

California Medical and Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC) Program

Overview

The Medical and Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC) Program ensures that every county (Operational Area) in California has a single point of coordination for medical and health disaster response.

Created under California Health & Safety Code § 1797.153, the program brings together EMS, public health, behavioral health, hospitals, environmental health, and other partners to coordinate resources during emergencies.

Key Responsibilities

MHOACs are responsible for 17 mandated functions during emergencies. Some of the most important include:

- Assessing immediate medical and health needs
- Coordinating disaster medical and health resources
- Managing patient distribution and evaluations
- Supporting hospitals, clinics, and EMS providers
- Working with fire agencies and prehospital services
- Setting up temporary treatment/triage sites
- Overseeing disease surveillance and outbreak control
- Ensuring food safety, safe water, and environmental health
- Providing or coordinating mental/behavioral health services
- Delivering public information and risk communications

How It Works

- Operational Area Level: Each county designates an MHOAC (often jointly filled by the Health Officer and EMS Agency Administrator or a qualified designee).
- 24/7 Duty Officer: The MHOAC program maintains on-call coverage for medical/health needs and mutual aid requests.
- Integration: During major events, the MHOAC works within the County Emergency Operations Center and California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Resource Coordination

When an incident overwhelms local systems:

- MHOACs process resource requests for supplies, equipment, and personnel.
- They maintain situational awareness and issue Situation Reports (SitReps).

- Requests that cannot be met locally are escalated through the state’s mutual aid system.

Why It Matters

- Unified Coordination: Prevents duplication and ensures the right resources reach the right place.
- Preparedness: Maintains situational awareness of hospitals, EMS, clinics, and public health resources.
- Compliance: Aligns with state and federal emergency systems, enabling access to funding and reimbursement.
- Community Safety: Supports medical, mental health, environmental, and public health needs in disasters.

Challenges

- Staffing and sustaining 24/7 readiness
- Limited local resources and supply chains
- Complex communication across agencies
- Role clarity during large, multi-agency incidents
- Adapting to emerging threats (pandemics, wildfires, climate events)

Learn More

California EMS Authority – MHOAC Program: <https://emsa.ca.gov/medical-health-operational-area-coordinator/>

CDPH & EMSA – MHOAC Program Manual (PDF):
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCLHO/CDPH%20Document%20Library/MedicalandHealthOperationalAreaCoordinationManual.pdf>