

NASCIO State IT Recognition Awards

Entry file name: **CA_ Information & Communications Technology**

STATE: California

AGENCY: California Department of Motor Vehicles

CATEGORY: Information & Communications Technology

PROJECT TITLE:

InstantID for Unhoused Californians and Individuals Impacted by Natural Disasters

PROJECT DATE: March 2025

Executive Summary

The California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) launched the nation's first Instant Identity Card (IIC) for individuals who do not have their physical driver's license or identification (DL/ID) card, nor access to it on their mobile device. The IIC is a printed paper document featuring a photograph of the holder, select demographic information, and a scannable QR code, which can be used to electronically verify the holder's identity.

The IIC is available to existing California residents with a valid, unexpired DL/ID card on record who need immediate proof of identity to gain access to aid and services. This card can be especially beneficial for Californians affected by natural disasters and the unhoused population. Californians can request an IIC at DMV disaster recovery centers or outreach events for the unhoused. The IIC is printed on-site at the time of the request.

California has 181,399 unhoused residents, accounting for 28 percent of the nation's homeless population. This includes the nation's highest rate of unsheltered unhoused residents at 68 percent (123,423 were unsheltered). Californians who need county, state, or federal services can use the IIC to access them as much as five to 10 days faster than without one.

The IIC also reduces identity fraud, which is rampant during disaster situations, and ensures Californians can access essential services while anticipating and mitigating risk.

IIC holders can present their card to any entity that possesses a mobile or electronic device with a camera, such as a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer. The verifying party can access the verification website by typing the URL, displayed on the face of the IIC, into a search engine on their mobile or electronic device, or by scanning the QR code printed on the IIC.

Project Description

IDEA

California faces recurring natural disasters, such as floods, wildfires, and earthquakes, that can displace thousands of residents each year. When these events occur, people may suddenly lose their homes, vehicles, personal belongings, and essential documents.

The state also has a large unhoused population that experiences many of the same challenges, even outside of disaster situations. These individuals often qualify for critical support from agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the Social Security Administration, but accessing that aid typically requires identity documents they may no longer have.

As California's primary issuer of identification, the DMV recognized the urgency of helping people replace lost documents quickly while confirming each person's identity. The traditional driver's license or ID card application process can take weeks and becomes even more difficult when the address on file is no longer valid because the home has been destroyed.

As of March 2025, even people without mobile devices can be identified and issued an IIC within minutes by DMV team members working on-site. Anyone with an internet-connected device and a camera can validate an IIC. Because the IIC uses IAL3-equivalent identity verification, it provides the same level of assurance and functional utility as a standard driver's license or ID card. It's printed on ordinary paper, so it can be produced and verified without any specialized equipment.

Each IIC expires after 60 days. This gives customers enough time to receive their replacement DL/ID card while also limiting opportunities for fraud.

IMPLEMENTATION

Department Director Steve Gordon conceived the IIC after visiting an LA fire disaster relief center, where he saw how difficult it was for survivors to prove their identity after losing documents and devices.

DMV divisions quickly began developing the project's policies, processes, and software. The DMV partnered with Digital Bazaar to host a hackathon that brought together businesses and government agencies to explore features and use cases. The California Department of Social Services helped shape the use case for unhoused Californians.

Using IDEMIA tablets running the IIC software, DMV Field Office Division staff now issue IICs across seven regions—at disaster recovery centers, unhoused outreach events, and directly to certain homebound Californians.

IICs became fully operational in March 2025 and will be used during the next disaster relief deployment. Large-scale outreach events for unhoused communities are also planned in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The key to future success is expanding awareness among the public and across government agencies. For example, although IICs are widely used, the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control has not yet formally confirmed whether they are acceptable for purchasing age-restricted products. Cross-departmental discussions to address these gaps are ongoing, and additional marketing efforts are in development.

The IIC itself uses QR-code-based architecture with a scannable code that leads to a photo of the holder. The verifier site shares the DMV's level of trust.

IMPACT

The primary benefit of the IIC is the convenience and immediate utility it provides to customers. Issued on the spot, an IIC allows Californians to verify their identity just as they would with a standard DL/ID card—critical for accessing disaster relief, essential services, and making necessary purchases.

The IIC replaces the DMV's former paper-based emergency DL/ID replacement process, which was slow and resource-intensive. Instead, customers receive a functional substitute instantly while waiting for their permanent card. This reduces stress during already difficult circumstances and ensures people can access help without delay.

By bringing IIC services directly to disaster recovery centers and unhoused outreach events, the DMV meets customers where they are while also easing demand on field offices. As a result, IICs provide a secondary benefit to all DMV customers by helping maintain smoother operations statewide.

The list of businesses and entities that recognize IICs is long and growing. In addition to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Social Security Administration, the California Office of Emergency Services and many hotels and motels have been sensitized and have amended processes to include IICs.

The DMV is proud to assist underprivileged Californians and victims of natural disasters in obtaining the resources necessary to get back on their feet.