



## **UCSF Statement by Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative Director Margot Kushel, MD, on the Los Angeles County Wildfires**

SAN FRANCISCO (January 17, 2025) – Following is a statement by Dr. Margot Kushel, MD, Director of the [Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative \(BHII\)](#) at the University of California, San Francisco, on the fires devastating Los Angeles County.

Dr. Kushel is the principal investigator of [The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness \(CASPEH\)](#), the largest representative study of homelessness in the U.S. since the 1990s. Released in 2023, CASPEH provides a comprehensive analysis of homelessness in California and offers policy recommendations to address its root causes.

“Our hearts go out to the thousands displaced by the devastating fires in Los Angeles. This tragedy underscores the growing challenges posed by climate-driven disasters, which exacerbate the existing severe housing crisis.

“For people already experiencing homelessness, disasters reveal the stark realities of surviving without stable housing. Limited access to evacuation alerts, disrupted transportation and heightened health risks from smoke exposure heighten those risks. Destruction from wildfires further reduces the strained housing supply, leaving people at risk of experiencing homelessness with fewer options. When disaster strikes, those at high risk of homelessness and those who are experiencing homelessness are the most likely to be left behind. People from historically marginalized communities face outsized risk. The intersecting crises of climate change and homelessness highlight the need for stronger systems—expanded shelter capacity, more affordable housing, and coordinated outreach. To build resilience in the face of future disasters, we must address these gaps.

“Evidence shows that displacement leads to prolonged housing instability and homelessness, straining shelter systems, and deepening inequities. By addressing the root causes of homelessness and integrating disaster preparedness into housing policies, we can build a system that protects and supports everyone. “Homelessness in California saw a three percent increase in the last year to 187,084. This increase is lower than the national trend, but the enormous number of people experiencing homelessness in California reflects the ongoing crisis caused by the lack of affordable housing in California.”

## **About UCSF BHHI**

The [UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative \(BHHI\)](#) provides accurate, timely policy-oriented research about homelessness for local, state, and national policymakers and practitioners. Funded by a generous gift from Marc and Lynne Benioff and based at the UCSF Division of Health Equity and Society, UCSF BHHI is a trusted source for evidence-based practice, policy, and scalable solutions—turning evidence into action to prevent and end homelessness.

Media requests can be directed to [BHHIMedia@ucsf.edu](mailto:BHHIMedia@ucsf.edu).

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