

# Resilient recovery

Submission to Emergency Management  
Victoria's discussion paper

April 2017

## 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.

This submission was prepared by Bridget Tehan with input from VCOSS members.

**Authorised by:**

Emma King, Chief Executive Officer

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Victorian Council of Social Service

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street

Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

+61 3 9235 1000

**For enquiries:**

Llewellyn Reynders, Policy Manager

Email: [llewellyn.reynders@vcoss.org.au](mailto:llewellyn.reynders@vcoss.org.au)

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

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# Introduction

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Emergency Management Victoria's *Resilient Recovery Discussion Paper*.

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. The *Resilient Recovery Discussion Paper* identifies community development principals to achieve community resilience, representing an important step.

# Summary of recommendations

## Creating resilience through community development

- Invest in community organisations to strengthen community resilience
- Invest in ongoing resilience building programs
- Use existing examples of partnerships and collaboration in the community sector in the emergency management sector

## Invest in volunteers

- Fund and adopt flexible and inclusive models of volunteering
- Provide increased funding for volunteer support

## Design evidence-based resilience building policies and programs

- Include evaluation in the resilient recovery model

# Creating resilience through community development

## Recommendations

- Invest in community organisations to strengthen community resilience
- Invest in ongoing resilience building programs
- Use existing examples of partnerships and collaboration in the community sector in the emergency management sector

Victoria is a tapestry of different communities, each with their own unique character, strengths and challenges. Taking a strengths based approach to resilience building in communities can assist the development of the recovery strategy. Resilient recovery can be achieved by working to strengthen the existing capacity of local communities through their community organisations.

Community development takes a strengths based approach so communities can identify and address their own needs. It assumes solutions stem from communities existing strengths and assets. Community development contributes to the resilience of individuals, families and communities and has been used by the community sector for decades, with much research and evidence demonstrating its success.

Resilient communities are able to cope with and manage change, stress and shock. This can include resilience to individual circumstances, such as result family breakdown, mental illness and drug or alcohol abuse, to community level events, including social unrest, unemployment or other economic challenges, through to drought, bushfire or flood.

Recovery from an emergency cannot be resilient unless the community is resilient to begin with. Resilience is best built long before an emergency event, and with a broader scope than emergency preparedness. The community sector works on a day to day basis to build personal, family and community resilience. However, community development funding erosion and the constraints placed on community services organisations over recent decades threatens to reduce community resilience. In contrast, enhanced investment in community development and community organisations will enhance and strengthen it.

### **Supporting community development<sup>1</sup>**

The social costs of natural disasters equal the more traditionally defined economic costs – and are sometimes even higher. It is clear that a greater effort should be invested in the preparedness of individuals, in particular long-term psycho-social recovery. This would include community development programs and support for areas such as health and wellbeing, employment and education.

Too often, innovative initiatives are choked by short-term funding grants or ‘pilot’ programs with no source of sustainable funding. Programs showing promise are often scaled up without reference to the different community contexts, divergent community capabilities, and the specific local conditions making programs work. Failing programs are abandoned, without interrogating their failure, or requirements for modification, re-trail and re-evaluation.

In addition, successfully proven programs, including those designed to build resilience to emergencies, are often funded as ‘pilots’, with no ongoing funding. Emergency-focused resilience programs are often led by community organisations, such as Neighbourhood Houses, community health centres or other organisations. These organisations are embedded in local communities and enjoy a high level of trust and engagement with their local communities. Their programs are successful, proven ways for community members to access information about emergency planning and preparedness, sites to access response and relief services, and longer term recovery services.

However, VCOSS members are frustrated initiatives community development initiatives receive only short-term funding. The lessons learned from these programs, the good will created and the work achieved is lost. Investing in resilience building programs on a longer term basis with recurrent funding can help build community trust, increase emergency preparedness, and build resilience.

### **Community awareness, education and engagement<sup>2</sup>**

Natural disasters have wide-ranging intangible impacts on health and wellbeing, education, community engagement and employment. It is clear that funding of disaster mitigation measures should not only focus on building physical infrastructure such as flood levees, but include funding for social and psychological measures too. This would include community awareness, education and engagement programs that enhance social capital by building social networks and connections. While these preventative measures require up-front funding, they yield a return on investment by lessening the overall impact of a natural disaster on individuals, businesses, governments and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *The economic cost of the social impact of natural disasters*, for the Australian business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

The Discussion Paper does not articulate the role the emergency management sector play in engaging emergency services and community sector organisations in valuing core community development principles and translate them into emergency management practice.

Including community in all levels of local community emergency planning will lead to more resilient recovery. For example, the needs of older people are best identified by engaging with older people and their community organisations. Similarly, the needs of young people are best identified and expressed through engaging young people themselves, along with local government youth services, School Focused Youth Services, youth mental health and homelessness services. Achieving inclusive planning means involving the community organisations, and the networks and collaborations existing between them, local governments and other stakeholders in communities. This is particularly important when considering the needs of people who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged.

VCOSS encourages the proposed resilient recovery model to consider place-based approaches to building resilience. Place-based approaches help communities deliver local solutions to local problems by bringing people, organisations, businesses, government, and public services together. Place-based approaches aim to empower people to develop and drive local solutions and 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.<sup>3</sup> They can build on existing community activities and services to connect people with their community. The most effective initiatives appear to be those with governance structures comprising community members, community organisations, business and government agencies. By using existing examples of partnerships and collaboration in the community sector, the emergency management sector build resilience before, during and after emergency events.

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<sup>3</sup> VCOSS, *Communities Taking Power*, Victorian Council of Social Service, 2016

# Invest in volunteers

## Recommendations

- Fund and adopt flexible and inclusive models of volunteering
- Provide increased funding for volunteer support

Both the emergency management and community organisations rely on volunteers. Over 1.5 million Victorians volunteer, helping to build cohesive and resilient community delivering social, health and economic benefits to volunteers as individuals, as well as to the communities their volunteer work supports.

Emergency management is shifting away from relying on traditional, structured volunteering models, to more flexible adaptive models, inclusive of newer and diverse volunteering styles.<sup>4</sup>

Volunteering is under threat with decreased funding available from all tiers of government to support volunteers and their work with local communities. Volunteering Victoria, Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Country Fire Authority and State Emergency Service have all faced significant reductions in volunteer support funding in recent years. These funding cuts directly affect emergency response, relief and recovery. Providing more ongoing funding for volunteers in the emergency management and community sectors will help organisations adapt their models of volunteering reflect new volunteering styles.

Volunteer support services promote, resource and support volunteering. They provide infrastructure in communities to lead, build capacity, recruit and retain volunteers in organisations, from human services and community society groups, to environmental, and sporting groups. However, effective, safe, productive and efficient volunteering does not “just happen” and is not free.<sup>5</sup> It requires expertise, leadership and local knowledge, as well as effective workforce management. Newer non-traditional or informal emergency volunteers prefer shorter-term, more episodic and project-based volunteering. This requires planning and coordination, pathway management and oversight. Adequate funding for volunteer support services helps build and maintain a volunteer workforce capable of responding and contributing to all phases of emergency management.

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<sup>4</sup> BNHCRC, The changing landscape of emergency volunteering in Australia, *Hazard Note Issue 27 April 2017*, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Volunteering Victoria, *State Budget 2017-18 Submission*, Volunteering Victoria 2016

# Design evidence-based resilience building policies and programs

## Recommendations

Include evaluation in the resilient recovery model

Good policy and program development flows from research and evidence, and can be people-centred and preventative-based. We can better learn from past recovery programs and projects to inform the proposed recovery model.

Existing Victorian research and evidence on recovery can help inform the proposed resilient recovery model, including Goodman and Taylor's report *Place-based and community-led specific disaster preparedness and generalisable community resilience*, and the two *Lessons Learned* reports from the Community Recovery Committees of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. Research from the Blue Mountain bushfires and research currently being undertaken in New Zealand by RMIT also provide useful insights into the successes and failures of different recovery approaches.

Including meaningful evaluation in the recovery model allows future efforts to learn from past experience. Post-disaster recovery evaluation, conducted in an agreed monitoring and reporting framework, can be conducted for disaster events. Outcomes focused evaluations can assess the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of post-disaster interventions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ryan R et al, Evaluations of post-disaster recovery: A review of practice material, *Evidence Base. Volume 2016 , Issue 4*, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, 2016

**Victorian Council of Social Service**

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street,  
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

e [vcoss@vcoss.org.au](mailto:vcoss@vcoss.org.au)

t 03 9235 1000

[www.vcoss.org.au](http://www.vcoss.org.au)

