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TOPICS IN THIS EDITION | COMMUNITIES | RECOVERY | RESILIENCE

HOW TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY RECOVERY AFTER DISASTERS



▲ **Above:** THIS RESEARCH SUPPORTS WELLBEING AFTER DISASTERS BY PROVIDING AN EVIDENCE-BASED FRAMEWORK OF RECOVERY CAPITALS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES. ILLUSTRATION: OSLO DAVIS.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The [Recovery capitals](#) project began in 2017 and aims to support wellbeing after disasters by providing evidence-based guidance about factors influencing the recovery process for people and communities. This research is a collaboration between the University of Melbourne, Massey University (Aotearoa New Zealand), Australian Red Cross, and other researchers, government and non-government agencies, and emergency management agencies from across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

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SUMMARY

Using an adapted version of the Community Capitals Framework, the *Recovery capitals* project promotes a multidimensional and inclusive, systemic approach to disaster recovery. The research emphasises the interactions between natural, cultural, human, social, political, built and financial capital resources (see 'What is a capital?' on page 2) in disaster recovery.

Researchers are developing a set of evidence-based resources to guide recovery workers, having launched the first guidance document in July 2020 to support current Australian recovery from the Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic – now available on the [Disaster Mental Health Hub](#).

This user-oriented project involves authentic collaboration between end-users and academics at every stage, from framework development and evidence mapping to resource design and piloting.

The resulting resources will consider people, geographies and temporality, while interweaving issues of access, equity and diversity.

WHAT IS A CAPITAL?

In the context of this research, capitals are assets or resources that can be used to generate more or new resources for the purpose of supporting wellbeing. For example, social capital refers to the connections and trust among people and groups that can be thought of as a resource at both the individual and community level.

CONTEXT

The complexity of disaster recovery processes is well established – it is multifaceted and dynamic, far from being a linear process with a single outcome. For the past decade, four recovery environments (built, social, economic and natural) have been used to recognise the multiple aspects of recovery. However, often recovery efforts remain siloed, with little attention paid to the interconnected and diverse layers which collectively contribute to the process.

In recent years, ‘capitals’ approaches have been applied to disaster recovery as part of continuing efforts to develop integrated understandings of the many factors involved, with notable attention given to social capital.

Capitals frameworks can be useful in understanding the dynamic and complex

ways in which different environments relate to each other, and which resources can be drawn upon to achieve desired outcomes.

One capitals approach that has been applied in recent years in the disaster resilience field is the Community Capitals Framework (CCF). This framework consists of seven capitals – social, cultural, natural, built, political, financial and human – which are the foundation of the current *Recovery capitals* project.

BUSHFIRE AND NATURAL HAZARDS CRC RESEARCH

This project involves working closely with end-users to improve the way that planning and decision making for disaster recovery is addressed. The research comprises three stages – firstly the establishment of the Recovery Capitals Framework, secondly the mapping of current evidence to inform the framework, and finally the development of specific resources for use by collaborative partners across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

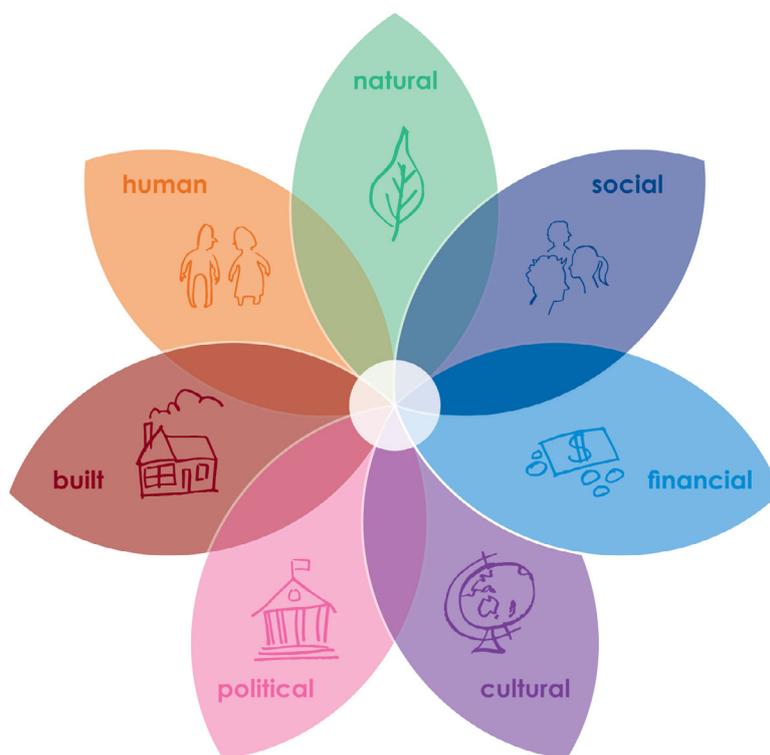
Recovery Capitals Framework

The first stage was to develop a Recovery Capitals Framework to guide the approach to gathering evidence and developing resources. Researchers used the Community Capitals Framework (see Emery and Flora,

2006) as a starting point, in recognition of its usefulness in highlighting complexity and interconnectedness in disaster recovery. The Recovery Capitals Framework comprises natural, social, financial, cultural, political, built and human capital (see Figure 1, below).

In the absence of pre-existing definitions of each of the seven capitals in disaster contexts, researchers developed new disaster-focused definitions in collaboration with end-users. The capitals were defined broadly to allow for fluidity of meanings and relationships between the different capitals, and to represent the richness and diversity of experiences amongst people and communities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Definitions of the capitals can be seen in the first Recovery Capitals resource (discussed on page 4).

While developing these definitions, researchers identified that traditional capitals approaches tend to frame production and accumulation of capital as inherently valuable, whereas the *Recovery capitals* project assumes that the value of capitals lies primarily in their usefulness to support and sustain *wellbeing* (a complex concept central to disaster recovery, as discussed by Gibbs et al., 2015). Accordingly, the Recovery Capitals project outputs not only include evidence of how each capital may influence other capitals, but also evidence of influences on wellbeing.



▲ **Figure 1:** RECOVERY CAPITALS FRAMEWORK. ALL CAPITALS WORK TOGETHER TO SUSTAIN WELLBEING AFTER A DISASTER.

Social | key considerations



'Social capital' refers to the connections, reciprocity and trust among people and groups. There are three types of social capital: **bonding** (strong ties between similar people e.g. family and friends), **bridging** (looser ties between a broader range of people, often cutting across race, gender and class) and **linking** (ties connecting people with those in power, such as decision-makers)²⁰. Social capital can be thought of as a resource at both an individual and community level.



Relocation decisions

What we know

Social networks and connection to a community can influence people's decisions about relocating or living locally after a disaster. Neighbourhoods with high levels of social capital tend to repopulate more quickly after disasters^{21,22}. Following Black Saturday, strong sense of community was a reason people chose to stay locally, while for others damaged sense of community arising from disagreements and changes to the local area led to decisions to relocate^{15,23}. After Hurricane Katrina, survivors relied on information about the plans of their neighbours, friends and store owners when deciding whether to return to New Orleans or relocate^{21,24}.

Decisions about relocation may be further complicated for Aboriginal people with connections to Country in the disaster-affected area^{2,16}. In addition to the ramifications for social, cultural and political life, these decisions are influenced by the distinctive nature of the formally recognised rights and interests held by

Aboriginal people – such as native title, which cannot be bought or sold – as compared to non-Indigenous land ownership².



Consider

- ▶ **What local groups, spaces, resources and activities help people connect with each other socially? How can these be supported? Be sure these opportunities are culturally sensitive and support marginalised groups.**
- ▶ **Facilitate ways for people to connect (e.g. through free local events) even if they are far apart (e.g. community pages on social media).**
- ▶ **Are there people who will have less opportunity to decide whether to stay or relocate than others (e.g. those in public housing or in rental homes)? Identify opportunities to help these people to connect and access support.**

▲ **Figure 2:** A SAMPLE PAGE FROM THE *GUIDE TO POST-DISASTER RECOVERY CAPITALS*, AVAILABLE AT WWW.RECOVERYCAPITALS.ORG.AU. THE GUIDE OUTLINES EACH OF THE RECOVERY CAPITALS (FOR EXAMPLE, SOCIAL CAPITAL), AND PROVIDES KNOWLEDGE AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EACH.

This process also highlighted the complexity of recovery, and the need to consider people, place and time at multiple levels. Drawing from socioecological models, the Recovery Capitals Framework (and subsequent resources) considers the wide range of types and scales of the disasters and recovery experiences for people, households and communities. It explores the role of various systems and infrastructures at the local, regional and national level. The Framework also recognises that disaster recovery happens over time, and as such the effects of each capital and the interactions between them can change. The phases of the disaster cycle (prevention, preparedness, response and recovery) are deeply intertwined, rather than linear and discrete. For example, preparedness activities can strongly influence how recovery is experienced. Further information about these considerations can be found in the first Recovery Capitals resource (discussed on page 4).

A final important consideration while developing the framework was the collective commitment to interweave issues of access, equity and diversity throughout the project

and its outputs. The *Recovery capitals* project recognises that disasters and recovery processes can exacerbate inequities, and that people and communities have complex and interrelated needs which should be understood, respected and addressed. As a collaboration across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the project includes Māori researchers, and with increasing input from Aboriginal researchers and advisors, this project continues to benefit from different perspectives based on cultural, environmental, political and societal contexts.

This has enhanced the relevance, nuance and appropriateness of the resources, particularly with respect to Indigenous peoples, while also deepening connections and understanding within and across the two countries. Through these commitments and dialogues, researchers have aspired to adapt mainstream frameworks to produce culturally relevant and inclusive guidance. For example, the Recovery Capitals resources are evidence-based, yet the available literature systematically overlooks some perspectives and experiences. The research team have developed several

strategies in response to this, including highlighting evidence gaps and developing diverse case study material to accompany summaries of peer-reviewed evidence.

Evidence mapping

With the framework established, the next stage of this research was to review the literature and map evidence against this framework. Given the enormous amount of literature relating to disaster recovery, researchers focused on relevant findings from project collaborators. This includes [Beyond Bushfires](#) study and related research conducted by the University of Melbourne, [Resilient Wellington](#) and related research conducted by Massey University, from the CRC's [Australian Disaster Resilience Index](#) and *Optimising post-disaster recovery interventions in Australia* project, and the work of social scientist Prof Daniel Aldrich (Northeastern University). In addition, using the Recovery Capitals Framework to identify key gaps in the literature, researchers specifically sought out evidence relating to important topics such as Indigenous peoples' recovery experiences.

Resource development

The final stage – the development and piloting of guidance resources – has commenced and will continue into 2021. The approach to resource development has been highly collaborative. In a *Recovery capitals* workshop in August 2019, end-users discussed the content and format of useful resources from the perspective of recovery workers. Discussions from this workshop informed a plan for a series of complementary tangible and online resources to share evidence-based findings.

End-users stated they are most likely to use resources that start with simple core messages, backed up by additional evidence and then more detailed guidance.

In keeping with the Recovery Capitals Framework, it was agreed that resources would be designed to accommodate diverse groups, community contexts and multiple hazards. End-user support and commitments of in-kind contributions to Recovery Capitals resource piloting and development have since supported additional funding for resources beyond the scope of the original project agreement. Draft versions of the pilot resource have been presented to end-users in recent months, leading to further iterations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to support end-users in recovery efforts from both the Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, the first of the Recovery Capitals resources

was released earlier than originally planned, in July 2020. The Australian pilot edition of the *Guide to Post-Disaster Recovery Capitals* is now available via the [Disaster Mental Health Hub](#). Limited numbers are also available in hard copy on request. The Guide provides visually engaging overviews, based on the evidence, of the role of each of the recovery capitals, highlighting the complex interplay between them all. It also includes prompts for those involved in disaster recovery to consider when planning practical recovery options. See an example of the Guide's pages in Figure 2, page 3.

The final project output will be a set of disaster recovery resources in different forms, enabling users to engage with the material in a variety of ways. This will include online and hard copy formats, high level key messages, evidence summaries, cases studies and podcasts. To ensure the appropriateness of the resources in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly relating to the Indigenous peoples of each country, resources are being adapted to the two countries separately, as necessary.

HOW COULD THIS RESEARCH BE USED?

Integral to this research is a new set of evidence-based resources being developed through collaboration between academics, end-users and creatives across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, which will continue to be released throughout 2021. The Recovery

Capitals resources are designed to encourage practitioners and policy makers to consider all the recovery capitals in the context of their own work, emphasising interconnectedness in order to support a shift towards more holistic approaches to recovery.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The *Recovery Capitals* project is still in progress. The first resource was released in July 2020, and is being distributed to end-users who are piloting it and providing feedback about feasibility, appropriateness and usefulness. In the meantime, development of the complete set of resources and adaptation into Aotearoa New Zealand editions continues.

FURTHER READING

Emery M & Flora C (2006) Spiraling-up: mapping community transformation with community capitals framework, *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 37(1): pp.19–35, available at <https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/rm230/costarica/Emery-Flora-2006.pdf>.

Gibbs L, Harms L, Howell-Meurs S, Block K, Lusher D, Richardson J, MacDougall C, Waters E (2015) Community wellbeing: applications for a disaster context, *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*; 30(3): pp.20–24, available at <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/1473/ajem-30-03-06.pdf>.

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Quinn P, Gibbs L, Blake D, Campbell E, Johnston D, Ireton G (2020) Guide to post-disaster recovery capitals (ReCap), Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, available at <http://www.redcross.org.au/recap>.

END-USER STATEMENT

“Recovery planning has long been based on intuitive decisions. Research undertaken over the past decade has improved our decision making, as it is now more evidence informed. Despite best efforts of recovery managers around the country, often key recovery decisions, i.e. about rebuilding or infrastructure are taken without consideration of the psychosocial or cultural dimensions. This research and the supporting resources enable us, as decision makers, programmers, and practitioners, to make decisions understanding the complexity of recovery, and to reduce the potential for downstream unintended consequences from decisions taken without the full picture.”

John Richardson, National Resilience Adviser, Australian Red Cross

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