



Building resilient communities



Working with the community sector
to enhance emergency management





About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups, and individuals interested in social policy. In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in policy debates and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

VCOSS recognises the traditional owners of country and pays its respects to Elders past and present.

This report was prepared by VCOSS Policy Advisor Bridget Tehan.

Authorised by: Emma King, Chief Executive Officer © Copyright 2017

Victorian Council of Social Service Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000 p. +61 3 9235 1000

For enquiries: Llewellyn Reynders, Policy Manager e. llewellyn.reynders@vcoss.org.au

Design by: ThinkLab Advertising www.thinklabadvertising.com

ISBN 978-0-949748-96-6

Photo: d-olwen-dee/CC



Contents

Executive summary	3
Background	4
Social networks are key to disaster resilience	5
Building resilience through the community sector	6
Building resilience every day	6
Bringing unique skills to resilience building	6
Embedding in local communities	8
Prioritising vulnerable and disadvantaged people	9
Playing crucial roles in emergencies	9
Sharing responsibility with the community sector	12
Working together	12
Sharing responsibility	13
Developing shared processes and practices	14
Conclusion	17
Appendix 1: Community sector roles in emergencies	18



"...in every country town in Victoria there are pre-existing community service organisations looking for opportunities to serve their community... if appropriately engaged, (they) would be a powerful force in building this community resilience. We need to facilitate the education of communities so we can empower them. We need to work in conjunction with them, rather than directing them when disasters strike. We need to encourage communities to discover their own learning about resilience in preparation for natural disasters."

FORMER VICTORIAN POLICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEADER NEIL COMRIE¹

Photo: robdownunder/CC

¹Comrie N, Risk Responses, 'Emergency Management and community resilience in the aftermath of the recent Victorian natural disasters', in *Future-Proofing the State, Managing risks, responding to crises and building resilience* (Boston J et al, Eds), Australian National University Press, 2014.



Executive summary

Resilience is the basis of modern emergency management policy. It is recognised as being a major protective factor, for both individuals and communities.

The emergency management sector is increasingly looking to foster community resilience as a way of helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters and emergency events.

Building individual and community resilience has been the core focus of the community sector for decades.

Community sector organisations are embedded in their local communities, build and maintain social connections and networks, and develop the strengths of people and families, all of which contribute to day to day resilience.

And they are ready to do more.

Working with the community sector will bring:

- experience in building resilience
- existing networks and connections
- significant levels of community trust and legitimacy
- community engagement and strengths-based approaches
- unique assets, resources and skills
- a deep understanding of local communities
- a focus on people who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged
- the willingness to contribute to disaster resilience.

By leveraging the resources, knowledge and skills of community organisations, the emergency management sector can significantly enhance Victorian communities' resilience before emergencies and disasters strike.



Photo: Sascha Grant/CC

Background

The term 'resilience' was first used in psychology to describe the ability to cope with or 'bounce back' from adversity and trauma.

It has been the core focus of the community sector for decades, seen as a major protective factor for both individuals and communities in times of personal and external stress and trauma.

Resilience is now increasingly the basis for disaster policy within emergency management. Evidence from multiple disasters and emergencies around the world, including Victoria's 2009 bushfires, has shown resilient communities are able to bounce back from uncertainty, surprise, change and disaster. They are able to draw on their strengths, connections and resources to transform

and respond to change and crisis in an adaptive way. Resilient communities also have the potential to learn from experience and improve over time.²

International and local experience has also produced a shift worldwide to 'shared responsibility' in emergency management, placing an emphasis on integrating different service sectors and encouraging connection and collaborations between emergency services, volunteers, business, community service organisations and all levels of government.

To better build resilience and collaborate across sectors, the role community service organisations and the broader community sector play in disasters and emergencies in preparation, response and recovery must be embraced.

This report outlines the specialist roles and skills community sector organisations bring to building resilience, and how they can be regarded as essential partners in building disaster resilience and managing emergencies.

Community organisations have knowledge and skills that are vital during disasters, crucial in their aftermath, and essential to building community resilience, particularly for people and communities who are vulnerable or face disadvantage.



Photo: Simon Bennett/CC



Photo: Takver/CC

²Price-Robertson R & Knight K, *Natural disasters and community resilience – a framework for support*, Australian Institute for Family Studies, 2012



Social networks are key to disaster resilience

KEY FINDINGS

- Community organisations are crucial to maintaining and building social connections and networks
- Social connections and networks increase resilience and promote recovery

Community organisations are crucial to maintaining and building the vital social connections and networks that enable people to cope with and adapt to change.

The ability to function well under stress, successfully adapt to change, be self-reliant, and have support systems are key to resilience. Networks of personal, family and community relationships are also considered crucial in helping people survive a disaster and recover in the long term.^{3,4}

Community organisations provide opportunities for people to meet, to develop a sense of belonging, and to create a sense of purpose. They encourage significant levels of volunteering, benefiting both the volunteers and the communities with whom they work in helping to build networks and friendships for people who may be at risk of social exclusion.

Through formal and informal engagement with clients, families and the broader community, community organisations provide a space for people to join together as service users, peer workers, volunteers and employees. They are the 'social glue' that brings people together from different backgrounds and walks of life into a wide range of programs, services, policy development and advocacy.

Emergency Management Victoria's resilience strategy⁵ is based on tailoring programs to a community's unique networks, connections and structures. It involves building the strength and sustainability of a community's infrastructure and institutions, and links between people, services, systems and structures. Community organisations are central to a community's networks.

Recent experiences in Victoria, including the 2009 bushfires, show that residents with strong and established local networks are more likely to be involved in emergency planning and preparation.

In addition, involvement in local community groups and organisations is associated with more positive outcomes in terms of mental health and wellbeing during the recovery period.⁶

People who have lived locally for 20 years or more are more likely to be involved in their community and community organisations, and to feel their community is close.^{7,8} In contrast, people who are new to an area, or on the margins of society, may feel isolated and unable to access the support social capital can bring.⁹

³Australian Red Cross, *Relationships matter: the application of social capital to disaster resilience National Disaster Resilience Roundtable Report*, Melbourne 2012.

⁴Council of Australian Governments, *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, COAG Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, 2011.

⁵Emergency Management Victoria, *A modern emergency management system for Victoria*, EMV, Melbourne, 2015.

⁶Gibbs L, et al. *Beyond Bushfires: Community Resilience and Recovery Final Report*, University of Melbourne, Victoria, 2016.

⁷Inspector General of Emergency Management, *Review of community recovery following the 2013–14 Victorian bushfires*, EMV, Melbourne, 2016.

⁸Every Dr D et al, *Capturing community experiences in the 2015 Sampson Flat fire: Report for the South Australia Country Fire Service*, BNHCRC, 2016.

⁹Australian Red Cross, *Relationships matter: the application of social capital to disaster resilience National Disaster Resilience Roundtable Report*, Melbourne, 2012.



Building resilience through the community sector

KEY POINTS

Community organisations:

- Contribute to the ability of individuals and their families to cope with change, stress and shock
- Understand the diversity, needs, strengths and vulnerabilities of their communities
- Have the capacity to empower the community and encourage community engagement
- Are embedded and at the centre of their communities
- Support and have a duty of care for disadvantaged and vulnerable people
- Play crucial roles in emergencies, particularly during recovery.

Building resilience every day

Community sector organisations work with individuals and families to cope with change, stress and shock. They bring significant local knowledge, experience and connections to their work.

Using a strengths-based approach, they reinforce the qualities and skills that individuals and families have to cope or manage daily stress and to navigate through different life situations.

They help to build strong, cohesive communities where people are able to connect and support each other on a day to day basis as well as in times of crisis.

Through their range of services and programs, volunteer and peer workforce models and advocacy, community organisations encourage meaningful community involvement and promote a greater sense of social responsibility.

Community organisations help to build local capacity through their established links in the community, high levels of trust, and range of skills in working with people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

Research and experience clearly show the long-term impacts of disasters are minimised by strengthening local capacity and capability, placing a greater emphasis on community engagement, and ensuring a better understanding of the diversity, needs, strengths and vulnerabilities within communities.¹⁰

Community organisations have well established links and have developed trust with communities and individuals. They generally have long experience working with vulnerable people, who are often a focus of efforts to build resilience. Importantly, community organisations have the capacity to empower the community and encourage community engagement.¹¹

Bringing unique skills to resilience building

Community sector staff have unique skills that enable them to work closely with local communities, and particularly with people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. Staff have a range of qualifications, competencies and knowledge and are trained to be person-focused, inclusive and culturally aware.

Resiliency skills are often developed and coordinated in strong community-based organisations (CBOs), which serve as gathering places and centers of local knowledge and expertise.¹²

¹⁰Deloitte Access Economics, *The economic cost of the social impact of natural disasters*, Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities 2016.

¹¹Australian Red Cross, *Beyond the Blanket: The role of not-for-profits and non-traditional stakeholders in emergency management*, 2nd National Disaster Resilience Roundtable Report, Australian Red Cross, 2015.

¹²Cowan L, *From the edge of disaster: How activists and insiders can use the lessons of Hurricane Sandy to make the city safer*, North Star Fund, USA, 2014.

Community sector staff who help people in times of crisis through casework, counselling, advocacy, community engagement and/or community development have been recognised as the professionals “best prepared to deal with complex situations resulting from an emergency, due to their unique roles and extended networks in communities.”¹³ The practical and crisis-oriented services provided by staff in emergencies include:

- access to food, shelter and clothing
- organisation of donation activities
- psychological, social and emotional visits and support for individuals and families
- counselling and advice for people manning help lines
- connections to resources such as financial assistance providers, emergency housing and other special programs
- support for families looking for missing relatives
- assistance in mediation of family disputes, emergency settlement, and investigating disaster information
- grief counselling and post-disaster support
- links to resources and support for physical and mental health problems and family breakdown
- intervening and long-term advocacy in service delivery systems
- community development.¹⁴

Community organisations can also provide advocacy, social policy, community development and risk management integration.

¹³ Pyles L, ‘Community organizing for post-disaster social development: Locating social work’, *International Social Work* 50; 321, 2007.

¹⁴ Cooper L & Briggs L, ‘Do we need specific disaster management education for social work?’ *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Volume 29, No. 4, October 2014.

¹⁵ Chandra A & Acosta J, *The role of nongovernmental organizations in long-term human recovery after disaster: Reflections from Louisiana four years after Hurricane Katrina*, RAND Gulf States Policy Institute, California, 2009.4.

¹⁶ Emergency Management Australia, *Community development in recovery from disaster*, Australian Emergency Manual Series Part III – Emergency Management Practice Volume 3 Guide 13, Commonwealth of Australia, 2003.

Non-government organisations in recovery

Human recovery happens at the individual and community levels; for individuals to recover, the community supporting them must be rebuilt and operating.

.... During short- and long-term recovery efforts, NGOs facilitate disaster recovery and are uniquely positioned to advocate for changes that may improve the resilience of communities to withstand future disasters.

For example, NGOs can strengthen social networks by enhancing connections between residents and community organizations... NGOs are critical partners because their organizational networks are key to rapidly mobilizing immediate and long-term support services for communities affected by disaster.

Given that NGOs are permanent fixtures in the community, they can also work on an ongoing basis to increase population resilience by developing economic resources, reducing risk, ameliorating resource inequities, and attending to areas of social vulnerability.

NGOs’ role in the human service delivery system also positions them to support individuals with acute needs who are affected by disaster as well as those who require sustained human services support prior to and after a disaster.¹⁵

The community sector’s commitment to people-centred support and services, social justice, the needs and rights of people, as well as a duty of care, align closely with Australia’s *Community Development Principles for Disaster Recovery* which state that successful activities in the disaster recovery context are those in which the following key areas are addressed:

- sustainability
- social justice
- economy/environment
- equity.¹⁶



Embedding in local communities

Community organisations are embedded within the communities they support and comprise a critical component of our social infrastructure, particularly for people who face disadvantage.

Extending the reach of emergency management

Relationships with human service agencies allow emergency management bodies to extend their reach to individuals whose unique disaster related needs might otherwise be neglected in response efforts ... service providers are a critical resource particularly when emergency management personnel are overwhelmed by the needs of the entire community.¹⁷

Community organisations are the major provider of services that most people rely on at some point in their lives, are often at the centre of communities, and deliver a wide range of services at a local level. In particular, community organisations:

- serve and know the most vulnerable and at-risk residents in their area
- know their local community intimately and have unique penetration into and engagement with their communities

- know their clients and their families well, including unique risks and vulnerabilities
- have regular contact with and up-to-date information about their clients
- are charged with acting in their clients' best interests and are perceived as 'trusted sources' by their community
- have the connections and trust within their community to undertake formal and informal needs analyses, monitor trends, and 'take the temperature' of their community
- have specific expertise in outreach, information referral, crisis management, volunteer management and special services
- are trained in language and cultural sensitivity skills and for working with people who have disabilities or other particular needs.

Much of the work of community organisations is focused on prevention and early intervention at a local level through a range of programs and services, including community and supported playgroups, early childhood intervention services, community health, youth support and neighbourhood houses. They each work to reduce the risk of harm and improve resilience among people facing disadvantage, particularly among children and young people.

There when needed: Victoria's responsive community organisations

In the immediate aftermath of the 2009 bushfires, community sector organisations mobilised, and were relied upon to an extent never before seen. Organisations not only assisted with urgent and immediate bushfire aid but remained involved with bushfire affected communities as they faced the significant challenges involved with recovering from such a major event. Community sector organisations were acknowledged as being flexible and creative in their response:

Some had to put aside their own operations to assist, while others had to add dealing with bushfire relief to responsibilities already stretched by limited resources. And in many cases, community sector volunteers and staff, having lost their own relatives, friends or homes, rallied to assist those around them.¹⁸

¹⁷ National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, *Integrating homeless service providers and clients in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery*, Issue Brief, USA, 2014

¹⁸ Office for the Community Sector, *There when needed: Victoria's responsive community organisations*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria, 2010.

Prioritising vulnerable and disadvantaged people

The community sector's role in supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable people is particularly crucial. Research shows that people who depend on services prior to an emergency event continue to need those services after the event and often have increased needs.

People in the greatest need of support are also often the most marginalised and disengaged from society. They may often be reluctant to engage with government systems and face many barriers to getting help. Community organisations already hold a position of trust and legitimacy in communities.

Often, relationships have been developed and nurtured over years, or even generations, and community organisations are able to reach people who might otherwise be socially excluded and isolated. They create an environment where marginalised people are respected and valued, and more likely to return for support. While these long-term relationships benefit the community at large, it is people facing disadvantage and vulnerability who benefit most.

Prioritising those who already face crisis

Disaster preparedness and resilience is not a priority for people who deal daily with problems such as poverty, crime, violence, serious illness, or unemployment..... Effective private-public collaboration empowers all segments of the population to take part in decision-making processes, a powerful incentive to those who are or feel disenfranchised.¹⁹

Playing crucial roles in emergencies

Community sector organisations play significant roles in supporting people and communities in the event of an emergency or disaster. They are frequently among the first responders to an emergency, and are often on the frontline, providing resources, support and triage services to people in the immediate aftermath. Many community organisations become informal relief centres and their staff are called upon to provide assistance at formal relief and recovery centres. As well as supporting individuals and communities, organisations support rebuilding efforts, environmental recovery, fundraising and donations.²⁰

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience acknowledges non-government and community organisations as being at the forefront of strengthening disaster resilience in Australia. It states:

Effective partnerships across all areas of society are critical to enhancing disaster resilience. Many not-for-profit organisations have experience and expertise in areas including community engagement and education, and various facets of service provision. Importantly, their existing networks and structures reach far into communities, and can effect real change.²¹

The impacts of disaster are significant, complex and often long-term. The services provided by community organisations are crucial following an emergency or disaster, supporting people as they deal with losses relating to their family, property, business, community, and physical environment.

The estimated social cost of disasters are larger than the financial costs,²² with increases in mental health issues, alcohol misuse, family violence, chronic disease and unemployment. The role of community organisations in minimising social impacts and providing support to people and communities is critical to successful recovery.

¹⁹ National Research Council of the National Academies, *Building Community Disaster Resilience Through Private-Public Collaboration*, The National Academies Press, Washington, D.C., 2011.

²⁰ Australian Red Cross, *Beyond the Blanket: The role of not-for-profits and non-traditional stakeholders in emergency management*, 2nd National Disaster Resilience Roundtable Report, Australian Red Cross, 2015.

²¹ Council of Australian Governments, *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, COAG Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, 2011.

²² Ibid



Community organisations are in unique positions to monitor and support the needs of existing clients as well as new clients who may have never previously sought assistance. Their support can be needed for events not immediately related to the disaster, such as relationship breakdown, bereavement or job loss, which can compound the grief and trauma of the disaster.

The need for social support services – including counselling and outreach services, community development, and other community supports – following large scale emergencies is well recognised. Victoria's *Psychosocial support: a framework for emergencies* was developed following the 2009 bushfires in recognition of the impact of emergencies on individual psychological and social wellbeing. It also recognised the social fabric of communities can be frayed by emergencies and stated that early intervention is essential to mitigate and reduce the likelihood of more serious and long-term damage to wellbeing.

The framework recognises that psychosocial responses should make use of and enhance existing services to ensure sustainable support for those affected. It identifies psychosocial support requirements as including:

- personal support
- psychological first aid
- emotional spiritual care

- outreach
- case support
- case management
- counselling
- mental health services
- community information sessions
- community engagement
- targeted support for:
 - children and young people
 - older people
 - men and women
 - people with a disability
 - people with a pre-existing mental health issue
 - those who are bereaved.²³

Critically, community organisations remain in communities long after the emergency event is over, providing assistance and support as people and communities navigate the recovery journey, often for months or years. Research shows the importance of strong social networks in the recovery and post-traumatic growth process, coupled with support of strong systems and resources. Involvement in local community groups and organisations is also associated with more positive outcomes.²⁴

Evaluation of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service

A significant element of the recovery process was the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service, which saw the rapid recruitment and deployment across Victoria of a large workforce from a range of community and health services, and in some areas by local government, with the skills and experience to offer effective case management to households impacted by the bushfires.

Case managers were found to have provided a skilled and appropriate service to many families and individuals, with 90 per cent of clients stating that they would definitely or probably recommend the service in a future emergency. In a survey of 510 clients, nearly half acknowledged they would have managed poorly without the case management service, and one in ten felt that they would not have been able to manage at all.²⁵

²³ Department of Human Services, *Psychosocial support: a framework for emergencies*, Victorian Government, 2014.

²⁴ Beyond Bushfires accessed at www.beyondbushfires.org.au 24 November 2016

²⁵ Urbis, *Evaluation of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service*, Melbourne, 2010.





Sharing responsibility with the community sector

KEY FINDINGS

Community organisations have:

- existing networks and structures that reach far into communities, and can effect real change
- specialist skills and assets to assist clients to better prepare for events and to respond to them after they occur
- the willingness and potential to contribute to community resilience
- resources, knowledge and skills that can be leveraged through collaboration
- significant knowledge, experience and expertise in facilitating local solutions.

Working together

Effective partnerships are critical to enhancing disaster resilience. Disaster resilience is the collective responsibility of all sectors of society, including all levels of government, business, the non-government sector and individuals.

If all these sectors work together with a united focus and a shared sense of responsibility to improve disaster resilience, they will be far more effective than the individual efforts of any one sector.

The existing networks and structures of community organisations reach far into communities, and can effect real change. With adequate resources and the right support, community organisations are willing to be better involved in emergency management. They have specialist skills and assets to assist clients to better prepare events and to respond to them after they occur. These include the ability to educate, contact, locate and evacuate vulnerable people with specialist needs; specialist skills such as case management, counselling and volunteer management; and specialist assets such as disability transport.

Community organisations have the willingness and potential to contribute to client and community resilience and to adapt their services to ensure they can continue to provide services to clients under duress. Australian research shows that of community organisations:

- over 70 per cent report they could provide community education programs to teach clients about local extreme weather risks and how to prepare for their potential impacts
- over 60 per cent report they could plan for collaborative service provision during extreme events
- over 60 per cent report they could warn their clients about a predicted extreme weather event
- approximately 40 per cent report an ability to evacuate clients from high-risk areas before a predicted extreme weather event occurred.²⁶

These responses indicate a well-adapted community services sector can play a critical role in client and community resilience.

There is increasing government acknowledgement of the community sector as essential partners in building disaster resilience and providing support during and after a disaster to promote and enact resilience. With the right support, the community sector can use its willingness, specialist skills, assets and capacity to contribute more to building the resilience and adaptive capacity of their clients and the community more broadly – not only for day-to-day resilience but for resilience to disasters and emergencies.²⁷

²⁶ Mallon K et al, *Adapting the community sector for climate extremes*, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, Gold Coast, pp. 286. 2013.

²⁷ Mallon K et al, op cit.

A community is not resilient unless all its sectors are resilient. Effective collaboration encompasses the full fabric of the community and represents all walks of life, including people of all faiths, voluntary organizations, the wealthy and the impoverished, all racial and ethnic groups regardless of citizenship, the disenfranchised, children, the elderly and the disabled. These different segments of society will have different concerns and different ways to contribute.... Recognizing the interconnected roles of the for- and non-profit sectors, government, faith-based, and community organizations in maintaining community-wide well-being is key to understanding how to protect a community and make it more resilient.²⁸

Sharing responsibility

The community sector is a critical stakeholder in shared responsibility. Community organisations are well placed to collaborate with the emergency management sector and others in the preparation and planning for emergencies as well as in relief and recovery. They are embedded within their communities, have strong local knowledge and insight, and work with many of the vulnerable or disadvantaged people the sector wishes to target.

The Victorian Floods Review found one consistent theme which emerged during community consultations was a strong desire for community involvement in all phases of emergency management. Concern was often expressed that communities had not been actively engaged in this process and invaluable local knowledge was not adequately considered. There was a prevailing sense that local communities had been disempowered by the state within the emergency management framework.

Supporting vulnerable populations

Disasters are ubiquitous, and communities require not only specific disaster plans that relate to economic recovery, but also opportunities for community participation in decision making, and thriving human services that support vulnerable populations. To consider how human services are supported or impeded in carrying out their activities, it is necessary to take stock of the wider context within which they operate.²⁹

The Floods Review also recommended that Victoria should embrace the imperative of shared responsibility by involving local communities in the development and ownership of community resilience plans based on an 'all hazards' approach and tailored for the specific needs of each community. Additionally it said local communities should be encouraged to form resilience committees to develop and administer community resilience plans.³⁰ Community organisations should be part of these efforts to ensure the whole community is represented.

Community based organisations in disasters

It was clear from the experience with (Hurricane) Sandy, as well as previous storms like Katrina, that these CBOs (community based organisations) will always play a vital role in emergencies and disaster no matter how well a municipality, a state, or the federal government has planned for a response. So we must learn from these lessons, talk about them, apply them and above all, allocate resources in a strategic way so that institutions at every level, both public and private, have what they need to respond to the plight of every person – but especially the most vulnerable.³¹

²⁸ National Research Council of the National Academies, *Building Community Disaster Resilience Through Private–Public Collaboration*, The National Academies Press, Washington, D.C., 2011.

²⁹ Van Heugten K, *Human Service Organizations in the Disaster Context*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014.

³⁰ Comrie N, *Review of the 2010–11 flood warnings & response Final Report*, Victorian Government, 2011.

³¹ Cowan L, *From the edge of disaster: How activists and insiders can use the lessons of Hurricane Sandy to make the city safer*, North Star Fund USA, 2014.



Developing shared processes and practices

'Place-based' models bring together community members, community organisations, businesses, governments and public services such as schools and health centres to work to achieve joined up outcomes, solve local problems and build on local strengths.

These models aim to empower people to develop and drive local solutions and to build stronger, more cohesive, resilient communities, where everyone has the chance to thrive, connect, fulfil their potential, and share the benefits of social and economic growth. They create linkages and connections between people and organisations that help 'join up' services and make it easier for people to access services when and where they need them.³²

Place-based models offer a concrete model for cooperation and collaboration between various sectors with a shared outcome, such as the shared responsibility and community resilience objectives of the emergency management sector.

Improved collaboration, utilising place-based or similar approaches, can help leverage the community sector's resources, knowledge, skills, and energy. The emergency management and community sectors have complementary resources and capabilities, as well as access to different parts of the community. Through improved collective efforts to identify needs and resources before a disaster occurs, communities can significantly improve their disaster resilience, particularly for those people who may be vulnerable.

Shared information at every level is a prime procedural enabler of community resilience. Organisations, services and community members need to work interactively and transparently to ensure correct information is communicated in a timely and effective manner.³³

'Whole Community' is a means by which residents, emergency management practitioners, organisational and community leaders, and government officials can collectively understand and assess the needs of their respective communities and determine the best ways to organise and strengthen their assets, capacities, and interests. The Whole Community approach explicitly identifies social and community service groups as well as other non-profit organisations as part of a community. The identified benefits of the Whole Community approach include:

- shared understanding of community needs and capabilities
- greater empowerment and integration of resources from across the community
- stronger social infrastructure
- establishment of relationships that facilitate more effective prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery activities
- increased individual and collective preparedness
- greater resiliency at both the community and national levels.³⁴

³² VCOSS, *Communities taking power: Using place-based approaches to deliver local solutions to poverty and disadvantage*, VCOSS 2016 Melbourne

³³ Price-Robertson R & Knight K, *Natural disasters and community resilience – a framework for support*, Australian Institute for Family Studies, 2012.

³⁴ FEMA, *A Whole Community approach to Emergency Management: Principles, themes, and pathways for action*, US Department of Homeland Security, USA 2011

Whole Community

The US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has identified three principles that represent the foundation for establishing a Whole Community approach to emergency management:

Understand and meet the actual needs of the whole community.

Community engagement can lead to a deeper understanding of the unique and diverse needs of a population, including its demographics, values, norms, community structures, networks, and relationships. The more we know about our communities, the better we can understand their real-life safety and sustaining needs and their motivations to participate in emergency management-related activities prior to an event.

Engage and empower all parts of the community.

Engaging the whole community and empowering local action will better position stakeholders to plan for and meet the actual needs of a community and strengthen the local capacity to deal with the consequences of all threats and hazards. This requires all members of the community to be part of the emergency management team, which should include diverse community members, social and community service groups and institutions, faith-based and disability groups, academia, professional associations, and the private and non-profit sectors, while including government agencies who may not traditionally have been directly involved in emergency management. When the community is engaged in an authentic dialogue, it becomes empowered to identify its needs and the existing resources that may be used to address them.

Strengthen what works well in communities on a daily basis.

A Whole Community approach to building community resilience requires finding ways to support and strengthen the institutions, assets, and networks that already work well in communities and are working to address issues that are important to community members on a daily basis. Existing structures and relationships that are present in the daily lives of individuals, families, businesses, and organizations before an incident occurs can be leveraged and empowered to act effectively during and after a disaster strikes.³⁵

³⁵FEMA, *A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, themes, and pathways for action*, US Department of Homeland Security, USA, 2011.



Establishing and maintaining relationships with community organisations and others well before an emergency event can help foster peer to peer relationships, build trust, and share critical information. However significant cultural change within the emergency management sector will be required to achieve true shared responsibility.

This entails sharing resources and, importantly, power. Emergency management sector leaders can lead these changes by reflecting the importance of working with community members as peers, acknowledging the skills and resources that people outside the sector can bring, and encouraging these changes within their organisations.³⁶

Properly resourcing all partners

As renewed attention is focused on the resilience of communities to withstand the next major disaster, it is critical to address the challenges faced by NGOs in supporting recovery. It is clear that NGO-government coordination is not adequate, and while there is greater acknowledgment that NGOs are essential to emergency preparedness, there are still many unanswered questions.

These include how to formalize and operationalize NGO roles and responsibilities, which NGO activities could be financed and how, and which NGO should lead efforts in a community. Moreover, articulating NGO roles in human recovery requires early planning, and this planning may have collateral benefits in enhancing the resilience of a community to withstand a disaster.³⁷

Including the community sector in shared responsibility can bring with it:

- experience in building resilience
- significant levels of trust and legitimacy
- existing networks and connections
- community engagement and strengths based approaches
- unique assets, resources and skills
- a deep understanding of local communities
- a focus on people who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged
- the willingness to contribute to disaster resilience.

³⁶ Brady K, 'The words we use and the stories we tell: the impacts language has on the actions and perceptions of emergency managers', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* Volume 30 Issue 4, 2015.

³⁷ Chandra A & Acosta J, *The role of nongovernmental organizations in long-term human recovery after disaster: Reflections from Louisiana four years after Hurricane Katrina*, RAND Gulf States Policy Institute, California, 2009.



Conclusion

The community sector's core role is building the resilience of individuals, families and communities. On a day to day basis it works to increase people's capacity to adapt and rebound from stressful life events to become stronger and more resourceful.

Through a range of prevention, early intervention, crisis support and community building activities, the sector builds individual, family and community wellbeing, strength and the ability to cope with adversity.

The shift to shared responsibility in emergency management is placing an emphasis on the integration of emergency services, volunteers, business, community organisations and all levels of government to build resilience to emergencies and disasters.

There is a clear and growing acknowledgement of the potential of the community sector as essential partners in building disaster resilience – strengthening people's and communities' capacity to cope with emergencies and disasters.

With the right acknowledgement and support, the community sector can build on its willingness, specialist skills, and capacity to increase its contribution to both emergency management and building disaster resilience.



Photo: St John of God Social Outreach/CC



Photo: Tali C./CC



Appendix 1

Community sector roles in emergencies

Sector	Services provided during and after an emergency event
Aboriginal health and support services Building cultural strengths, and social and emotional wellbeing	A range of additional culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal people impacted by an emergency including medical, social, emotional and cultural well-being services. These are often the only organisations that Aboriginal people will trust or turn to.
Advocacy services Encouraging empowerment, self-advocacy and resilience	A range of additional services to assist vulnerable or disadvantaged people impacted by an emergency with their rights and responsibilities, to help resolve problems or complaints, speak with service providers and provide referrals to other agencies as required. Advocacy services range in areas from drug and alcohol abuse and rehabilitation, child abuse, child support, child and adolescent anti-social behaviour, culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities, crisis accommodation, physical or mental disability.
Alcohol and other drugs support services	A range of counselling, intervention, liaison and other services to people with alcohol and other drug dependencies or abuse and other complex care issues. Additional support for increased demand as a result of an emergency including existing and new clients.
Carer support Building capacity to effectively and adaptively cope with pressures of caring	A range of additional support, advice and respite services for carers impacted by an emergency who may need to manage the immediate and longer term recovery needs for themselves, their families and/or the people that they care for – a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.
Child care Supporting and improving children’s social learning and development and emotional wellbeing	Additional services including psychosocial support and assistance for vulnerable and other children and their families impacted by an emergency who may be dealing with loss, trauma and recovery; organisations may be called upon to provide additional child care services as families may need time to rebuild and/or manage their recovery.
Child welfare and child services Supporting and improving outcomes for vulnerable children	Along with a duty of care to ensure vulnerable children are safe in an emergency, child welfare services also provide increased support or coordination of services to prevent child abuse and neglect, often exacerbated as a result of an emergency. Organisations ensure continuity of services to families who need help protecting and caring for their children, continue to support or arrange for out-of-home care (foster care, kinship care, or other) when children and young people cannot remain safely at home, including ensuring that their health, mental health, and educational needs are addressed. Organisations also continue to work with existing or new vulnerable children, young people, and families to achieve family reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children and youth leaving out-of-home care.

Sector	Services provided during and after an emergency event
<p>Community development Creating empowered, inclusive, resilient and better connected communities</p>	<p>Additional planning, coordination and provision of a range of activities tailored to the needs of an impacted community including support, advice, advocacy and program delivery. Organisations ensure enhanced collaboration and inclusion with impacted communities through their existing links and networks. These organisations are critical in the recovery phase following an emergency.</p>
<p>Community health services Supporting and improving health, social and emotional wellbeing</p>	<p>Often on the frontline in emergencies, community health services act as informal relief centres and offer treatment for minor and acute injuries, treatment for pre-existing chronic medical conditions, provision of primary health care and psychological first aid for new and existing clients. They also provide increased services for conditions that may be caused or exacerbated by an emergency event including a rise in chronic health issues, services for people experiencing depression, anxiety, complicated grief, substance abuse, somatic responses and PTSD. Community health services also often provide case management services and provide advice, information and referrals to allied health providers.</p>
<p>Disability services Supporting independence and active engagement in communities.</p>	<p>Enhanced communication and other services to people with disabilities and their families and/or carers including transport and evacuation services, medical and psychosocial support, and rehabilitation services. Organisations also provide support and referrals to people with disabilities and their families who may be traumatised by an emergency or who may need additional support during the recovery period.</p>
<p>Family violence and sexual assault services Protecting and supporting vulnerable women and children</p>	<p>Prioritising the safety of vulnerable women and children during an emergency event, these organisations also provide increased services for women and children as emergency events exacerbate the risk of domestic violence. Services include temporary and/or safe housing, counselling, and information on forensic and general medical processes, making complaints to police, referrals, liaison, and strategies around self-care, healing and keeping safe.</p>
<p>Early childhood services Supporting and improving social and emotional wellbeing, and learning and development</p>	<p>Additional services for vulnerable and other children and families impacted by an emergency including a range of child-specific and family psychosocial support and programs, referrals and other information and advice.</p>
<p>Child welfare and child services Supporting and improving outcomes for vulnerable children</p>	<p>Along with a duty of care to ensure vulnerable children are safe in an emergency, child welfare services also provide increased support or coordination of services to prevent child abuse and neglect, often exacerbated as a result of an emergency. Organisations ensure continuity of services to families that need help protecting and caring for their children, continue to support or arrange for out-of-home care (foster care, kinship care, or other) when children and young people cannot remain safely at home, including ensuring that their health, mental health, and educational needs are addressed. Organisations also continue to work with existing or newly vulnerable children, young people, and families to achieve family reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children and youth leaving out-of-home care.</p>
<p>Employment/training services Supporting and improving skills, knowledge, confidence and independence</p>	<p>Additional advice, information and referrals for vulnerable learners and people facing disadvantage impacted by an emergency including non-attendance at workplaces, temporary closure of places of employment or training facilities, stand downs, community service leave and/or other leave that may be required due to injury, grief, psychological impact or the need to repair, rebuild and recover from an emergency event.</p>



Community sector roles in emergencies

Sector	Services provided during and after an emergency event
<p>Emergency relief services Supporting people and families in times of personal crisis</p>	<p>Significantly increased levels of support during and after an emergency, including emergency shelter and/or housing, meals, clothes and other essential items, management of donations, fundraising and aid programs. Organisations also provide medical support, outreach, and other support services. In addition they continue to support people who use their services on a day to day basis.</p>
<p>Financial support services Supporting financial independence</p>	<p>Advice and information to people on low incomes and others impacted by an emergency for a range of issues including grants, debts, insurance, repairs or replacement of homes, tax, cost of living, unemployment, hardship policies, small business matters and other financial issues.</p>
<p>Family and relationship services Strengthening family relationships</p>	<p>Additional services including psychological first aid, screening and counselling services for disadvantaged, vulnerable and other families impacted by an emergency. Organisations also provide services for families of emergency services personnel that are impacted by an emergency. They provide additional support for families that break down following the emergency as well as support for single parents, and education and parenting support for families impacted by an emergency.</p>
<p>Health and health related services Supporting and improving health, social and emotional wellbeing</p>	<p>Immediate treatment for minor and acute injuries and treatment for pre-existing chronic medical conditions for existing and new clients. Health services also ensure the provision of adequate levels of primary health care and continuity of pharmaceutical supplies for people and communities impacted by an emergency. Organisations provide additional services for issues relating to an emergency including a rise in chronic health and psychological issues and can provide advice, information and referrals to allied health providers.</p>
<p>Housing and homelessness services Providing stable accommodation with personal support and education, training and employment opportunities Supporting people and families facing homelessness in times of personal crisis</p>	<p>Support and advice for access to temporary, emergency or other housing to people rendered homeless by an emergency. Organisations also provide information and advice on access to safe and secure housing options including social and public housing, community housing and/or affordable housing as well as emergency grants and loans. Organisations also provide crisis support for people facing homelessness and work to ensure equitable services for existing clients alongside new clients.</p>
<p>Information, advice and referral services Supporting and improving economic and social participation</p>	<p>Information about a wide range of services available to disadvantaged and vulnerable people impacted by an emergency, including new services and programs established after an emergency. Organisations assist with coordinating referrals to service providers, establishing links between people and resources in the community, monitoring client progress and maintaining relevant and accurate client records.</p>

Sector	Services provided during and after an emergency event
<p>Legal services</p> <p>Supporting legal representation</p>	<p>A range of services to people on low incomes or who face disadvantage including advice and information on emergency-related issues, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodation • Centrelink decisions • early access to superannuation • emergency and crisis assistance • employment and small business • family law • fencing • managing debt • parenting, property and child support • personal injury • replacing lost or destroyed title documents • tenancy • utilities • insurance • wills and estates.
<p>Mental health services</p> <p>Promoting mental wellbeing, and preventing, identifying, treating and managing mental ill health</p>	<p>A range of additional services for people living with a mental health illness or people living with mental ill-health impacted by an emergency including psychological triage and psychological first aid. Organisations also provide secondary assessment and referrals, crisis intervention, casualty support, and information and advocacy to people impacted by an emergency.</p>
<p>Migrant, refugee and asylum seeker services</p> <p>Supporting settlement, education, training and employment</p>	<p>A range of additional services including translation for emergency warnings, food, financial assistance, housing and other services to CALD communities. Organisations also provide support and referrals for people, many of whom have previously lived through trauma and who may be re-traumatised due to an emergency event. They also provide culturally relevant information and support during the recovery period.</p>
<p>Neighbourhood houses and learning centres</p> <p>Supporting and improving community connectedness, social, other, recreational and support activities</p>	<p>Seen as a trusted source of information for vulnerable and disadvantaged people in particular, neighbourhood houses can act as an informal or formal community hub during and after an emergency. Organisations provide information, advice and referrals on a wide range of emergency-related issues. In addition they provide enhanced social, educational, recreational and support activities to support the recovery of impacted people and communities.</p>
<p>Residential aged care and nursing homes, and other services and for the aged and elderly</p> <p>Supporting physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of older people</p>	<p>A range of additional services for vulnerable older people impacted by an emergency, including transport or evacuation services, ongoing and additional medical and psychosocial support and rehabilitation services. Organisations accommodate new clients who present as a result of injury or trauma from an emergency as well as providing home visits, outreach, meals and medical assistance.</p>
<p>Women's health services</p> <p>Supporting and improving the health and wellbeing of women, children and their families</p>	<p>Specialist support and treatment for women impacted by an emergency including infectious diseases, traumatic injuries, chronic disease exacerbations, pregnancy-related concerns or complications, and general support for newborn babies and nursing mothers. Organisations also provide support for women who are targets of gender- or family-based violence following an emergency.</p>
<p>Youth services</p> <p>Supporting and improving the health and social and emotional wellbeing of young people</p>	<p>A range of youth-specific counselling and support services to assist vulnerable young people impacted by an emergency. Organisations provide enhanced outreach, coordination and referrals, case management, life skills, mentoring, and accommodation services to young people on a longer term basis.</p>

Victorian Council
of Social Service
Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

e vcoss@vcoss.org.au
t 03 9235 1000

 @vcoss
 /VCOSS



「Building resilient
communities

