



Diversity

in Disaster

## Executive Summary

*of Diversity in Disaster Issues Paper*

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# Executive Summary of Diversity in Disaster Issues Paper

Diversity in Disaster Collaborative

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Contributing authors and a full list of references are listed at the end of the Issues Paper.  
You can find the Issues Paper at: <https://www.diversityindisaster.com/links-resources.html>.

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## Purpose

Ground-breaking research with marginalised groups in Australian disasters is rarely communicated directly with the emergency management (EM) sector. In 2018 a national conference is scheduled with leading researchers and practitioners who will explore identified needs amongst marginalised communities. The *Diversity in Disaster* Conference is to be held in Melbourne on 17-18<sup>th</sup> April, 2018. This Executive Summary Issues Paper is a snapshot of issues to be presented. It aims to stimulate delegates' curiosity and increase understanding prior to attendance. It will assist delegates to select sessions to meet your professional needs and interests.

The conference is an initiative of the Gender and Disaster Pod (Women's Health In the North, Women's Health Goulburn North East and Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative), Victorian Council of Social Services and Resilient Melbourne. It is funded by the Australian Government in partnership with the Victorian Government under the National Partnership Agreement for National Disaster Resilience.

## Guiding documents

Demands on the emergency management (EM) sector are increasing in frequency and complexity. As climate change increases the potential for more extreme weather events grows, exacerbating inequality in readiness and preparation. In order to manage competing demands on time and resources and serve all communities, an efficient EM approach needs to apply the latest research into policy and action, and reflect the lived experience of people in the community.

## International

Internationally, key documents such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) and its successor, the Sendai Framework (2015-2025) outline and uphold the understanding that a whole-of-society, multi-sectorial response that engages all stakeholders is required to effectively respond to the emerging challenges. Further, the United Nation's 2017 Climate Change Conference developed a 'gender action plan' and 'Local Communities and Indigenous People's Platform' (2017). The Australian Government is party to these frameworks and goals, which affirm the importance and timeliness of the *Diversity in Disaster* Conference.

It is clear that the risks posed by natural hazards and climate change must be considered in relation to intersections with other issues (poverty, gender inequality, environmental degradation etc.). The poor and the vulnerable, however defined, face disproportionate risks during disasters. This Conference is positioned to identify constructive strategies to reduce inequalities and increase resilience across our communities.

## Australia

Extensive work around Australia has examined the needs of people who may be vulnerable in emergencies, but significant work is required to put these findings into practice. This includes:

- The ANZEMC report, *Vulnerable Sections of Society (an emergency management perspective)* (2015)
- National Strategy for Disaster Resilience: Community Engagement Framework
- Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience's current review of EM manuals.

The Victorian context is given as an example of the endeavours of one State of Australia.

- The Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission (2010)
- The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services' 'Review of the vulnerable people in emergencies policy' (2017)
- Emergency Management Victoria's (EMV) *Diversity and Inclusion Framework* (2016)
- VCOSS' *Disaster and Disadvantage* (2014) and *Building Resilient Communities* (2017)
- BNHCRC's *Diversity and inclusion: building strength and capability* (2017)
- Previously, over the period 2014-2016, EMV hosted the nationally unique Gender and Disaster Taskforce co-chaired by the EMV commissioner, Mr Craig Lapsley, and the EO of Women's Health Goulburn North East, Ms Susie Reid, with additional funding, including from the Australian Attorney-General's Department under the NEMP scheme for national gender and emergency management guidelines.

## Defining key Concepts

**Resilience** is a contested term. One definition, proposed by 100 Resilient Cities is 'the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems [within a city] to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience'.

Terms related to **community** – including ‘community-led’, ‘community-based’ and ‘community-centric’ – are common but represent no shared understanding either philosophically or practically. There is willingness by the sector to think about the concept, however, this sits alongside reluctance to relinquish power. IAP2’s public participation spectrum, and other frameworks, seek to define the community leader/ EM interface.

## Introduction and cross-cutting issues

In every society, there are power dynamics, and groups that may experience exclusion, making them more vulnerable to hazards and other threats. (Turnbull & Moriniere, 2017, p. 6)

Australia faces particular risks, with one in three have had ‘direct disaster experience’ in their lifetime. Disasters heighten inequalities, marginalisation is increased, and risk factors are multiplied. At each stage – from preparation, response and recovery, reconstruction and reformation of affected communities – disasters’ impacts are different depending on circumstances and positioning within structurally unequal relations of power. Post disaster, decision-making voids and power vacuums are created, commonly leading to centralised ‘top down, power-over’, and inevitably, conflict. Factors such as gender, socio-economic status, mobility, age, disability, location, and English language skills play a central role in determining the outcomes for individuals in, and following, disasters. These can be considered as the social determinants of disasters.

### Gender

A cross-cutting differential is that the impact of disasters on people is gendered. Fire fighting has historically been perceived as a masculine pursuit, and as such, brings prestige. Yet, men are vulnerable through risk-taking, over-confidence, loss of a sense of control, reluctance to seek help, and failure to live up to expectations of them as ‘protector’ during the disasters, and ‘provider’ in the aftermath. Women are vulnerable through notions that women and children are protected in disasters, through the caring role assigned to women, through lack of autonomy in decision-making; and exclusion from bushfire survival education. There is compelling evidence that violence against women increases following large-scale disasters around the world – including in developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand. People of diverse gender and sexual identities people may face specific vulnerabilities with disruption to both formal and informal social support along with increased discrimination and loss of safe spaces. Despite the research cited above, a gender ‘lens’ is rarely used when studying the sociological aspects of disasters and crises. In considering gender, this conference applies such a lens.

The *Gender and Emergency Management (GEM) Literature Review*, *GEM Guidelines* and *GEM Action Checklist* – collaboratively developed and informed by gender experts and over 350 EM personnel nationally – aim to provide a gender-sensitive approach to planning and delivery of disaster planning, relief and recover. Broad distribution of these guidelines is still in its infancy, awaiting the launch of the GEM Guidelines at this conference.

## Violence

Extreme weather events may inflame conflict in communities and families and can disturb relationships, as a higher rate of marriage breakdown is evident after disasters and during prolonged drought.

Men's violence against women increases following large-scale disasters around the world – including in developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand. After the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes, innovative strategies were implemented involving multi-agency collaborations, and in Australia, some local governments and Country Fire Authorities wrote policies and plans to incorporate awareness of family violence into EM planning and recovery.<sup>1</sup> Specific training has been developed by WHGNE for the EM sector. However, in most jurisdictions, emergency workers are likely to be unaware of the need to incorporate awareness of family violence into emergency planning and recovery.

## Poverty

The Sendai Framework calls for further action on tackling underlying disaster risk drivers, such as the consequences of poverty and inequality (Sendai Framework, 2015-2025; Para 6). One of the main sources of vulnerability to a disaster is poverty and this is reflected for most of the groups discussed below.

## Excluded groups

### *Older people*

- Post disaster community breakdown may particularly affect the elderly who rely on informal social support.
- In the year following Hurricane Katrina, the health of elderly survivors declined at a rate of four times the national average for older adults not affected by the disaster.
- Policies encouraging the elderly to remain living at home pose EM issues in disasters.
- The elderly may have valuable knowledge of local place and past disaster events, or experience in dealing with adversity to contribute to EM.

### *Children and young people*

- Children are not little adults, but have specific needs in disasters.
- There is potential in including children and young people to bring fresh thinking and action to EM.
- Guidelines for children in EM were published in 2013. This national survey showed children were largely neglected in current planning.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'domestic violence' and 'family violence' are reluctantly used in this report reflecting their various use by participants, workers, authors and in different states and countries. These terms are euphemistic and infer an equal level of violence by men and women which is unsupported in crime statistics (VicHealth, 2011).

### *People with animals and pets*

- Animal ownership (in two-thirds of Australian households) both increases vulnerability and can improve general resilience and recovery post-event.
- Pet and livestock owners may have no access to private vehicles or transportation equipment such as floats and crates in an evacuation.
- Some may rely on their pets, e.g. people with visual impairments, with autism, and those with mental health needs. Both children and adults may rely on animals as sole companions, including amongst the elderly living alone, the homeless, and socially isolated people.
- Examples exist of community-led approaches to motivate and support communities to advocate for animals to be included in preparedness and planning, response, and recovery.

### *Rural and remote communities*

- The agricultural industry is vulnerable to extreme weather, as farmers risk losing the source of their livelihood in times of disaster.
- In contrast, privileged groups perpetuate environmentally destructive norms and practices.

### *People who are homeless*

- Homeless people become more vulnerable during extreme weather, as many lose their shelter (tents, safe sleeping spaces or temporary structures), experience increased or new mental health issues, and lack access to early warning systems and educational resources.

### *Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers*

- Lack of experience with bushfire (and flood) creates vulnerability.
- New refugees may not have access to, or understanding of, critical preparatory and emergency risk communication information.
- Mainstream and translated messaging do not account for new arrivals' discrete socio-cultural contexts and communication needs.
- These vulnerabilities are amplified where there is a lack of social support – people who can act as translators, or 'sense-makers', of preparatory and emergency messages.
- The lived experience of life-threatening incidents often means that some refugees may seem to take unwise and unpredictable initiatives in disasters. Others, already traumatised by previous life events, may freeze.
- In contrast, while refugees may be thought to be at higher risk in a disaster, resilience and leadership can be found in those who have already survived disasters.
- A kit for 'Risk communication planning with CALD communities' was published in 2015.

### *People with a BMI over 40*

- Without appropriate consideration, people with BMI >40 face may be exposed to disproportionate and potentially avoidable risk. It may be the only difference between being rescued or being left behind.
- Fear of blocking evacuation routes or difficulty in carrying stretchers down stairwells meant obese hospital patients were left until last in Superstorm Sandy.

### *People with mental illness*

- People experiencing a mental illness face particular challenges in preparing, responding and recovering from natural disasters.

- While previous experiences of trauma may worsen disaster experience, people with lived experience of mental illness can offer strength and expert guidance to others in their community for whom it is a new experience.

#### *People with a disability and those with a chronic health condition*

- People with disability are twice-to-four times more likely to be killed or injured in natural disasters than the general population.
- They are the first to be left behind and the last to be rescued, and their rights to protection and safety are often denied.
- Limited mobility, compromised health, reliance on equipment, and difficulty with seeing or hearing emergency bulletins can all contribute to vulnerability in emergency situations.
- They may have limited access to early warnings and lifesaving information and procedures. Assuming persons with disabilities are able to access such information, they may not be able to act on this information in times of emergency, such as independently evacuate.
- Community health and disability support providers have not been integrated into the emergency management system as a resource for community resilience.
- After the Christchurch earthquakes and aftershocks, some vision impaired adults lost a sense of independence over time. Disrupted schedules, changed terrain, damaged homes and the risks of PTSD emerged. Older vision impaired participants reported difficulties post-disaster in reduced access to medications, use of chemical toilets, hygiene in evacuation centres and well-being of Guide Dogs.
- The gaps in school disaster and EM planning for children with disabilities are wide. Children using wheelchairs, on ventilators, those who do not speak English or who are non-verbal, those with autism, blindness, hearing impairments and other disadvantages could benefit from careful planning for individualised safety plans in the event of natural or man-made disasters and emergencies.
- The risks of separation from parents and caregivers, illness, disease, malnutrition, abuse, and abandonment make careful disaster planning for disabled children crucial.
- The DIDRR, NSW guidelines identify four principles of DIDRR: (a) accessibility; (b) participation; (c) collaboration; and (d) non-discrimination. The DIDRR framework presented in the guidelines offers actionable tools for local emergency managers to apply DIDRR principles in their practice.

#### *Indigenous knowledge and practices*

- There are complex systems of accountability and care that support disaster resilience in Aboriginal communities in the greater Darwin region.
- Narratives of previous cyclones keep alive strategies for caring for friends and family. Such strategies include ensuring sound knowledge of all services – including Police, Local Indigenous Night Patrols, and other EM services.
- Networks of communication are central to disaster planning and response, as is knowledge of safe sites, both formal and informal, and shelters preferred by particular clan groups.
- The extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is drawn upon by the EM sector across Australia is unclear, however there is considerable interest in the collaborative development of disaster management strategies by many Indigenous groups.
- In New Zealand, a recent review recommended that clearer arrangements with iwi (the largest social units in Māori society) are required in protocols, coordination and planning structures.

## Online tools

A key area of interest for increasing disaster resilience across all communities is knowledge and information transmission, including the use of online tools. A range of resources will be showcased that addresses, e.g. person-centred planning to include people with disabilities and chronic health conditions; the critical success factors and challenges for community-based initiatives; and embracing diversity and inclusion in EM through various communication platforms.

## Conclusion

This Issues Paper outlines identified needs and vulnerabilities in times of disaster. Equally, it recognises the strengths and capabilities of excluded communities, and the reality that the contributions they can make may be overlooked. At the forefront of the conference is a shared aim to assist the emergency management sector in achieving its goal of better reflecting and connecting with the community it serves (EMV, 2016). Achievement of this aim will lead to inclusion of the needs and contributions of diverse groups into disaster planning, response and recovery – within resource limitations.

“The need for effective disaster risk management is greater than ever and demands a change in the way we work. As agreed in the *Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction 2015-2030*, we must go beyond preparedness and response, so that people do not remain in a vicious cycle of poverty and disaster. We must be inclusive and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable. We must empower communities to plan and drive change, and reinforce governments’ responsibility to provide their people with a protective and enabling environment. (Turnbull & Moriniere, 2017, p. 3)

