

Recent experience of governments and agencies in the aftermath of a number of large-scale disasters has encouraged the Australian government to significantly evolve and elevate recovery to a core function that involves all agencies in the emergency management sector, and as a consequence invest more research and funds.

The former Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI) defines recovery as:

“the coordinated process of supporting affected communities in the reconstruction of the built environment and the restoration of emotional, social, economic, built and natural environment wellbeing. Recovery is more than simply the replacement of what has been destroyed and the rehabilitation of those affected. It is a complex social and developmental process. Recovery provides an opportunity to improve aspects beyond previous conditions by enhancing social infrastructure, natural and built environments, and economies.

The manner in which recovery processes are undertaken is critical to their success. Recovery is best achieved when the affected community is able to exercise a high degree of self-determination. Well-designed communication plans are also critical to the success of an affected community's self-determination.”

While recovery is less mature in terms of research and practice than other areas of emergency management, it is just as important that recovery policy and practice is based on robust evidence. Yet governments, jurisdictions and organisations still do not fully understand:

- the long-term impacts of disasters on individuals and communities
- community led recovery, including the enablers, barriers and strengths and limitations
- the recovery workforce
- the cumulative impacts of disasters on communities
- resilience and vulnerability.

Further research in these areas will develop a robust evidence base to support government and agencies develop sound recovery policy and programs.

Throughout 2015-2017, emergency service agencies around Australia participated in workshops hosted by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC to consider the major issues in natural hazards emergency management.

This publication on recovery summarises the outcomes of one of these workshops and poses questions as a guide for a national research agenda in natural hazard emergency management.

Research has demonstrated that the impacts of recovery are often intangible. Social structures such as faith groups, educational facilities, networks and relationships, childcare, service groups, Rotary and Lions groups, non-government organisations, neighbourhood centres and health facilities can all be disrupted in the short term. But what are the long term impacts? What are the long term impacts of service interruption on this scale?

The lack of evidence on the long- term impacts of disaster for individuals and communities and the different stages/ phases of recovery makes it difficult for agencies and governments to develop robust recovery policy and programs.

- **What are the long term impacts of disasters for individuals and communities? How do they differ from one another?**
- **What are the different stages / phases of recovery over the long term? (including interest from several participants in seeing an increase in longitudinal research following Australian disaster events)**

Research is highlighting that social capital plays a major role in how people and communities recover after a disaster and social networks are the most critical indicator of how well communities respond and recover from a disaster. However, to date there is limited research specifically into community-led recovery activities and the effectiveness of community-led recovery, including barriers, strengths and limitations. Further research into this area will help establish the connection between community led recovery and community and individual recovery.

- **What are the community level impacts of disasters?**
- **What are the enablers, barriers, strengths and limitations of community led recovery?**
- **What are the governance arrangements that support effective community led recovery?**
- **How should we consider what a community is for the purposes of recovery?**



The recovery workforce consists mainly of itinerant workers from government and agencies temporarily employed to fill specific roles in recovery in response to a localised disaster. Little is known or understood about good practice in this area and what works best for agencies, governments and communities. Even less is understood about the knowledge and skills that are required for an effective recovery process.

- **Who comprises the recovery workforce (e.g. formal, informal, voluntary, paid)?**
- **What are the knowledge, skills, education and training needed for an effective recovery workforce?**
- **How can we best capture and transfer knowledge about recovery experience and lessons learned from previous events?**

It is expected that with climate change Australia will see an increased number of cumulative or multiple emergency events, such as days of heatwave followed by a bushfire. However, the experience in Australia so far has been limited in this capacity and more could be done to understand the impact of cumulative events to enable government and agencies to build policy and resilience that will prepare them to respond to these types of events.

Research has found that recovery is not about returning a post-event community into the pre-event community; it is the rehabilitation of a community to accept and transition to a new state. Disasters can impact upon all aspects of wellbeing, degrade quality of life and undermine the social quality of the community.

It is anecdotally understood that community recovery is closely linked with resilience and the strength of local networks and social cohesion. Hence there are research opportunities in the nexus between resilience, vulnerability and recovery that will provide a sound evidence base for all recovery policy and programs.

- **What are the impacts at different levels (e.g. individual, community, economy) of multiple/cumulative disaster events?**
- **What are the conditions that enhance or detract from resilience? What are the service implications of this?**
- **How can we better understand resilience and vulnerability in the context of disaster recovery?**
- **Are the concepts of resilience and vulnerability currently integrated into recovery governance? How can this be improved?**



National research priorities for natural hazards emergency management

What are the most significant natural hazard emergency management issues Australia faces over the next 10 years?

This was the question posed to emergency service agencies around Australia in a series of workshops hosted by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC from 2015-2017.

This publication is an outcome of one of these workshops and part of a broader national research agenda in natural hazards emergency management being developed by the CRC.

The workshops provided an exploration of major issues that would benefit from the support of research at a national level. There was no attempt to solve any of the issues or problems raised nor was there any discussion on the details of specific research projects. The participants discussed the issues they believed were relevant to the specific topic under discussion, the relative importance of the issues and the reasons underpinning their relative importance.

This series of publications summarises the outcomes of the workshops conducted so far – more will take place in 2017. They provide a guide for future research activities by identifying national priorities across major themes. The workshop outcomes have also influenced the evolving research agenda of the CRC.

This statement has been developed with the assistance of the Australian Red Cross which hosted a workshop with key natural hazard stakeholders in Brisbane and by video conference in all other Australian states on 13 October 2015.



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