

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, DISASTER RESILIENCE AND HOMELESSNESS

'A high level of community satisfaction and trust in local government means that when emergencies occur, councils are a trusted source of information and support. While this trust and connection is a strength, it also comes with an expectation that councils are ready to support communities during and after emergencies.' (LGA South Australia 2019: 9-10)

Disaster-related homelessness: an emerging area of concern

Local governments are at the coalface in terms of the impacts of climate-related disasters and other emergencies in their communities. Bushfires, floods, storms, cyclones, other extreme weather and a global pandemic have brought into sharp focus the issues of emergency management and disaster resilience for communities and governments. Recent analysis by KPMG identifies the scale and reach of disasters, estimating 18 million Australians, or around 70 per cent of the population, lived in a local government area impacted by at least one natural disaster event in 2022 (KPMG 2023).

Disasters and emergencies have come at great cost to families and communities – human, financial and otherwise. They have also come at great cost to councils as stressors on community, assets and services, council staff and other resources. Damage and destruction have led to loss of habitable accommodation within communities. Displacement of residents, coupled with rising local housing market supply pressures, have contributed to the housing and homelessness challenge communities face, including regionally.

The potential for disasters and emergencies to become 'prolonged disasters, instead of just one-off catastrophic events' presents further concern (Anglicare 2022: 1). Such reflection allows for councils to think in terms of preventative not reactive actions, including preventing new incidences of homelessness and limiting the length of homelessness.

Recent research on 'The impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery' after the 2022 Northern Rivers floods (NSW) shows many and 'overlapping challenges' for communities:

- displacement of low-income and other renters from already limited private rental stock.
- increased need for homelessness services as existing services were already operating under constraints.
- existing housing and support services for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness being 'subsumed into the flood-response evacuation and emergency housing systems put in place' (van den Nouwelant & Cibin 2022: 1).

Such challenges 'hindered the flood recovery process', reminding us that emergency planning and management efforts must understand:

- existing service sector challenges in relation to homelessness;
- the need for additional capacities to address homelessness related to emergencies; and,
- that disaster-related homelessness is a climate justice issue.

Responding to disaster-related homelessness: ideas for councils

'The impacts of climate change mean that councils will need to support communities affected by emergencies more often. It will also necessitate a stronger focus on resilience, so that communities can survive, adapt and grow through the experience of emergencies' (Whyalla City Council 2021: 10).

There are several ways local councils can ensure the safety and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness during disasters and emergencies. By working alongside state agencies with legislative responsibilities and structures for emergency management in SA*, such as the state's Control, Coordinating and Emergency Relief agencies (i.e. SA Police, the SA Housing Trust and the Department of Human Services) and non-government agencies such as the Red Cross, **councils can leverage these and other local networks and efforts to maximise reach and impact.**

Actions local councils could take include:

- identifying people experiencing or at risk of homelessness as highly vulnerable residents in disasters and emergencies and who will likely require targeted support. This includes people sleeping rough who may be less known within communities.
- maintaining information on people experiencing or at risk of homelessness (e.g. via a tool such as a By-Name List), allowing for more streamlined identification of people and their needs.
- understanding the types of hardships people are experiencing and the information and support they need in different emergencies, i.e. for crisis accommodation where there is complete loss of housing, versus the need for help navigating special emergency assistance, versus provision of motel accommodation (temporarily) where no other options exist or for public health motivations.
- prioritising connected approaches to support.
- developing plans for supporting people's needs beyond the immediate crisis, for example connections with community, services, longer-term housing.
- developing local protocols to support people sleeping rough in extreme weather events and other highly vulnerable people, e.g. providing facilities as respite from extreme weather and linking people to other supports they may need.

In all actions working with and leveraging local networks and collaborations is critical. Councils should work to have a clear and current picture of the local services ecosystem, knowing who does what, where and when. Local services are likely to already have interaction with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including case management, and can provide important information about people's needs and vulnerabilities when a disaster or emergency crisis situation arises.

Understanding strengths, gaps and capacity issues in the services landscape is important in emergency planning and responses. Stakeholder and service mapping will provide these answers.

*via the Zone Emergency Management Committees and Zone Emergency Support Teams.

Some approaches to learn from or consider

Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) is an Australian-designed tool that 'promotes collaborative action and tailored emergency preparedness planning' for disaster resilience (Collaborating 4 Inclusion 2023). Developed with and for people with disability, P-CEP enables self-assessment of a person's 'preparedness, capabilities and support needs' and a way to 'plan, together with their support network, for how they will manage those support needs in emergencies' (Styles et al. 2021: 4). Researchers worked together with **councils**, communities and people with lived experience to co-design and field-test the **P-CEP toolkit**. A case study from Mackay Regional Council (Qld) shows how the council was involved in introducing P-CEP to local service providers. P-CEP can be used by other groups. **The Homelessness & Disaster Project** is the third and most recent partnership project, including eight local government partners across Queensland. The resources developed include roles for local government:

- [P-CEP Homelessness Outreach Guide \(2023\)](#)
- [P-CEP Homelessness Outreach Learning Modules](#)
- a guide to having [Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness conversations](#)
- Webinars on how people experiencing homelessness can stay safe during disasters and videos sharing lived experiences.

Adelaide Hills Council in SA is establishing P-CEP Peer Leaders.

The South Australian based **Out of the Storm** offers another resource for councils. The program aims to enhance the wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness. It notes the importance of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness having accessible information, physical safety and their material needs met in times of disaster (Every & Richardson 2018).

South Australia's **Homelessness Winter Strategy and Winter Strategy Regional Toolkit** (SA Housing Authority 2023) and a recently announced, health-focused **mobile cooling hub** in inner Sydney (Currie et al. 2023), offer current examples of practices councils can consider (see Resources for links).

The SA Housing Trust and Department of Human Services are key contacts for councils in disaster-related responses.

'Across South Australia, councils play important and diverse roles in emergency management because of their strong relationships with communities, knowledge of local hazard, risk and the local environment, ability to mobilise local resources, and experience in mitigating, responding to and recovering from emergencies' (LGA South Australia 2019: 4).

Emerging good practice in disaster-responsive planning is **involving people with lived experience** of such events or with particular vulnerabilities or risks (including carers and health care professionals) in emergency planning processes and the design of responses.

Relevant resources (see also References)

- Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) (2023) *advance to zero*.
- AAEH (2023) *Advance to Zero Framework and Disaster Resilience – Briefing Document*.
- Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2020) *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience*.
- Collaborating 4 Inclusion (2023) *Homelessness & Disaster*.
- Currie, J., River, J. & English, T. (2023) *Australia's first mobile cooling hub is ready for searing heat this summer - and people who are homeless helped design it*, *The Conversation*, 8 December 2023.
- Emergency Management Victoria (2014) *Disaster Recovery Toolkit for Local Government*.
- Every, D. & Richardson, J. (2017) *Building the Severe Weather and Disaster Resilience of the Homeless Community*, CQUniversity and the Red Cross in collaboration with VCOSS, NCCARF and ShelterSA for the National Emergency Management Project.
- Every, D., Pedler, A. & Collyer-Braham, S. (2020) *Out of the Storm: extreme weather resilience for community homelessness*, *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 35 (1): 53-59.
- Local Government Association of South Australia and the State Recovery Office (SRO), Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (2017) *Disaster Recovery Guide for Councils*.
- South Australian Housing Authority (2023) *Homelessness Winter Strategy and Winter Strategy Regional Toolkit*.
- Villeneuve, M. (2023) *Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP): Homelessness Outreach Guide*, Centre for Disability Research and Policy, University of Sydney, NSW.

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- Anglicare Australia (2022) *Submission to the Second National Action Plan under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework*.
- Collaborating 4 Inclusion (2023) *Homelessness and Disaster Learning Module*.
- Every, D. and Richardson, J. (2018) A framework for disaster resilience education with homeless communities, *Disaster Prevent. and Mgt* 27 (2): 146-58.
- KPMG (2023) *70 percent of Australians impacted by natural disasters*, media release.
- Local Government Association of South Australia (LGASA) (2019) *Local Government Emergency Management Framework*.
- Styles, H., Villeneuve, M. & Moss, M. (2021) *Person-Centred Emergency Management Approach: A Case Study from Mackay, Queensland*, paper presented at the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference, NSW, 18-19 August 2021.
- van den Nouwelant, R. and Cibir, A. (2022) *The impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery: the 2022 Northern Rivers Floods*, City Futures Research Institute, Sydney.
- Whyalla City Council (2021) *Emergency Management Plan*.

About **Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government**

This fact sheet is one in a suite which together makes up *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government*. *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government* has been funded by the LGA South Australia as a practical resource for councils across South Australia to refer to in supporting community and council efforts to end homelessness.

The toolkit has been developed in consultation with the LGA, councils and stakeholders advancing end homelessness efforts in SA, nationally and beyond. The fact sheets synthesise what we know from the ever evolving academic and practice evidence about homelessness and how we can end it. The toolkit has been designed with both regional and metropolitan councils in mind. The fact sheets are sensitive to the different contexts in which councils operate, the ways in which homelessness presents for people and within communities and knowing that councils and communities are all at different stages in their ending homelessness journeys.

Other fact sheets in **Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government**

Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government comprises nine fact sheets that work together to provide a practical guide for councils interested in or working towards ending homelessness with their communities.

Fact sheet 1: Understanding homelessness: A guide for local government

Fact sheet 2: Ending homelessness: Why and how?

Fact sheet 3: Partnering in efforts to end homelessness: Making and having collective impact

Fact sheet 4: Ending homelessness brightspots

Fact sheet 5: Ending homelessness: Culturally safe practices

Fact sheet 6: Local governments, advocacy and ending homelessness

Fact sheet 7: Local government, disaster resilience and homelessness

Fact sheet 8: The role of local government in preventing homelessness

Fact sheet 9: An ending homelessness glossary

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