



# Submission to the 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission

As the peak independent coordinating body of the social and community services sector, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) raises awareness of the existence, causes and effects of poverty and inequality and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. As well as promoting the wellbeing of those experiencing disadvantage and contributing to initiatives seeking to create a more just society, VCOSS provides a strong, non-political voice for the community sector.

VCOSS works together with its members on issues such as poverty and inequality and ensures that community resources and services are available and affordable. VCOSS promotes community participation as well as strengthening the value of citizenship in our community.

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission ('the Commission').

This submission presents a range of issues and recommendations identified up to this point through ongoing discussions and formal consultation with VCOSS members and community sector organisations working in bushfire affected areas. VCOSS will continue to consult with the community sector involved in bushfire recovery over the following months and will continue to provide feedback to government, and to the Commission if requested.

VCOSS consultation has included:

- a roundtable discussion on 4 March 2009 in Melbourne involving 31 representatives from organisations involved in bushfire relief and recovery;
- a roundtable discussion on 22 April 2009 in Traralgon involving ten representatives from local community service organisations involved in bushfire relief and recovery; and
- ongoing individual consultation with VCOSS members and community sector organisations.

In addition, VCOSS is represented on the following committees relating to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires:

- Victorian Bushfire Case Management Coordination Committee;
- Victorian Bushfire Psychosocial Recovery Advisory Committee; and
- State Social, Health and Community Recovery Planning Sub Committee.





# 1. Context

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires ('the bushfires') were unprecedented in their extent, intensity and impact on communities. The generosity and effort of the Victorian community, governments at all levels, business and the community sector in response to this tragedy has been momentous. However, it is widely recognised that the magnitude of these events overtook the capacity of current emergency warning and response systems. Likewise, the recovery process is of an unprecedented scale and cost.

The frequency and extremity of bushfires, as well as storms and flooding, are predicted to increase substantially over the following decades due to the impacts of climate change. As was so tragically demonstrated in the close proximity of the January 2009 heatwave and the Black Saturday fires, a hotter, drier and windier Victorian climate increases the likelihood of multiple emergencies occurring simultaneously and across larger geographic areas. Multiple events of this type have a cumulative impact on the capacity of emergency, health and community services.

The Commission therefore not only has a critical opportunity to investigate the 2009 bushfires but to also identify aspects of emergency preparation, communication and warning systems, emergency response and recovery which need to be reformed to ensure that Victoria is able to more effectively manage future emergencies in a harsher climate.

While the terms of reference for the Commission are largely focussed on the preparation for and emergency response to bushfire, psychosocial relief and recovery are also a critical responsibility of government in and following emergency events. VCOSS would encourage the Commission to consider these equally important aspects of Victoria's response to the bushfires.

Aspects of emergency psychosocial response include:

- relief and recovery centres;
- mental health and counselling;
- material aid;
- accommodation support;
- volunteers; and
- community engagement, including information provision and community involvement in recovery and rebuilding.

Community sector organisations are centrally involved in emergency relief and are critical in supporting communities in recovery. The range of community sector organisations involved in the Victorian Bushfires response and recovery include:

- aged care services;
- case work/case management;
- community groups;
- community health;
- community legal services;
- disability services;
- drug and alcohol support services;

- early childhood services;
- family support;
- financial counselling;
- housing and homelessness services;
- material aid providers;
- neighbourhood houses; and
- youth services.

## 2. Preparation

The extent and inclusiveness of emergency planning undertaken prior to the bushfires varied between municipalities. In addition, the capacity of local networks and the strength of local relationships between local government and community sector organisations in each area influenced the effectiveness of response to the bushfires. Emergency planning is critically important in strengthening the effectiveness of emergency responses. It is important to recognise however that appropriate levels of flexibility and adaptability are required to respond to the unique characteristics and challenges of each emergency event.

### 2.1 Local and regional level planning

Including relevant community sector organisations in local level emergency planning is important to ensure that coordinated responses can be implemented early in response to emergencies.

In some cases community sector organisations were not included in local planning at all and were included in local responses on an ad hoc basis after the bushfires. This reduced the effectiveness and timeliness of response. In other areas, organisations were unaware of their inclusion in local emergency plans. This was especially problematic where organisations were listed on plans for several neighbouring local government areas.

In some areas, emergency management arrangements had not been finalised and interim arrangements were in place. Lack of communication or clarity in these arrangements between the central Department of Human Services (DHS) and regional offices undermined the capacity at the local level to provide a coordinated service response.

These experiences contrasted with responses in local government areas where there were strong relationships and networks pre-existing the bushfire which provided a strong foundation for more effective response.

These issues and differences in capacity to respond point to the need for regional level coordination of emergency planning which includes social and community sector services. The Integrated Fire Management Planning Project and resulting framework aim to address a number of coordination issues across levels of government and between agencies. Given the degree of involvement of community sector organisations in response and recovery from fires, it will be important that the community sector is actively included in local and regional level planning associated with the roll out of this framework.

## **2.2 Community resilience and capacity**

Effective local relationships and networks between community services and local government are valuable for many reasons. Their enormous value in emergency situations was evident early in the response to the bushfires.

The Whittlesea Community Futures (WCF) group provides an example of the value of local networks. WCF is a network of over 40 human service organisations, community-based groups and state government departments working with the City of Whittlesea to deliver projects to increase local community capacity and resilience. Following the bushfires, the relationships and communication networks established through WCF were critical in increasing the effectiveness and coordinated use of local resources and services to best meet the needs of individuals and communities affected.

Building and maintaining networks and relationships between local government, state government departments, emergency services, community sector organisations and community-based groups is a key aspect to preparation for emergencies.

## **3. Emergency warning and evacuation**

### **3.1 Emergency warning systems**

Emergency warning systems need to communicate effectively and in a timely manner with the whole community – including people with a range of disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. VCOSS anticipates that the adequacy of the emergency warning system in the case of the bushfires will be closely examined by the Commission and expects that recommendations made will take into account the needs of vulnerable groups within the community.

Emergency warning systems need to be delivered in multiple formats to ensure that people with a range of disabilities, including hearing impairment, visual impairment and mobility difficulties, are able to make appropriate choices about evacuation.

Some people with mobility difficulties who rely on wheelchair accessible taxis as their primary mode of transport may require additional early warning in order to make timely and informed choices about evacuation. The lack of access to wheelchair accessible taxis outside central Melbourne has also been raised as a concern as this may undermine the ability of people with disabilities to safely leave their property at a time of their choosing. In some cases evacuation through informal social networks may not be an option, including due to a lack of an appropriate and accessible vehicle. Options for evacuation including using accessible vehicles, need to be available to people who have difficulties with mobility.

Currently there are inconsistent approaches at the local government level to holding information on vulnerable community members who may require additional assistance in the event of an emergency including those with disabilities and frail older people. It is hoped that the recently announced 'Seniors Register' will address some of these issues.

### **3.2 Early warning and evacuation of community services**

Early warning systems and effective emergency planning at the service level can prevent the need for high risk evacuations in emergency situations.

For example, in their role as the regulator of children's services the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) had a role in relation to service closures and evacuations. The provisions in Section 43A of the *Children's Services Act* enabled DEECD to close services in fire prone areas as the provision in the Act means that services must close if children are in immediate threat of danger. This is partly due to the difficulties in evacuating very young children who do not have high levels of mobility. Due to these provisions and preparation, DEECD was able to act promptly and alert services and families, removing the need for evacuation. It is our understanding that regulatory provisions such as this do not exist for other service types.

In emergency events of this scale the capacity of emergency services to assist in the evacuation of residents with additional needs is compromised. For example, in some high bushfire risk areas in the week following the Black Saturday fires, residential aged care facilities were informed that there was not sufficient emergency service capacity to guarantee assistance with evacuation. There is concern that where there are high concentrations of aged care facilities in high bushfire risk areas that adequate evacuation support may not be provided. Concerns were also communicated to VCOSS that private or community based residential facilities may not be included in local emergency plans. These issues need to be addressed both in terms of emergency service capacity but also communication and coordination with the aged and community care sectors.

## **4. Relief and recovery**

The scale of the bushfires necessitated the mobilisation of an unprecedented emergency response including emergency, health and community services, multiple departments of state and federal government, local government, businesses and the wider community.

Given that a coordinated response and relief effort of this scale had never been attempted or required in Victoria until this time, the response which emerged was extraordinary. However, coordination of aspects of the response and relief phases was ineffective as emergency systems designed to respond to more isolated, local level events did not provide an adequate systemic response. In addition, the scale of the devastation reduced both the capacity of local responses and the potential for local flexibility in responses.

The geographic spread of the bushfires and overwhelming community response also required more sophisticated information management systems and required state level responses to issues which have normally been managed at the local level. Improving several aspects of coordination, human resource and information management will be critical in responding to future emergencies.

## 4.1 Coordination and communication

A number of broad coordination issues have been identified from the experience of community sector organisations. These include:

- lack of communication between central government departments and regional offices;
- lack of communication with local services about the shift from relief to recovery;
- delay in state government taking over coordination in areas experiencing extreme impacts and resulting compromised capacity to lead response; and
- lack of coordination with local systems in the implementation of state government driven responses such as Community Service Hubs.

The responsive and necessary shift to state government coordination of many aspects of the relief and recovery phases following the bushfires, in some cases, reduced the flexibility, adaptability and local compatibility of responses. Variations in the level of impact, as well as differences in local agencies' capacity, geography and local culture across Victoria made a 'one size fits all' response less effective. In some instances, a 'one size fits all' model undermined the effectiveness of local responses. In general, local coordination and leadership is the most effective where this is possible. Alongside this approach, systems are required which identify when state level coordination is required, and these need to be better articulated and communicated at the local level.

The establishment of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction Authority (VBRA) has been an important step in providing a coordinated response to the bushfires. However, the functions and role of VBRA remain unclear in a number of areas, including in the area of psychosocial recovery. Coordination between VBRA and local level responses is also critical to avoid 'consultation fatigue' in affected communities.

The response to the bushfires has also seen examples of effective interdepartmental coordination and coordination with local services. For example, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) have shown considerable leadership, particularly in relation to the responses targeting children and families. Early on, DEECD recognised that children didn't need 'entertainers', rather that they would be better served by people with early childhood qualifications and skills. This saw Maternal and Child Health and early childhood workers establishing activities in relief centres and mobile kindergartens in Kinglake and Flowerdale. These services were reflective of what the community felt they required during this time and provided children with stability and a safe environment to reflect on their experiences and be supported through this period of significant trauma.

### 4.13 Communication of essential information

Information provided to affected communities and those working to support them is critical. This information needs to be clear, timely, correct and repeated to ensure that people affected by disasters are able to negotiate support systems and are empowered in their recovery.

In some instances, contact information provided for crisis counselling and other support services was incorrect. Keeping information of this type up to date is an essential part of emergency preparation.

Community sector organisations working at relief centres have suggested that where numerous services were provided in a single location, a central information point and clear signage would have assisted in directing people to appropriate services and would have reduced frustration and distress.

Central provision of resources and information on Victorian Government websites was generally effective, although in some instances was not available soon enough to meet community needs. However, it is acknowledged that some information was simply not available as responses were still under development. This reflects broader systemic capacity constraints. Targeted information, such as that provided by DHS and on DEECD websites for schools, teachers, parents and early childhood professionals, was valuable.

Communication about funding and grant opportunities for organisations working to support bushfire affected communities was not always provided in a timely way – in some instances due to failure of communication between central and regional offices of government departments. In some cases, organisations where staff were working long hours and experiencing very high levels of stress received information on available funding with less than 48 hours to respond. This is clearly counterproductive as organisations most affected and involved had least capacity to apply for funding to support this involvement.

#### **4.14 Information management systems**

Appropriate information management systems were not in place to effectively handle and coordinate registration of people affected, volunteers, donations and other support services. There is clearly a need to develop accessible centralised database systems which can be used in the event of complex emergencies.

During the relief phase, and ongoing despite the implementation of the Bushfire Case Management Service, people affected by the bushfires have had to tell and retell personal and traumatic information as well as provide identification in order to access services and supports as there is no single accessible information management system. While privacy and confidentiality are clearly critical in the handling of personal information, a permission based system with privacy provisions built in would assist in preventing duplication in service provision and would support more person centred responses.

Information management systems were also inadequate to manage other critical aspects of the bushfire relief effort including coordination of material donations and coordination of volunteers.

Initial collection and communication of information regarding volunteers by the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) was highly inadequate. Community sector organisations were provided with long lists of names and phone numbers for potential volunteers without critical information such as location of the volunteer, skills and qualifications, and valid police or working with children check. While more appropriate systems were put in place, community sector organisations reported both additional pressure in having to negotiate this unhelpful system, with a number of organisations reporting that they just had to put the list received aside as there was not the time to sift through the list in an effort to attempt to determine if any volunteers may be able to provide them with some assistance.

#### **4.15 Coordination of volunteers**

Volunteer support is a critical part of community response to emergencies and in many cases people respond to a local crisis by spontaneously volunteering and solving problems on the ground. These initial responses are vital and often faster than more systemic responses to develop. However, volunteer coordination is vital to ensure that volunteers are not put at risk and are directed to areas where they are best able to contribute. In some cases lack of volunteer coordination led to a chaotic response where volunteers were unclear of their role and duplication of efforts occurred.

In future emergencies it will be important to ensure that volunteer registration and coordination occurs in the first phase of emergency response and that data management systems are capable of being activated to usefully record offers of assistance.

## **4.2 Material donations**

The bushfires prompted an overwhelming response from the wider community including the donation of vast, and in some instances unhelpful, quantities of material goods which have proved extremely difficult to manage. This is an ongoing issue, as large quantities of goods still remain warehoused. The sheer volume of material has created storage and handling issues and diverted volunteers and community services from other important work.

In future emergency situations, there is a need to balance the generosity of responses with the reality that material donations can place a substantial burden on communities struggling to respond to crisis and trauma. The media has an important role in communicating this issue effectively.

A coordinated logistics and data management system was required to manage the storage, allocation and distribution of material donations. VCOSS understands that such a model was developed, but not funded and as such material goods continue to be distributed in an ad hoc manner.

Major material aid providers have discussed the benefits of ongoing and structured communication and engagement with government to support the continuation of coordination put in place in response to the bushfires.

Further clarification about the various roles of material aid providers in different emergency responses could be further clarified for future events.

## **4.3 Human resources**

The bushfires required an unprecedented mobilisation of staff from across local government, state government, health services, community services and community-based organisations as well as volunteers.

### **4.31 Need for appropriate skills and experience**

Staff deployed to the frontline of emergency response must have the appropriate skills, knowledge and support to undertake these roles and provide continuity of support to affected communities.

In particular, there is a strong preference for people who have local knowledge, connections and who have 'been there' through the crisis to be involved in both response and recovery phases in preference to personnel brought in from other areas. In future emergencies it is suggested that strategies be implemented which support local people and organisations to deliver support and services to affected communities with adequate backfilling of their roles and positions by staff and resources from outside the area. In addition, the community services sector has a wealth of experience in crisis support which may have been better utilised.

Rostering different staff each day for relief and recovery centres in some instances created difficulties in maintaining knowledge and service continuity.

#### **4.32 Support for staff and volunteers**

The lack of formalised, widely available debriefing and support for those responding to emergencies led to trauma for people who were ill-prepared and poorly supported to deal with the impacts of the events and stories they were witnessing.

Debriefing and support for volunteers and workers responding to the fires was largely expected to be provided at the organisational level. In some cases, internal support and debriefing procedures may be insufficient, especially where staff are affected by emergencies themselves. It is recommended that additional support be provided to enable organisations to offer specialised debriefing and support for workers and volunteers facing traumatic emergency situations. In addition, with a number of volunteers unregistered and workers from organisations unused to dealing with crisis situations and trauma, in some cases inadequate debriefing and support was provided for people providing services and support after the fires.

For example, Lifeline Gippsland provided on-site debriefing to a number of staff from government agencies and private sector organisations who would otherwise have been unable to access appropriate debriefing. This included young staff with limited experience brought in from interstate who were away from their social support systems.

## **5. Recovery**

It is important to acknowledge that communities affected by the bushfires are only in the beginning phases of recovery from these catastrophic events and that recovery is an ongoing process that will take years.

The recovery process to date has been weighted towards meeting the needs of affected individuals and households, rather than neighbourhoods or communities. While meeting individual needs is clearly a priority, working to rebuild communities and support parts of communities indirectly impacted by the fires is also critical to recovery.

### **5.1 Community involvement**

Community involvement in emergency recovery is a guiding principle in the Victorian Government's psychosocial recovery framework and has been a feature of the work undertaken by VBRA. VCOSS strongly supports this principle. In responding to emergencies on the ground it is important to acknowledge and work with existing

community networks and structures as well as those which have formed organically in response to the emergency event. In some cases concern has been raised that 'official' community involvement processes developed following the bushfires were superimposed over local processes. There is also a need to coordinate the wide variety of opportunities for community involvement to ensure that communities in recovery are not burdened by a large number of separate community meetings and activities.

## **5.2 Case Management Service**

The roll out of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service (Case Management Service) has been an important response in assisting affected individuals to negotiate complex bureaucratic processes and access support at a time of high stress. This service has been greatly appreciated by many. However at this early stage in the implementation of the Case Management Service some limitations of this model have become evident and some issues in implementation are worth recording to inform future policy in this area.

These represent initial concerns and feedback from the community sector. VCOSS will undertake further consultation with community sector organisations delivering the Case Management Service over the coming months and will continue to provide feedback on this aspect of the bushfire recovery process.

### **5.21 Program roll out, recruitment and funding**

The Victorian Government's commitment to fund the Case Management Service over two years reflects the need to provide longer term psychosocial support. Initially however, community sector organisations were directed to appoint case managers on three or six month contracts. The bushfires occurred in areas already experiencing difficulty in recruiting qualified staff. Given the impact of the bushfires on the local workforce and community this task was additionally difficult. The initial offer of three to six month contracts made staff recruitment extremely difficult. Knowing that bushfire recovery is a process of years rather than months, alternative employment contracts offering greater job security and continuity of support for communities would be more appropriate.

In addition, community sector organisations attempting to provide appropriate training for staff newly deployed to bushfire case management experienced pressure to put staff on prior to completing appropriate induction.

Community sector organisations have experienced significant financial issues due to delays in forwarding funds for services delivered, including services delivered as part of local emergency responses. This has led, in some instances, to a point where organisations have faced having to consider laying off staff due to inability to pay wages. Community sector organisations rarely have capital reserves sufficient to tide over such delays in funding. Capacity of government to transfer funds in a timely way would greatly reduce additional stress on community sector staff and resources in future emergencies.

It is appreciated that this is a new program which was developed under a great deal of pressure. It is suggested that future roll out of similar programs consider:

- strategies for preferentially employing people with local knowledge in case management role;

- appropriate and event specific induction and training for workers newly recruited to these roles;
- longer term employment contacts; and
- timely provision of funding to organisations delivering these services.

### **5.22 Barriers to accessing the service for vulnerable groups**

Self referring individualised case management is a model which is not suited to the needs of some vulnerable people within bushfire affected communities.

Feedback from HomeGround, an organisation which delivers bushfire case management services in the northern metropolitan region, has indicated that a number of highly vulnerable people unwilling to self refer for an unknown case manager are missing out on much needed support. Case managers in the field have been able to personally engage some of these individuals directly but have been told that they are not able to refer to the service and pick up these cases. Increasing alternative and more supportive pathways to access this service will be important to ensure that people do not 'fall through the cracks'.

## **5.3 Lack of assistance to increase community service capacity**

Prior to the bushfires, many areas affected were already disadvantaged by a lack of community services including services critical for community recovery such as youth services. This lack of service availability has been reflected in community concern about vulnerable groups, such as young people, following the bushfires.

While a substantial amount of resources have been directed towards the employment of case managers, there has been very limited additional investment in the human services to which they are likely to refer for example drug and alcohol, family support, family violence, youth and early childhood services in bushfire affected areas. As a consequence, local community services are struggling to meet the additional workload both from the referral of bushfire affected individuals and families and the wider community impacted indirectly (see section 5.5 below).

For example, family support services in bushfire affected areas (e.g. Lower Hume region) are reporting that approximately 30 per cent of referrals are bushfire related. However no additional funding has been provided to meet this increased demand. While community services are expanding their workload staff capacity is increasingly strained. In some areas, community services are increasingly relying of triage procedures and waiting lists to manage increased demand. There is concern that there is an increasing gap between the capacity of community services and community need for support leading to delays in receiving services. This is not sustainable and is likely to increase negative outcomes for communities already experiencing trauma.

## **5.3 Community development**

It is known from previous emergencies, including the 2006 Grampians bushfires, that timely deployment of community development workers to effected communities greatly assists community recovery and that community development personnel who are only on the ground some time after the event have much more difficulty in effectively engaging communities.

While it is encouraging that the Victorian Government provided funding for local community development workers through the Community Recovery Fund, it is disappointing that these workers were not able to be deployed in a timely way. While funding for a community development position was provided to LaTrobe Shire Council promptly following the Boolarra fires, funding for community development positions in areas affected by the subsequent fires was not available for some time. This has resulted in a situation where some areas have yet to appoint a community development officer some three months after the bushfires.

## **5.5 Effects on the wider community**

The bushfires and the mobilisation of resources required to respond have had significant impacts on Victorian communities not directly affected by the fires.

In particular, people in bushfire affected areas who did not experience direct losses or those living in communities under threat for long periods who may not be eligible for support, are still feeling significant indirect impacts of the fires. Increased rates of family violence, relationship breakdown and substance abuse in areas attempting to recover from the fires indicates that greater attention is needed to support whole communities.

Disruption to 'business as usual' in government and the community sector has created ripples of impact for vulnerable people throughout the Victorian community. It is hoped that future emergency responses which build on the knowledge gained from these bushfires will better equip Victoria to contain the impact of these emergencies.

### **5.51 Access to services**

As indicated above, community service organisations across Victoria have diverted staff and resources to respond to the fires. This has reduced the overall capacity of the sector through the relief and recovery phases of the bushfire response. In particular, prioritising of services to those directly affected by the bushfires has restricted the capacity of some community services. It is clearly important that people experiencing significant loss and trauma as a result of the bushfires receive all support they require, however it is important that one group of people in crisis is not prioritised over others also experiencing crisis. This is likely to lead to increasing impacts on the wider community disadvantaged by a reduced capacity to quickly provide necessary support.

Robust emergency response frameworks that are able to quickly direct assistance and support where required will reduce the need to draw on the wider pool of overstretched crisis response and support services, such as emergency and public housing.

### **5.52 Interruption to government business**

The mobilisation of government personnel in response to the fires has affected government business. While this has occurred across government, it is vital that essential and time critical government functions are not affected. For example, DHS have reduced staff in some areas due to the bushfire response. This is affecting the relationship between ChildFIRST Alliances and the department which in turn is impacting on effective, timely and appropriate allocation of cases from Child Protection to ChildFIRST.

## 6. Rebuilding

There is an imperative to rebuild communities devastated by the bushfires as fast as possible – yet there is an opportunity to ensure that the built environment is restored in a way which provides added benefits to affected communities through ensuring that best practice building accessibility, efficiency and safety are addressed. In the rebuilding of community services, VCOSS supports DEECD's commitment to not only rebuild the services affected by the bushfires to meet the needs identified by communities but to also reflect current policy priorities around integrated service delivery. This will ensure strong outcomes and service coordination for these communities.

VCOSS also commends the recognition of the important role that universal services, such as maternal child health, child care, kindergarten and schools, play in communities and the prioritisation of the rebuilding these in the reconstruction process.

## 6. Recommendations

VCOSS recommends that:

- the community sector is actively included in local and regional level planning associated with the roll out of integrated bushfire management;
- emergency warning systems communicate effectively and in a timely manner with the whole community – including people with a range of disabilities, a variety of community languages;
- building and maintaining networks and relationships between local government, state government departments, emergency services, community sector organisations and community-based groups is recognised as an important aspect to preparation for emergencies;
- local coordination and leadership in response to emergencies is supported where possible and systems which identify when state level coordination is required need to be better articulated and communicated at the local level;
- volunteer registration and coordination should occur in the first phase of emergency response;
- there is a need to develop accessible centralised database systems which can be used in the event of complex emergencies to register people affected, manage offers to volunteer and material donations;
- a coordinated logistics and data management system is required to manage the storage, allocation and distribution of material donations in emergencies;
- staff deployed to the frontline of emergency response must have the appropriate skills and knowledge to undertake these roles and must receive adequate debriefing and support;
- additional support be provided to enable organisations to offer specialised debriefing and support for workers and volunteers facing traumatic emergency situations;

- emergency response strategies developed which support local people and organisations to deliver support and services to affected communities with adequate backfilling of their roles and positions by staff and resources from outside the area;
- future case management services following emergencies consider:
  - strategies for preferentially employing people with local knowledge in case management role;
  - appropriate and event specific induction and training for workers newly recruited to these roles;
  - longer term employment contacts;
  - timely provision of funding to organisations delivering these services; and
  - greater flexibility in pathways for people to access the service.
- local Community development officers be appointed in communities affected by emergencies as soon as possible after the event;
- impacts on the wider community and increased demand for community services following emergencies are recognised and additional service capacity is funded where appropriate; and
- the built environment is restored in a way which provides added benefits to affected communities through ensuring that best practice accessibility and housing efficiency, as well as safety and service integration, are addressed.

## Further information

For further information or to discuss the VCOSS submission to the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, please contact:

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