00:10.02

Brittnie Bloom

Matthew, thank you so much for being here with us today. I am always happy to be joined by another San Diego State alumni.

00:19.09

Matthew Martinez

Thank you so much for having me. I'm really happy to be here.

00:21.18

Brittnie Bloom

yay um So as you know, in recent months and years, California specifically has faced increasingly severe wildfires and other natural disasters.

00:31.97

Brittnie Bloom

So I thought we would start out today by talking a little bit about your involvement in the prevention, education, and response of the wildfires and other natural disasters that we've seen here in California.

00:44.58

Matthew Martinez

Yeah, absolutely.

00:44.87

Brittnie Bloom

yeah

00:45.26

Matthew Martinez

i am based out of Los Angeles. um I live in Long Beach and I've kind of lived and worked in Southern California my whole life. And disasters are a little rare to us.

00:56.69

Matthew Martinez

we In my role, we are used to deploying members. We're used to sending people across the country. And I've noticed a trend of disasters getting closer and closer and closer to home.

01:07.03

Matthew Martinez

um Of course, we've always had, you know, really major wildfires affect the Southern California region. But with this L.A. wildfire, it really is close to home for a lot of urban populations. So that was really interesting in my role and what I've done with my organization in the past is a lot of community faced and forward work of being out there directly.

01:27.64

Matthew Martinez

educating and creating programs to work with youth volunteers and to work with members of the community to do things like install smoke alarms, to share preparedness information, make sure folks have critical things like getting an emergency kit and having a plan. So those are some of the areas that I've worked in as well as responding to disasters as they arise within our county.

01:50.22

Brittnie Bloom

Awesome. Well, with your background and experience in emergency management and response, can you talk us through the role that FEMA or the Federal Emergency Management Agency plays in supporting local and state responses during major crises like the wildfires that we just saw in Los Angeles or earthquakes in California or the plethora of other natural disasters that we've seen in the United States in recent years?

02:18.92

Matthew Martinez

Yeah, absolutely. And this is from mostly my experience working alongside FEMA on different disasters. FEMA is the federal agency responsible for emergencies. um ah There are a lot of players in emergencies. Almost every department touches emergency management somehow, but FEMA really is the agency that we all look to for that guidance. FEMA does a lot of work um and they may do things or they may not do things that folks expect them to do.

02:45.35

Matthew Martinez

A lot of what we're familiar with FEMA doing is a lot of the recovery work. So they're that major player in getting folks from, hey, this disaster has happened. ah What is their next step going to be? How can the the resources of the federal government be brought to these communities and help them recover on these large scale disasters?

03:03.94

Matthew Martinez

So much like Congress, we in our nonprofit space or another municipal groups think of FEMA as like the folks who hold the purse and who can help to like reimburse some of the on the ground operations that are happening.

03:16.58

Matthew Martinez

But FEMA does also directly work in some of those areas. I know I've had colleagues who have responded to disasters in Puerto Rico who were working alongside FEMA groups who had trucks and who had food and who were passing those out.

03:28.89

Matthew Martinez

And our teams were helping with that. Every disaster is a little bit different, but FEMA does help with you know recovery and rebuilding. They do work and do incredible work in preparedness and mitigation. So working before those emergencies happen.

03:41.81

Matthew Martinez

But again, in my role, what we've mainly looked to FEMA for was guidance and support for like, these are going to be our experts or our leading organization and establishing like criteria and guidance. And then also who we look for, for recovery and for funding.

03:59.28

Brittnie Bloom

So it sounds like FEMA does a lot and they are a key connector during difficult and stressful and scary moments um in California and um you know throughout the US.

04:13.38

Brittnie Bloom

So you're a public health professional who has worked on disaster preparedness initiatives in California, including providing CPR training and responding to disasters.

04:26.64

Brittnie Bloom

Given your role and your background, how do you think public health education and awareness programs can play a larger role in preparing individuals and communities for the next wildfire season or next natural disaster that we may face?

04:41.75

Matthew Martinez

That's an excellent question. And I think the focus on community is really important. We in the preparedness sphere have really tried to push that community interventions need to be the base of where preparedness is happening.

04:55.19

Matthew Martinez

And public health has a really strong skill set in that. Like I mentioned before, there's a lot of players in disaster preparedness and emergency management. And so I really think the role of public health is working to do play to their strengths and work directly with like our priority populations, maybe some communities that need special assistance because of their lived experiences or background.

05:19.97

Matthew Martinez

And also, again, focusing on that community-based responsibility of individuals to be prepared for disasters.

05:29.00

Brittnie Bloom

So I'm hearing you say there's a need to focus on community and to have community engagement specifically around priority populations.

05:39.17

Brittnie Bloom

Can you priority populations can mean a whole bunch of different things depending on what sort of slice of the pie of public health that you're working in.

05:43.15

Matthew Martinez

Mm-hmm.

05:46.59

Brittnie Bloom

Can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by priority populations in this context?

05:52.12

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely. That's a great question. i use priority populations as a more encouraging term in lieu of vulnerable populations. I think there are strengths in every community. And instead of us focusing on what makes them vulnerable, ah focusing on why we should instead prioritize them, because every community has strengths and we need to be able to address them and also recognize that some communities are going to need other more attention than others.

06:17.59

Matthew Martinez

So maybe communities who are ah non-English speaking as their primary language, who are lower income, who have access to functional needs. ah These groups can really be supported by public health because public health does very often work with these groups.

06:31.73

Matthew Martinez

So that is what I mean by priority populations in this setting.

06:35.15

Brittnie Bloom

Excellent. It sort of removes that like deficit type language that sometimes folks use when we're talking about you know vulnerable populations. I love that switch for priority population.

06:46.66

Brittnie Bloom

ah So thank you.

06:47.88

Matthew Martinez

Yeah, if I might add, I think that one of the things that I've seen most often working directly with the community is it's folks who are already having some difficulties or were experiencing some challenges before the disaster are the folks who are most greatly going to be impacted.

07:04.08

Matthew Martinez

All those things that I just mentioned, you know, being low income, maybe not speaking English as a primary language, um education status, there's different characteristics, but it's those folks who may have experienced struggles before the disaster are going to face a lot of barriers recovering from a disaster. So again, that's why we need to prioritize in these populations.

07:24.39

Brittnie Bloom

Absolutely. And I think um you make a ah great point about these populations that might we we as public health experts um and those in emergency response, et cetera, ah might need to just pay a little bit more attention to. and Your comment about um you know language, we see the need to expand language services or ensure that education and prevention you know documentation is provided and various languages to ensure that all of the beautiful populations that we have in California, where there are many different languages that are um spoken, are accounted for um when we're doing training and doing you know responding to to disasters.

08:14.50

Brittnie Bloom

So in that sort of same vein, when I'm thinking about education, I'm thinking about young people, um what do you think about the role of youth and youth volunteers in disaster preparedness? you know What can be done to engage our younger generations in preparedness programs, um especially in in light of the ongoing wildfire risks in California and just the increase in natural disasters throughout the US s and globally, really?

08:42.66

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely. Engaging youth is a really important point for me, and it's also a passion point. I started doing this work and I fell in love with this work as a young person, even as early as fourth grade. I took a CPR class to the Red Cross through my Boy Scout troop, fell in love with it, and that's how i found this career path.

08:59.36

Matthew Martinez

And the reason why I go back to that is because that's the first time i can feel that I was empowered because of this education, because of this knowledge, because of an organization telling me, you have the ability to help people. And in times of emergencies, we look to you to help people.

09:15.66

Matthew Martinez

And so I think it's really important to introduce that to younger populations because it might inspire them in the way that it did me. But also, we tend to think that youth are not empowered to respond to disasters or they're not as affected as adults are.

09:31.98

Matthew Martinez

But when you're an adolescent or I'm specifically talking about like high school aged youth ah populations, you are very aware of your surroundings and you're impacted like them. You're almost an adult.

09:44.59

Matthew Martinez

And so to not have those skills or not to not be looked upon and not have the skills to to respond to disasters is really scary. And so the work that I've done working with youth volunteers and working with youth members in our community to give them these skills has been empowering. A couple of ah what I call mission moments for me from this last disaster is I ran into youth volunteers and folks that I had trained working in shelters and supporting our operation and saying, hey, I'm here because I took this class or I did this program or, you know, I was able to evacuate my family because of the education that your program helped provide.

10:18.69

Matthew Martinez

And so those things show that they were able to be that champion in their family to say, hey, adults, you know, parents, you have a lot of priorities. let preparedness and let safety be my priority in the family. And they were actually able to, again, be that champion and help to save their family's life to help grab the essential items and find important resources for those individuals in the county that I've worked with who were affected by these disasters.

10:46.46

Brittnie Bloom

That must have been a really beautiful full circle moment for you as a young person who is really interested and you know, I can help my community. I can help others in moments of disaster to then seeing other youth having that same sort of aha moment in an actual moment of crisis.

11:03.98

Brittnie Bloom

um And then, then thanking you. That is really cool. ahead.

11:08.60

Matthew Martinez

I was just, sorry, i was just really happy to be a part of that.

11:09.61

Brittnie Bloom

go ahead

11:11.29

Matthew Martinez

It it felt really like an honor ah that it did come full circle like that.

11:15.99

Brittnie Bloom

Yeah, I don't think many of us have those moments, those full circle moments. So how how cool ah that you were able to experience that.

11:26.65

Matthew Martinez

Mm-hmm.

11:27.13

Brittnie Bloom

Do you have any specific organizations or educational materials or anything, you know, if there is a young person who's listening to this podcast and thinks, I want to be prepared, I want to dive in to make sure that my community, my family is prepared whenever the next, you know, natural disaster may hit.

11:48.76

Brittnie Bloom

Do you have any resources you would just quickly want to maybe give a shout out to or, um you know, highlight for for young people who might be interested?

11:57.40

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely, and I really encourage all folks to to engage in this, right? We asked or we talked about what should the role in public health be to support disaster preparedness? I think there's a lot of competing priorities that we have in this field. I think this has to now move front and center, and we as community members have to understand that preparedness is no longer this optional thing. I've been working in preparedness for a number of years,

12:21.66

Matthew Martinez

And it's been viewed as something that we can kind of put aside or something that I won't really need. The number one thing I hear when I'm responding to disasters is, I never thought it would be me or you never think it's going to be you. um That's by far the the long the largest thing that I hear.

12:35.04

Matthew Martinez

And so I think that the Red Cross has fantastic preparedness presentations for all different ages, starting even in like kindergarten. And then they have a great rep website and app. I would plug in their apps, their first aid app, their emergency apps. They're fantastic.

12:49.18

Matthew Martinez

the state of california has also develop some incredible resources through their Listos California campaign. So their preparedness materials is really communities focused and specific. And then ready.gov on the federal side ah has information about all different types of disasters. But I would recommend kind of those three from different levels, right? The nonprofit side of the Red Cross has great resources, Listos California from the state ah specific here to California, and then ready.gov anything federal or kind of something you'll see across the country.

13:20.11

Brittnie Bloom

Excellent. Thank you for that. So I'm going to change veins a little bit here, and I want to know what you can tell us related to what you think is going well in the disaster preparedness field. We hear a lot about what's going not so well, and I'm going to ask you about that next. But I want to start us off by saying, or by asking, what's what's working in disaster preparedness?

13:46.92

Matthew Martinez

Excellent. Yes. And again, this is my opinion, but I really enjoy that we are having these conversations to say we are seeing this cycle of communities who are already facing challenges or barriers after and before disasters. How do we start preparing them before that so that we can kind of limit the impacts that disasters are having?

14:06.64

Matthew Martinez

So we're talking about being culturally competent. We're talking about getting in the right communities. We're talking about having specific approaches to different communities. Because even within L.A. County, you go to different neighborhoods and there's a different culture that's not always assigned to like where someone's from or from their ethnicity. It's just you know where they live or or how that community is. And so I do like that.

14:28.36

Matthew Martinez

different organizations are focusing on how do we make preparedness relevant and accessible to the communities that we're serving and not having it be a one size fits all approach.

14:39.61

Matthew Martinez

Because that's what it's very much been like in the past. And if you navigate even through some of those resources, you'll see a lot of similarities and here's how everyone should prepare. But I like the approach to there are different populations, there are different communities.

14:52.38

Matthew Martinez

How can we best serve them and how can we develop the tools that are really going to support these individuals?

14:58.36

Brittnie Bloom

Yeah, I think it's a really rare moment where one-size-fits-all approach really ever works, but I think this is a ah great example of where relevant and population-specific or area-specific intervention can can really help.

15:15.08

Brittnie Bloom

So let's then move into what you think is maybe not going so well. What have you experienced and what do you see as being some of the most critical gaps in communication and coordination, especially between federal, state and local or nonprofit agencies, especially during large scale disasters?

15:36.96

Matthew Martinez

I think we're always learning new things from every disaster. And that's a little difficult. And I think a little bit of grace that we have to give to some of these emergency management agencies, um whether they're you know governmental or community-based, it's Every disaster is different.

15:54.04

Matthew Martinez

And so we have we may have learned some great takeaways from a previous disaster and try to apply those. But very quickly, we have to think on our feet and say, this disaster is different. And how are we going to be able to support that community? and And so i think that... I'm so sorry, you're going edit this out because I forgot the question and I wanted to address something else.

16:14.73

Matthew Martinez

Yeah.

16:14.73

Brittnie Bloom

No, that's okay. um I was just asking you, like, what's not going so well and what you've experienced related to critical gaps in communication and coordination.

16:26.36

Brittnie Bloom

And then I threw in the like federal state local agency piece. So let me, let's restart.

16:30.95

Matthew Martinez

gotcha

16:32.61

Brittnie Bloom

So I'm going to say, okay.

16:32.93

Matthew Martinez

Yeah. Give me one second, sorry, because I have an answer on this that I think is really important, and I lost myself in trying to think of what was my answer. I'm

16:41.12

Brittnie Bloom

No, that's totally fine. That's what we're here for. Okay.

16:44.75

Matthew Martinez

glad we're not doing this live.

16:46.99

Brittnie Bloom

but Me too. Okay. Three, two, one. Okay. Now let's think about what is going not so well. And I'm curious to know what you've experienced and what are some of the most critical gaps in communication and coordination, especially between, you know, federal, state and local or nonprofit agencies during large scale disasters?

17:09.83

Matthew Martinez

realize that every disaster is really different. And so even though these agencies have a wealth of knowledge from previous disasters, we can't always apply them to new situations. So we do have to give some grace to these different organizations when they enter a new disaster.

17:26.18

Matthew Martinez

Things may be different and we have to think very quickly on how to address certain concerns or how to specifically serve this community. i think that communication is really important. because there are a lot of players and stakeholders in emergency management and a lot of people who need to be doing different things.

17:42.67

Matthew Martinez

And what folks may not realize is that changes based on the disaster and specifically because of location. If a county has never experienced this disaster before, their you know department of x y and Z may have never been activated ah in a disaster space before.

17:58.03

Matthew Martinez

So they have never exercised or practiced or utilized communication with somebody coming in like FEMA or a state emergency management agency. So there's always a little bit of initial growing pains where it's, okay, how are we going flesh out these conversations?

18:13.15

Matthew Martinez

But I think one of the things that agencies are doing well is that they've recognized this and they're using opportunities like exercises or ah non-emergency operations to really flush out these communication practices. So when these things do happen, all of these agencies have to be on the same page and all these agencies provide multiple services. Sometimes they overlap.

18:35.90

Matthew Martinez

One of the areas for growth that I do see is who is responsible for what, establishing that early and making sure that we're all bringing our strengths to the table. Sometimes we have to leave behind a portion of our organization that that's something that they do because ah for this disaster, another organization is leading that effort.

18:55.73

Brittnie Bloom

Yeah, so I think a really important takeaway and maybe one that we don't think about is you know, just like you you were describing with emergency preparedness, the prepare part isn't one size fits all, neither is response. It is just impossible to have a one size fits all sort of response when an emergency or a disaster hits unexpectedly. Yeah.

19:22.47

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely. And I think that a lot of folks look to emergency-based partners for those answers. But what I've experienced a lot and what I've mentioned is that it's a lot of the municipalities, it's a lot of local departments who have never anticipated being used in an emergency fashion now being transitioned to that.

19:41.22

Matthew Martinez

So there's a little bit of that, getting accustomed to that.

19:45.19

Brittnie Bloom

So, yeah, so let's talk about recommendations um that you might have, specifically around emergency response policy. So what recommendations do you have for us?

19:57.58

Brittnie Bloom

um And I think on top of that, I'm interested in policy specifically related to priority populations. I had originally had that question asked as vulnerable, but I'm switching that to be priority populations.

20:15.51

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely. i think, first of all, in terms of policies, having established and well exercised, like MOUs, Memorandum but of Understandings, is really important between different agencies to say, okay, within this county, within this area, within this region,

20:33.88

Matthew Martinez

How are we going to work together and what are we going to do? And then identifying that helps agencies to understand who's responsible for what. You are our feeding partner in this kind of emergency. You're our mass care partner. You're our recovery partner. You're our you know evacuations coordinator for the county. Those things are really important. And a lot of those things are interagency.

20:54.29

Matthew Martinez

I would be really curious in seeing policy or or legislation implemented that would support community-based preparedness events, you know, really leaning on local cities and government agencies to support how can we help and prioritize community preparedness in our communities.

21:19.54

Brittnie Bloom

Yeah. i Can you walk us through how an MOU is typically like built? I'm just wondering because of your previous comment on how we're seeing disasters kind of come closer and closer to home. So perhaps there are counties out there that haven't put one together because they think that they don't need to, because they think that they're not in the danger zone of a fire or a flood or, you know, fill in the blank.

21:51.78

Brittnie Bloom

How would someone go about ensuring that their county and their community is covered under an MOU?

22:02.61

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely. So it is really important for there to be a leading organization. And for me, I tend to default to like a county or a city group because they have a legal responsibility to ensure that all this happens.

22:18.01

Matthew Martinez

It may not be the best suggestion. So if there are folks who disagree with that, ah totally open to that. But there does need to be a leading agency that coordinates this among these agencies to say, again, who's going to do what?

22:22.88

Brittnie Bloom

Yeah.

22:28.61

Matthew Martinez

MOUs come from that understanding of there's two agencies or there's multiple agencies. And before disaster happens, they're going to sit down and say, okay, here's what we're really good at and make sure all other agencies understand that. And they're going to put it in writing saying that, you know, I, as this organization can contribute this during a that disaster,

22:46.36

Matthew Martinez

And I'm going to make sure that I'm going to uphold that. It's not a legally binding contract, but it's great because it helps us to flush out and to sit down and be like, oh, actually, we thought you were going to be able to do this.

22:56.85

Matthew Martinez

But, you know, it's really great to know that this portion, let's just say feeding, feeding during a disaster is going to be covered by your organization. And, you know, for this period and and all that.

23:08.11

Brittnie Bloom

Awesome. Okay, thank you. So let's see. the The next question I have for you is, again, focused on California's growing risk of natural disasters.

23:22.58

Brittnie Bloom

And I'm wondering how you envision the future of emergency management in our state. um What steps you think should be prioritized to ensure that the state is better prepared in the years to come?

23:40.15

Matthew Martinez

I do know that that is a focus of the state. Cal OES is the California FEMA equivalent. They are the emergency management agency for the state of California.

23:51.19

Matthew Martinez

They do do a lot of big picture discussions like this of how can we work to make California better prepared. And like the Listos campaign that's been out for a number of years, they have been working to move preparedness and disaster response to the frontline of their efforts. So I do applaud them for that. I think something that's interesting is that LA County tops the FEMA disaster risk list. FEMA has an assessment that they put out and it's a hazard risk map that looks at which communities are going to, or have the highest risk based on a couple of elements ah for disasters and having really negative impacts. The reason why l LA ranks really high, actually a hundred out of a hundred ah is because we don't,

24:34.60

Matthew Martinez

and I don't want to jinx us by saying this, but we don't really get disasters quite frequently. and so we're not very well exercised and we don't have those policies that the state and the federal government are hoping to flush out and well-establish in California compared to a place like Florida that has severe weather and hurricanes quite often.

24:52.00

Matthew Martinez

They have had more opportunities to exercise these relationships, to have flushed out more plans and to have practiced some of these responses, whereas in California, we haven't encountered that yet.

25:03.34

Matthew Martinez

So I do know that the state, at the Cal OES and that state agencies are really working with all their partners to see how do we prepare California and really strengthen our disaster response operations. Cal OES is a great job and we do have a lot of wonderful resources in here in California, but I do know they are bringing attention to that.

25:22.96

Brittnie Bloom

Do you think that's changed um even recently just because of the huge wildfire disaster that we saw you know in Los Angeles and slowly making its way down to San Diego? And San Diego has not been a stranger to fire um wildfires, even um in in recent days after the l LA fires were you know burning at the same time.

25:50.03

Brittnie Bloom

Are we seeing changes already?

25:54.25

Matthew Martinez

To that score, that is a great question. I know that comes out every number of years and there's a number of factors that go into the risk associated with that. Of course, it's not a perfect scale, but I do know that it has been forecasted that we are going to see different things in this region, right? We're seeing an increase in floodings. We're seeing an increase in fires. We're seeing an increase in things like atmospheric rivers.

26:15.99

Matthew Martinez

So seeing how we adapt and respond to that is going to be really critical. I think l LA really did show up and show out for these large wildfires and kind of just a personal hope for myself.

26:25.05

Brittnie Bloom

Mm-hmm.

26:27.01

Matthew Martinez

One of the things that I've been thinking is I hope that well doesn't run dry ah I hope that if we continue to encounter these really catastrophic disasters, which of course I hope we don't, I hope that we don't kind of experience fatigue with this and the community continues to show up and to keep that resiliency going and allowing our neighbors to depend on our LA community because we do have really big strengths here in l LA and in Southern California.

26:51.54

Matthew Martinez

i would like us to see that happening because that was outside of any formal structure, la really came together. i think if we can grow our formal structures between our nonprofits and our government partners and so on, and really keep that community momentum, that would be really important to me.

27:08.51

Brittnie Bloom

Thank you. And I think this next question is a good segue.

27:08.91

Matthew Martinez

you

27:14.05

Brittnie Bloom

um you know, we've been hearing a lot recently about potential shifts in federal disaster relief policies. um Examples include eliminating FEMA altogether and or making states responsible for their own disaster management and response after a natural disaster occurs.

27:33.62

Brittnie Bloom

So I'm wondering what you think about this and how changes like that could impact California's emergency management landscape.

27:42.86

Matthew Martinez

That has been a really consistent topic of conversations because we have been working directly with FEMA and the future has been concerning, mostly because, as I mentioned, we look to FEMA for guidance, we look to FEMA for ah resources, we look to FEMA for a lot, and so do the states. And so when I mentioned that sometimes folks aren't well-practiced, it's because they haven't experienced disasters like this, where sometimes, but absolutely, FEMA has, right?

28:13.97

Matthew Martinez

For FEMA workers who are deployable, they spend three to upwards of six months out of their year being deployed supporting disasters. It's very difficult for me to imagine a state agency being able to keep people on retainer like that and say, we're going to have this deployable force because they're making a big gamble. If there is no disaster that year, what do they do with those individuals? And it's really hard to pull folks away from critical jobs that they would do every day if a disaster did happen to have and go do disaster work.

28:42.84

Matthew Martinez

So, FEMA being a national resource that gets sent all over the country and is really something that we depend on and I can't see being without. I think folks make a lot of arguments for things belonging to the state.

28:57.62

Matthew Martinez

I think having a national deployable kind of leader system in emergencies at the federal level is really important a lot of catastrophic disasters that the states haven't worked in that space before.

29:11.66

Matthew Martinez

And it's going to cause a lot of growing pains that are ultimately going to affect disaster survivors. And like I mentioned, no one ever expects it's going to be them. And so you can ultimately be putting yourself in risk by, you know, not having this strong national force of FEMA to be able to come in and provide that guidance during disasters.

29:32.81

Brittnie Bloom

And how do you think it would impact your work with, you know, the Red Cross or other nonprofit organizations that are dedicated to ah disaster preparedness, response, education, et cetera?

29:49.01

Matthew Martinez

Yeah. And again, speaking from from my own opinion and what I've experienced within the organization, they're a partner. we No one can do anything in this space without their partners. That would leave a huge hole in the work that a lot of different organizations can do, right?

30:03.89

Matthew Martinez

We receive a small amount of funding from them, but that funding is crucial. I do like to always stress that the Red Cross receives the majority of its donations. of its funds from donations, but we do look to FEMA to provide different services.

30:19.76

Matthew Martinez

um I'll give you an example of like something tangible that shows the strength of FEMA and it's gonna be really silly, but it's signage. ah It's the state and FEMA are working together in this disaster at the disaster recovery centers and FEMA, because they do this very often, they have toolkits that they come and bring out that are incredible. They have thought of everything that you're gonna need when you're setting up these disaster recovery centers.

30:44.21

Matthew Martinez

and they have incredible signage. And it just shows that, hey, they've done this before, they've kind of flushed this out, where when the state opened it up, that was one of the things that they didn't have as strong and one of the things that they grew.

30:54.65

Matthew Martinez

But that's just going to be a really small note to say like, that shows the difference in, hey, a state is a very capable agency in doing disasters, but FEMA, even in the small thing of signage, brings experience and can bring sometimes better outcomes for survivors of disasters.

31:11.78

Brittnie Bloom

Yeah, like you've mentioned before, ah they're the leaders that folks are often looking to in these really scary moments where every moment counts.

31:21.18

Matthew Martinez

Absolutely.

31:22.77

Brittnie Bloom

So I have one last question for you, Matthew, and i think it's sort of a big one and and one that we face in public health a lot. And that is, how do we balance the need for immediate response and the long-term need for infrastructure change?

31:42.15

Brittnie Bloom

um that addresses root causes and vulnerabilities to disaster. How can we prioritize both within emergency response efforts?

31:53.10

Matthew Martinez

That is becoming a growing and growing conversation in this space. One of the things that I always pull out or one of the things that I always mention when we have this discussion is a critical part of being prepared is having physical stuff. And we tell individuals that you have to have ah minimum three-day supply of food. We recommend two weeks of food. and And we're we've been telling people you have to have three days of food storage to two weeks of food storage.

32:19.97

Matthew Martinez

But we also have to recognize that some folks don't know what their next meal is going to be or what they're going to eat tomorrow.

32:24.52

Brittnie Bloom

Mm-hmm.

32:26.21

Matthew Martinez

And so when we're talking about immediate response versus like long term improvements that we have to make. there are a lot of competing priorities with a field that is as broad as public health. We are trying to improve and trying to improve the lived experiences of individuals.

32:41.88

Matthew Martinez

And it is hard to determine, okay when do we devote resources to something immediate like disasters? And when do we focus on things that are long-term?

32:52.82

Matthew Martinez

What we're looking at is how do we not separate the two? And how do every time we're doing an intervention like supporting, you know, hunger. When we're supporting hunger, how can we tie in preparedness to that and make a community that's resilient?

33:08.03

Matthew Martinez

And when we're talking about immediate responses to disasters, how does that help us to identify these infrastructural changes that we need to make?

33:17.88

Brittnie Bloom

Thank you. um I guess before we wrap up, it is tradition to ask one final question. And that is if you could change one thing about disaster preparedness and response, education, all of the topics that you've sort of covered today, if you could change one thing, what would that be?

33:42.44

Matthew Martinez

It's great question. The first thing that comes to mind, and this is going to be really funny, is I wish we could have, if I could implement one thing ah along the lines of change, is a community block party.

33:49.00

Brittnie Bloom

Thank you.

33:53.91

Matthew Martinez

I think that we've talked a lot about community members, and we really see that your neighbors are your first responders in disasters, and a lot of us don't know our neighbors, we don't have their phone numbers, you know.

34:05.21

Matthew Martinez

And so if I could magically have one thing happen overnight and have one thing change is that we would have this community block party of, you know, neighbors opening their doors, coming to the middle of the street and packing emergency kits together, talking about plans. Hey, how are we going to take care of Mrs. So-and-so down the street who is an older adult and may not, you know, has mobility issues. how are we going to make sure that she can evacuate? You know, this person has young kids. How can we support them and have this community effort and,

34:33.48

Matthew Martinez

Whenever I say community effort, I envision this block party example that I'm mentioning of if I could change one thing, it would be that. Us having a time where we come together, understand that the relationships that we have is important and that we work together to build out our emergency kits, to focus on making plans and being knowledgeable about the disasters that we may face.

34:56.90

Brittnie Bloom

What a beautiful public health and community centered response. I love that. um Well, Matthew, thank you so much for your time. i want to give you the opportunity if there's any closing words besides that, any last shout outs or information or anything else you'd want to share with our listeners before i officially have a sign off for the day.

35:19.46

Matthew Martinez

Yeah, absolutely. i would empower you to try to, as much as you can, put into action what I just mentioned. Take a second, family dinner, whoever you're dorming with, whoever your friends are, or whoever your community is at this moment, take a second to be that leader and say, hey, let's talk about preparedness. And I guarantee you, it sounds like an out there conversation, but especially now, right after these LA wildfires, we do have a lot of attention on it.

35:46.23

Matthew Martinez

work on that and say, hey, I care about you. i want to make sure that we're all safe during disasters. Let's take an hour and let that hour grow to how are we going to respond and be prepared for a disaster?

35:58.10

Matthew Martinez

I think that is that would really push for.

36:01.42

Brittnie Bloom

We all have communities and we all have the ability to have conversations like that. So that is a beautiful piece of advice for us to end on.

36:12.33

Brittnie Bloom

Thank you so much, Matthew. I really appreciate your time today.

36:15.74

Matthew Martinez

Thank It's been pleasure.