriate team and support functions in order to deliver outreach services.

211 LA is an independent, non-profit organization that serves as the hub for community members and community-based organizations seeking health, human, and social services in Los Angeles County. Through 211 LA, residents may receive information and referrals to services based on individual needs, through their 2-1-1 phone line, website, and chat function. It is important to note, services offered are based upon budget, available funding, and subject to motel availability. As homeless services are led by LAHSA, referrals for services are made via 211 LA. The City does not have a direct contractual relationship with 211 LA.

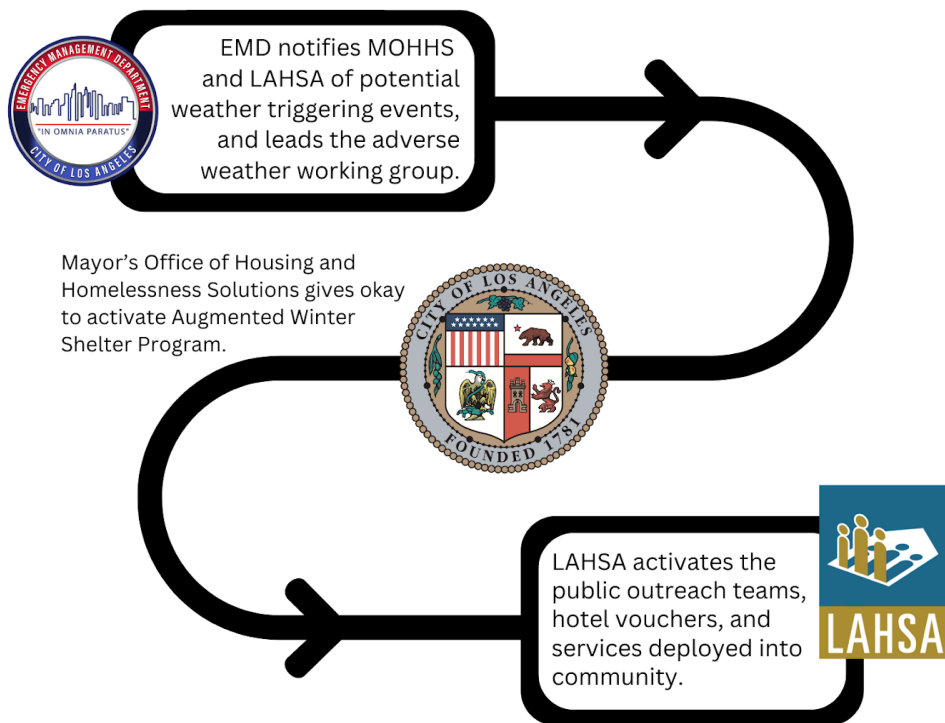
Findings:

The National Weather Service (NWS) regularly models the abundance of possibilities prior to and during severe weather events. Forecast models include, but are not limited to, total rainfall, rainfall rates per hour, significant impact by area and zones, wind speeds, hail, flash flooding, coastal flooding, etc. Forecasting models often share similar probability levels of occurrence. Due to the wide range of outcomes being monitored attributable to the unpredictable nature of the forming unsettled weather, which may lead to extreme weather events, NWS typically cannot give confidence on forecasted weather models more than 48 hours out. Understanding this limitation, EMD, MOHHS, and LAHSA activate the adverse weather working group and PEH adverse weather team following any notification from NWS of potential adverse weather to pre-stage resources in the event City-level triggers are imminent, which necessitates their deployment.

Additionally, EMD leans forward to enhance EOC readiness as well as strengthen networking with private and public emergency preparedness partner agencies. This includes information sharing to expand the capacity and capability to communicate with the public during emergencies and adverse weather. Courtesy notifications are made in advance of a prolonged adverse weather event using the City's alert and warning platform, *NotifyLA*. Text messages and emails are sent to all registered users. EMD uses its websites and social media platforms as well to amplify messaging. Understanding gaps in receiving such emergency messages, EMD works with partner agencies such as MOHHS and LAHSA via both the City of LA adverse weather working group and PEH adverse weather team to provide direct outreach and communication to people experiencing homelessness before and during adverse weather events.

An example of this coordination and messaging process is described in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Deployment of AWSP PEH Resources Flow Chart



As EMD receives potential adverse weather information from NWS, this information is then shared with MOHHS to measure the potential impact on the community and strategize resource deployment efforts. This includes the activation of the PEH adverse weather team which is composed of relevant City of LA departments and external agencies needed to provide resources and services to the PEH communities.

If triggers defined by the Augmented Winter Shelter Program (AWSP) have been met, MOHHS moves forward with recommendations to LAHSA to provide direct outreach offering either motel vouchers and/or activating the AWSP shelters and the Recreation and Parks Department (RAP) sites (*as authorized by MOHHS*). During adverse weather events, 211 LA services provide callers with motel vouchers, augmented winter shelter program (AWSP) shelters, and/or RAP sites. The motel vouchers offer an alternative to the winter shelters and cooling centers during extreme heat. They represent a new model developed to tackle the problem of an insufficient number of fixed beds by redirecting resources and services to other sites.

In some cases, adverse weather may not meet the triggers for LAHSA's augmented winter shelter program, but for weather such as extreme heat, there is a need to offer shelter services to unsheltered PEH. Current triggers for the AWSP include, but are not limited to:

- NWS forecast calls for three days of low daytime temperatures accompanied by night wind chill temperatures of 32 degrees or less.
- Forecast of 1 inch of rain in 24 hours.
- The forecast calls for three consecutive days of 1-4 inches of rain or more accompanied by temperatures at /or below 50 degrees.
- NWS issues a flood watch or flood/flash flood warning.

- Conditions not previously identified by the plan but for which it would be prudent to do so based upon critical need.

(Source: <https://www.lahsa.org/winter-shelter>)

In unique cases when triggers are not met for the AWSP, augmented weather shelters may be implemented by the City at RAP sites when deemed necessary by MOHHSs. An example of this is extreme heat during the summer months. The PEH adverse weather team has learned it is best practice to plan for AWSP services to be offered to PEH during both extreme heat and cold/rain.

Lessons Learned, Recommendations, and Next Steps:

During the winter shelter season for Fiscal Year 2022-23, LAHSA was able to provide 142 motel vouchers per activation to PEH in the City of Los Angeles and 367 motel vouchers per activation to the remainder of unsheltered PEH in LA County. Given that motel vouchers are based upon budget, available funding, and Winter Shelter Program (WSP) shelter beds available, the current fiscal year 2023-24 budget has allotted 65 hotel vouchers per activation period to unsheltered PEH, not including the use of City of LA RAP shelter sites.

For the Fiscal Year 2023-24, RAP provided 15 AWSP sites between three different activations, registering a total of 628 unsheltered PEH during adverse weather events. It is important to note that these sites were not included in LAHSA's budget or the proposed AWSP plan. The amount of motel vouchers and the need for placement of unsheltered PEH is much greater than the current budget allotment.

The significant storms of early 2023, Tropical Storm Hilary, November 2023 storms, and February 2024 storms have led to significant lessons learned and changes in the City's response for PEH during adverse weather events. Clear communication channels and coordinated and consistent messaging have drastically improved the impact of AWSP sites reaching capacity versus facilities remaining unused or vacant.

For coordination of emergency public information on large-scale disasters, incidents, and planned events involving multiple City of LA agencies, the EOC Joint Information Center (JIC) is activated. During the 2024 February storms, the JIC was activated as the centralized information hub to maintain clear, concise, and consistent information sharing to the community regarding public safety and access to services such as AWSP sites, availability, and motel vouchers. Ultimately, 294 motel vouchers were issued to PEH during the 2024 February storms. An additional 6 RAP AWSP sites were activated during the 2024 February Storms to meet the surge in demand, with a total of 299 individuals registered. RAP sites were at /or near capacity. In comparison, during the 2023 November storms, there were RAP AWSP sites that went unused due to limited public awareness of the facilities.

Lessons learned by the City of LA adverse weather working group and PEH adverse weather team have created best practices to lean forward with communication and planning coordination of weather events including, but not limited to:

- Flagging potential NWS adverse weather events via EMD Duty Officer to begin planning/coordination at least a week before the weather event,
- Maintaining clear lines of communication, and designating specific spaces where definitive or official updates are provided,

- Activating LAHSA resources before the storm starts to increase public outreach and allow street outreach placements into shelters during safe and dry conditions,
- During weekends and holidays – Regional Outreach Coordinators collect information during the week about what Homeless Engagement Teams (HET), Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT), and Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME) and community-based outreach teams will be active, and coordinate with them to surge capacity, and ensure awareness of resources. LAHSA leadership additionally has designated staff who must be ready to support activation administration and dispatches internal staff volunteers for full coverage of services such as transportation,
- PEH adverse weather team maintains a clear understanding of entry/check-out times for motel vouchers and RAP AWSP sites, and
- Analyzing need, capacity, and resources needed for AWSP to meet demand based on changes in weather conditions and more dynamic adverse weather.

Based upon best practices and lessons learned from 211 LA’s “After Action Report: Augmented Weather Shelter Program (AWSP),” future recommendations for the Augmented Winter Shelter Program include the ability to increase staffing capacity to answer more calls and reduce wait times, establish a systems integration with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to reduce the cost and time for double data entry, increase the number of fixed beds, and add more motel vouchers based on available funding and 211 LA to increase their motel capacity to allow for available beds, to be given based on need.

NOTE: To extend the hours of the phone line service or increase staffing to reduce call wait times or drop rates, the City would need to coordinate with LA County and increase its pass-through funding to LAHSA for 211 LA, which can be done by increasing the annual allotment to 211 LA in the General Budget.

LAHSA has rolled out the Emergency Response Program (ERP), which provides year-round low-barrier, safe, and supportive 24-hour emergency congregate site-based and hotel/motel-based sheltering during severe weather events or disaster circumstances that pose an immediate danger to unsheltered individuals. Examples include excessive heat/cold/rain, wildfires; landslides and/or mudslides; or other conditions not previously identified by the AWSP plan but for which it would be prudent to activate based on critical need. Moving forward, ERP will replace the AWSP during the winter months and throughout the year.

Conclusion:

The ERP shelters may be used during extreme heat events during the summer; however, it is important to note a major difference between the two types of adverse weather shelters. Due to the Mediterranean-type climate of the Los Angeles coastal region and inland areas, weather may be hot during the day but significantly cooler at night, thus reducing the need to maintain or keep shelters open overnight, which reduces the financial impact in comparison to rain/extreme cold adverse weather shelters. As the weather continues to become more dynamic and as the Los Angeles region experiences more wet winters compared to previous drought winters, additional resources and funding will need to be allocated to the ERP. The next steps should include referring to previous AWSP activations as forecasting models for the scaling of resources and funding needed to facilitate these services during future adverse weather events.