

Recognising that a large segment of the Australian community is not active in their own preparedness for emergencies and natural disasters, the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) purposely advocates for the community to be active participants in their own resilience. This represents a major policy shift in emergency management moving from the traditional position of the emergency services serving the community, to where the community is empowered to act as its own agent in emergency management.

There are a series of community engagement activities that the emergency management sector can utilise to build community resilience. All of these activities centre on the concepts of shared responsibility and community resilience which encourages the active participation of individuals, businesses and communities in government processes and in this case emergency management and the preparedness for emergencies.

There is growing public interest in emergency management policy with governments wanting to demonstrate impact and positive outcomes for the community. There are some fundamental questions on how to demonstrate whether or not the treatments currently being used are effective, and to what extent they are effective. For example, there is strong evidence that supports traditional risk treatments such as building levees for flood protection. However, there is currently no equivalent evidence for possible benefits of shared responsibility and community resilience.

In recent years, there has been a shifting paradigm impacting on emergency management organisations. No longer are they expected to be solely 'response' focused (although this is still a primary responsibility when emergencies or disasters happen); they also carry responsibility for community engagement and information management.

To that end there needs to be a shared understanding of what emergency services are able to do so that expectations are realistic and attitudes consistent with sharing responsibility. Communities must have available to them the information and resources to share that responsibility. For that reason, considerable attention is being paid to ensuring that the community is as informed as possible and able to make appropriate choices when it comes to exposure to risk in areas susceptible to natural and other hazards.

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 community resilience summarises the outcomes of two of these workshops and poses questions as a guide for a national research agenda in natural hazard emergency management.

Better understanding of the economic costs of disasters, their risk profiles, and the risk-reducing benefits of treatments can build a more compelling case that improves the likelihood of risk treatments being resourced and implemented.

Traditionally, such treatments are considered to be physical in nature, such as the building of levees for flood protection or undertaking prescribed burning for bushfire risk mitigation. Investment in social mitigation efforts, such as the development of volunteering programs or community engagement activities, also brings significant resilience benefits during and after major events.

- **How can we quantify the long-term benefit of mitigation investments, both physical and social, across different hazards, and use these as drivers for proactive mitigation activity?**
- **How does investment in changing behaviour at different levels, including political, government agencies, business, community and individual support improving disaster resilience?**
- **How can emergency events and climate change be used as an opportunity:**
 - o to further develop and expand the emergency management narrative when there is a heightened level of interest, to government, business and community?
 - o to prepare for and mitigate against future disasters?
 - o to improve both physical infrastructure and social structures developed in the midst of recovery from natural hazard events?

Recent research into the social elements of risk is designed to better inform and establish better practice in agencies and government. However, the amount of research is so broad and deep that government and community have a difficult time making sense of all the results, recommendations and information.

Understanding social research in emergency management, what it is saying, how it can be applied, why it matters and how it fits with other research, will enable government (and agencies) to make better decisions to develop programs and policies and allocate resources. It also allows the community to learn more about risk, how it affects them and how programs can help them to better mitigate and prepare for risk.

- **What does good community engagement look like?**
 - o How do we shift the unshiftable?
 - o How do we build on existing community engagement based on original Bushfire CRC research?
- **How does the body of community engagement research fit together and how can it be made accessible to community and government?**
- **What is the evidence for risk communication for infrequent hazards and diversity of communities?**
- **What resources are required to support communicating risk, particularly to the diverse communities?**
- **How can we define the cost benefit of community engagement activities?**

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH TO MANAGING RISK

Traditional notions of risk management focus on government and emergency management agencies taking responsibility for identifying, quantifying and mitigating risks. However, those directly threatened by natural hazards have the most to lose, and hence, also the most to gain in managing risks. Communities, when provided with relevant and accessible risk information, are often in the best position to identify ways of managing those risks.

- **What can government and agencies do to enable communities to manage their own risks?**
- **How can we better develop new partnerships and leverage existing partnerships between government, business and community to engage to deliver change?**

Resilience is a central concept of the government's current policy approach to risk mitigation and emergency management in the community. The concept is attractive because in recognising the community as key owners of risk (the most exposed, with the most to lose), they are also best placed to be responsible for resilience; to understand it and how it applies to them.

There is no shared definition of resilience, it is often used differently by groups depending on their perspective and in some cases not defined at all. The NSDR does not define resilience, rather, the strategy focuses on the common characteristics of disaster resilient communities, individuals and organisations. However, in general, all agree that resilience should include something about the ability to prepare, respond, and bounce back from a disaster or emergency event. The difference in definition is really how about how this is practically applied.

Developing a deeper understanding of resilience allows the emergency management sector to get a more holistic picture in order to work more effectively to embed resilience principles until it becomes a natural part of the community and a key component of social capital. The idea is that communities will become more self-reliant, so that resilience is maintained when government and/or agencies are not present.

- **What does inherent resilience look like and how can it be measured?**
- **What levels of inherent resilience already exist in communities and how can it be nurtured?**
- **What are the most effective community engagement tools for building inherent resilience?**
- **How do complex systems interact (e.g. infrastructure, enforcement, engagement) to build community resilience?**

The emergency services have assumed the role of the interventionist taking responsibility for natural hazards such as flood, fire and earthquake for many years. In recent years the emergency services have recognised this paradigm needs to change as it takes power away from communities to be their own agents of resilience and change. This approach encourages communities and individuals to take charge of themselves, manage their own risk and establish their own priorities. It is also unsustainable given the pressures on the emergency services from growing expectations and more austere fiscal arrangements.

Shared responsibility is a key element of the current strategy towards building resilience. Shared responsibility is a relatively new policy platform and as it matures it will rely on collaboration and partnerships between the perceived binary opposites of government and community. Government and community are often in silos that do not allow the 'other' to acknowledge that all share an interest in building resilience to varying degrees. Breaking down barriers between government and community allows a collaborative approach to establishing common priorities—a springboard to building resilience and shared responsibility.

- **How can government collaborate with community to break down silos to build trust and effective partnerships?**
 - o How can government, agencies and community each separately contribute to this process?
- **What collaborations already exist between community and government and how can both parties learn from them?**
 - o What community engagement models exist for building capability and partnerships in the emergency management sector?
 - o Has community-led planning been a good model in the past?
- **How can we build community engagement capacity within and across agencies and other sectors?**



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 throughout 2016.

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 Australia and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) Community Engagement Sub-committee and the AFAC Community Engagement Technical Group, and the AFAC Community Safety Group and AFAC SES Community Safety Group. The groups hosted workshops with key natural hazard stakeholders in Canberra (10 May 2016) and Melbourne (20 April 2016).



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