

# Community Conversations Forum Report: Emergency Planning in Cairns

2 June 2025



**Image description:** Groups of people are sitting around tables having conversations. There is a projector screen at the front of the room with instructions on it.

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## Contact:

Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve  
[Collaborating.4Inclusion@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Collaborating.4Inclusion@sydney.edu.au)



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# 1. Introduction

The Cairns Community Conversations Forum about inclusive emergency planning was organised by and held at the Cairns Regional Council Chambers on 2 June 2025. Cairns Regional Council organised the event and Dr. Tonia Crawford of Collaborating4Inclusion facilitated the forum along with Neil James from Cairns Regional Council. The focus of the event was to bring together a diverse group of people to learn together about person-centred and organisational emergency preparedness strategies that could be implemented by both the disability and aged care services providers to positively impact the safety and wellbeing of all older people in emergencies.

Forum attendees were invited to share their perspectives on the following:

- Emergency preparedness actions that organisations (particularly aged care, disability and health service providers) can take to make sure older people, and their support needs are at the centre of emergency management planning.
- Barriers and enablers to safety for older people in disaster events.
- Ways that local communities can work together to ensure people with disability are aware, safe, and prepared for emergencies.

## 1.1 Purpose of this Report

This report summarises discussions at the Community Conversations Forum in Cairns, organised into key learnings. Local Government and community partners are invited to share this report with people who attended the forum and their networks. The key learnings of this report can be used to support inclusive emergency planning at the individual, organisational and community level. Please note that not all conversations were recorded and are therefore not included in the findings of this report.

## 2. About the Forum

The Community Conversations Forum: Emergency Planning is the first stage of the Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation Project, which is being conducted in the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Bundaberg, Cairns and Hinchinbrook Shire. In each of these locations, the project team are seeking leaders, advocates and supporters who will champion P-CEP implementation in their community.

The Community Conversations Forum in Cairns was held on 2 June with a diverse group of key stakeholders, including older people, First Peoples, people with disability or long-term conditions and the people, organisations and community groups that support them. There was a particular emphasis on aged care service providers and other relevant organisations who can contribute to building inclusive emergency planning. The forum was an opportunity to learn from others in the Cairns community about the preparedness, capabilities and support needs of older people and the emergency preparedness of organisations that support them. It was a chance to tell, show and learn about good practices being implemented across different sectors, organisations and groups. All who attended had something valuable to contribute to inclusive risk reduction in their communities and shared a desire to improve the safety and wellbeing of all older people in emergencies.

During the forum, participants were invited to identify local disaster risks and discuss their preparedness for emergency events, as individuals and as representatives from various organisations with responsibilities to the people they support and to their staff.

Two tools to enable preparedness were discussed at the forum: one designed for personal preparedness and another designed for organisational preparedness.

<b>Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness</b>	<b>Organisational Emergency Preparedness</b>
<p><b><u>Discussion:</u></b> Forum participants discussed the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Framework as a tool to build disaster resilience for people with support needs.</p>	<p><b><u>Discussion:</u></b> Forum attendees were introduced to the Organisational Emergency Preparedness (OEP) self-assessment tool to help them evaluate their service continuity readiness and accessible assets for risk reduction in emergencies.</p>
<p><b><u>Action:</u></b> Attendees were invited to register their interest to participate in the second stage of this project: undertaking the P-CEP Online Certificate Course.</p>	<p><b><u>Action:</u></b> Attendees were invited to complete the online survey in discussion with other attendees from their organisation and other local organisations.</p>
<p><b><u>Link to P-CEP Course EOI:</u></b> <a href="https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=MTW7JHWHY84MNRXK">https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=MTW7JHWHY84MNRXK</a></p>	<p><b><u>Link to OEP survey:</u></b> <a href="https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=JF8YTL4J4EFEA8DK">https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=JF8YTL4J4EFEA8DK</a></p>

## 2.1 Forum Objectives

The objectives of the forum were:

- To foster strategic partnerships between council and organisations to improve emergency management for older people.
- To promote participation in the P-CEP Online Certificate Course for capacity building.
- To introduce the requirement for organisational disaster preparedness of aged care providers as per the New Aged Care Act 2024.

## 2.2 Forum Attendees

As forum host, Cairns Regional Council worked with their established networks to invite people from three stakeholder groups:

- Aged care, disability, health, and community service providers.
- Emergency services and government staff involved in disaster management and inclusion.
- Older people and carers, including Elders and First Peoples' leaders.

A total of 35 people registered for the forum and 41 attended on the day. Among these attendees, 24 organisations were represented.

Attendees were asked to confirm their role/stakeholder group.

<b>Role of Attendee</b>	<b>Number</b>
Government Worker (Federal, State/Territory or Local)	11
Emergency Services Personnel	4
Disability, Aged Care, Health or Community Service Provider	17
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	3
Community Member	2
Other *	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

\*Other includes a worker for policy and leadership organisation for Indigenous equality, representatives from a residents' association, and a project support officer.

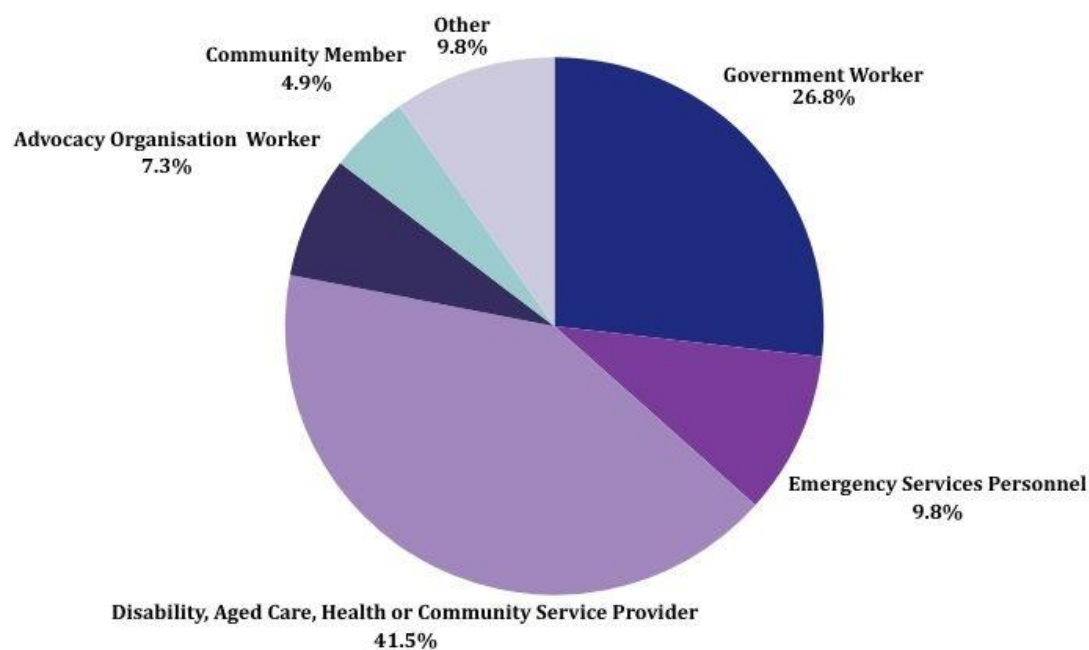


Figure 1: Distribution of stakeholder groups by percentage.

## 2.3 List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Animal Care for Seniors at Home Cairns Inc.
- 2 Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia
- 3 Australian Red Cross
- 4 Aveo Group, The Parks Retirement
- 5 Babinda Taskforce
- 6 Being Mentors, Aged/Disability Care
- 7 Cairns Regional Council, Community Development
- 8 Cairns Regional Council, Disaster Management Unit
- 9 Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership
- 10 Carinity Homecare
- 11 Centacare
- 12 Department of Communities
- 13 Douglas Shire Council
- 14 EC Care Support Services
- 15 Himalayan Community Care Services, NDIS and Aged Care Service
- 16 ILSA, Aged/Disability Care
- 17 Mulgrave Complete Care
- 18 National Emergency Management Agency
- 29 North Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN)
- 20 Queensland Police Service
- 21 Spinal Life Australia
- 22 State Emergency Services
- 23 Tropical Public Health
- 24 Yorkeys Knob Residents Association

## 3. Forum Content: Emergency Planning with Older People

### 3.1 Disproportionate Risks for Older People in Emergencies

Older people face disproportionate risks in disasters, including higher rates of injury and death. Those with overlapping vulnerabilities (e.g., older First Peoples, people with disability) are at even greater risk. The forum highlighted the need to remove systemic barriers and take an intersectional approach to inclusive disaster planning.

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### 3.2 The New Aged Care Act 2024

The forum reviewed Outcome 2.10 of the *New Aged Care Act 2024*, which mandates that aged care providers prepare for emergencies. Participants reflected on how their organisations could implement these new requirements, recognising the need for tailored support, cross-sector collaboration, and ongoing capacity building.

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### 3.3 Enabling Preparedness with P-CEP and OEP

Participants were introduced to two preparedness tools.

**1. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP):** A framework to support individuals in creating customised emergency plans.

- P-CEP is a conversation tool that facilitators can use to match emergency planning to the supports people need for their health and safety in emergencies.
- Learn more about P-CEP in this brief introduction at the Collaborating4Inclusion website: <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/pcep/pcep-tools/>
- Learn more about P-CEP implementation with these webinars and case studies: <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/pcep/pcep-implementation-revised/>

**2. Organisational Emergency Preparedness (OEP):** A self-assessment tool to evaluate and enhance organisational readiness.

- The OEP survey was designed to help organisations reflect on and document:
  - their current level of emergency preparedness
  - their organisational and resource capabilities
  - their preferred way to collaborate with government and emergency services
  - the individual and collaborative actions they can take to reduce disaster risks for people with disability and other groups with additional support needs in natural hazard emergencies.

- This information can be used to identify action-oriented steps to improve their preparedness. It also enables them to share information about their needs, capabilities and assets with partnering organisations and agencies.
- Complete the OEP survey:  
<https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=JF8YTL4J4EFEA8DK>

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### 3.4 Sharing Experiences, Learnings and Insights from Previous Disaster Events

In the second half of the forum, Neil James of Cairns Regional Council invited attendees to recall the recent impacts of Cyclone Jasper and consider how, as individuals and organisations, they are now placed to respond in the event of a similar disaster. Using this example and drawing on their personal and professional knowledge, the attendees were invited to answer a series of questions in discussion with others at their table. They were then asked to report these answers back to the larger group for discussion. Some of the questions that were answered included the following:

1. What are the biggest issues with emergency plans for people considered vulnerable?  
How can these plans be made better?
2. For people from organisations: What organizations are you closely partnered with?
  - a. Elaborate further: What makes this partnership work? What do you know about their emergency plans in a disaster like this? How would you work together?
3. What are your biggest worries for older people in a disaster?
4. What are your biggest worries for aged care organisations in a disaster?
5. For service providers: How prepared are your clients for a disaster like this?
  - a. Elaborate further: Are they aware of local hazard risks? Do they have access to emergency information and alerts? Do they have an emergency plan? Do they understand their emergency plan? Have they practiced their emergency plan? Is their emergency plan up to date?

These conversations were recorded, transcribed and analysed. This data was used to produce the following key learnings and attendee recommendations.

## 4. Key Learnings

Thematic analysis of forum discussions produced five key learnings.

### Key Learning

- 1 Older people must actively prepare for disasters, as emergency services will not always be available to assist.
- 2 Standardised resources are not sufficient to make a viable person-centred plan.
- 3 Emergency plans must consider the geography of the local area.
- 4 Stoicism and other barriers to effective planning and support in an emergency.
- 5 The role of service providers in person-centred emergency preparedness.

The following sections overview the five key learnings from the forum discussions. Quotes have been de-identified but attributed to conversations at different tables (G1—G4) and the large group discussion (LG).

### 4.1 Older people must actively prepare for disasters, as emergency services may not always be available to assist.

*Person-centred emergency preparedness builds capability so that people are less reliant on being rescued in a disaster.*

Attendees recognised the need for everyone to have a personal plan, tailored to their support needs and capabilities, to reduce their own disaster risk and reduce reliance on emergency services. They had observed that many people in the Cairns region expected emergency services to be available to assist them when they required it; however, emergency services did not “have the capacity to save everybody” (G1). This expectation gave people a false sense of security and led to complacency around emergency planning and preparedness. Attendees believed some people did not make comprehensive emergency plans or take preparedness actions for this reason.

*A lot of people in society, they default to “the emergency services will take care of this for me.” ... it's more understanding that those services will be overwhelmed immediately. [...] They need to be able to take some action themselves. (LG)*

*[T]here's a mindset, not with everybody, but in general, there's a mindset for all different types of people that the emergency services have the capacity to save everybody. So they outsource their responsibility in the hopes that someone else will pick it up for them. (G1)*

One attendee noted that, during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, many people moved to North Queensland from interstate but had limited knowledge and experience of disasters that were common in the region they had relocated to. Attendees at this table agreed that this group were particularly unprepared. They had also observed that their expectations of emergency services were unrealistic:

*We went through the new sub-divisions that were being built, as people moved up from places like Melbourne. And they were saying, “Oh, when we need help, we’ll just call triple zero.” You know, you call triple zero, but I’d suspect there’s actually no one coming for quite some time. People are not knowledgeable about the hazard itself, but actually it is that expectation [that leads to their lack of planning and preparation]. (G4)*

Reliance on emergency services put further resource strain on personnel and increased risk for both emergency services workers and people who depended on their assistance.

*I suppose the next worry that I have is that when you rescue or you aim to rescue, the risk is immediately a lot higher—not just for the elderly person, but the rescue people, you know? And that’s been clearly seen in the most recent floods where we’ve lost lives. [...] Why do we have to get to that level of, oh my goodness, now we’re going to lose lives? What could we have done beforehand? (G2)*

*In 2019, with the flooding in Townsville, there were people in boats at midnight rescuing people off their roofs. How dangerous is that? You’re putting lives at risk to reclaim lives. (G2)*

Attendees emphasised that older people should be prepared for disasters before they strike and make comprehensive plans and contingencies. Older people may require specific equipment, medication, medical care, support workers, accessible transport, accessible and/or specialised facilities, the assistance of formal and/or informal supports, and access to power. As a result, their emergency plans may be complex and require co-ordination with other people or organisations. For example, some older people are dependent on powered medical devices like oxygen concentrators or CPAP machines. Backup generators or shared infrastructure were identified as solutions when there are power outages in the area, but access to these require planning in advance.

*I need electricity to keep the chair going. I sleep with an apnoea machine, so I need a certain amount of power. Other people, they need more oxygen. (G3)*

*I’ve got an 8 kVA generator. So, the three houses down the road, as soon as the power goes off, the generator sits in the middle of us all in the centre house. (G3)*

Attendees recognised that person-centred preparedness empowered older people and increased their capability in disaster events.

## **4.2 Standardised resources are not sufficient to create a viable person-centred plan.**

*Conversations with people can support them to develop emergency plans which are tailored to their specific needs, capabilities, resources, priorities and circumstances.*

Throughout the forum, attendees noted that older people—particularly those with functional support needs and/or complex life circumstances—required more than standardised emergency resources to build comprehensive, viable plans. The attendees recognised the importance of Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) as a conversation which began

with discussions around the individual's specific support and capabilities in their daily life which then informs their planning. They identified various issues with standardised plans and emphasised the need for more personalised planning:

*The language in the plans needs to be more specific as opposed to being general because one of the things we discussed was that when people's plans alter from what they... If they had a plan and it goes a little bit awry, they're immediately off the track and they can't recover from that. (LG)*

Knowledge about local hazards and risks—from conversations and planning with people who have this expertise and experience—should be incorporated into people's emergency plans. For example, considering contingencies and having back up plans:

*So really when I look at people's plans, something that I do is I will support my community, doesn't matter who it is, I sit down with them and I say, "Hey, what's your plan look like?" "Oh well, we've got a box with some clothes, medication, whatever, from the Get Ready program. [...] And then I say to them, "So do you know where the flood maps are?" "Oh, no." So, then I discuss that with them. And then I ask them, "What happens in worst case situations? What happens if you get [...] some very diverse, very dynamic, quick changes. (G1)*

*[I]t's not just about floods, it's also about water. It's also about the waste process being compromised through the council. These are all things that an emergency plan needs to be written for. So, this is one of the things that I find, they've got the basics, because they've taken the basic one from Get Ready Queensland, but whoever's working with them hasn't expanded on it. (G1)*

Plans that consider multiple contingencies allow them to be fluid and flexible.

*The plan must be adaptable to be able to include trigger points [e.g.] So, if this occurs, this is what we will. So, it's a moving, fluid plan, rather than some of the stagnant plans that we come across where people go, "I am going to stay here because that's what my plan says, because that's what my organisation has written." (LG)*

*So, these are the broader things that I look at when I talk with communities. And I remind them as well, "What's your backup, what's your next step, what is the tenth degree of a step?" [...] Because I know from experience that these are the things that potentially have to be challenged... what happens if there's a car crash on the evacuation plan, what's your next step?" It's those things that people tend to not think about. (G1)*

Attendees recognised that effective, viable plans were the result of conversations, brainstorming and collaborating with others—rather than completing a basic checklist or a standardised resource.

### **4.3 Emergency plans must consider geography of the local area**

***Local knowledge of hazards and geography, particularly flooding cut-offs, should shape planning and preparedness.***

Forum attendees recognised that different areas of Cairns and the region as a whole could be isolated during and after a disaster and such contingencies should be considered in emergency planning. Remote areas could be “cut off for a long time” (G3), compromising access to critical supplies, such as food and medication. Attendees identified that the north and south sides of Cairns were often cut off from each other during flooding events. Support services are therefore not able to physically reach their clients to maintain service provision or provide access to necessary resources if they are sheltering in their homes, as reflected from the recent Tropical Cyclone Jasper:

*That was nature of Cairns as well because, with the cut-off, anyone on the south side, was on that side; anyone on the other side, was on the other side. And all of the services and the corporate local services are on this side. That's a geographic-specificity of the Cairns area. (G1)*

*Geographic cut-offs were not considered in support plans. (G1)*

One attendee reflected that they had not considered plans for being trapped at home and, in the event that this occurred, their clients needed to have appropriate plans:

*Actually, you just pointed out to me: in their home, what's their plan in their home, in the circumstances? Because I always thought about, “Ok, what do you do throughout a cyclone?” and you know I haven't thought about if you're trapped, what's your plan in your home? I hadn't thought about that. (G2)*

Due to the geography of Cairns and the vulnerability of change of disasters, even people who did not live in remote areas could be isolated in their homes during a disaster. One attendant gave a recent example of what had happened in Caravonica:

*Caravonica was a classic, absolutely classic example. So, you know at particular hours, the Baron River continued to increase. It went higher and higher and they had well over a thousand people in that suburb. I don't think people realised it was going to break the banks. The level of information and even access to get to all of those homes was very easy. Until it got to midnight when the banks finally did break and homes started to get inundated with water, not just to the carpets, but to the doors, from the doors, halfway up the doors, then all the way up to the ceilings in some cases. And I suppose, depending on what plan, on who lived in what house, really had to become pretty important as to who, what, where, who did we move, who did we not move. And then the following morning when we were seeing cars that weren't even driven out of driveways, they had no time. [...]*

*Vulnerability of change of the disaster is something that we can prepare to a certain extent. But we never thought that Caravonica was going to get inundated like that or Machan's Beach. And then once that road is cut, that's it. You're not coming in; you're not coming out. And they were vulnerable. And they were vulnerable to a point where everything was in place for the disabled person in the house, and the decision was hopefully made for the right reasons, but in the event that it got to extreme, then loss of life could happen. And that's very, very important that those steps are discussed in the process at the same time. So, for argument's sake, yes, you're getting heavy rain at Machan's Beach, you're getting*

*flooded, you've only got one road in. Your decision to evacuate is now, not in eight hours' time in the event. You know what I mean? That's my worry. (G2)*

Attendees recognised that warning systems were not “infallible” and there were issues with the Australian Warning System (AWS). For plans to be viable and effective, people need to understand what warning systems mean, given their particular location, its disaster history, their capabilities and their support needs. One attendee gave an example:

*That system's not for the best, but [it's important to] understand that if you get a “watch and act” what that actually means. What does it mean for me? And understanding the flood maps—I live here so “watch and act” actually means “I need to act now”. On a hill, maybe not so much. (G1)*

This example demonstrates how emergency warnings need to be considered in the context of a person’s individual circumstances—particularly location—rather than being interpreted at face-value. Similarly, “watch and act” may mean evacuation for some people with complex support needs, who may need a longer time and more co-ordination to implement action.

#### **4.4 Stoicism and other barriers to effective planning and support in an emergency.**

*Older people living in the Cairns community may be reluctant to prepare—particularly if it involves asking for support from others—for various reasons. Older people, including homeless people, who are not connected to support services may need support to make and implement effective emergency plans.*

Throughout the forum, attendees noted that older people in the Cairns region, particularly those who have lived through past disasters, held a sense of stoicism that affected their preparedness and increased their sense of complacency.

*Sometimes I talk to older people—and even people in my own family—they're like, ‘Oh, you know, we've seen plenty of disasters. They just come and we'll be fine.’ (G4)*

*We had people say ‘I've been through ten cyclones. I'll be right.’ (G1)*

They stated that this conviction may be rooted in outdated comparisons or past experiences that no longer reflect current risks, especially with changing climate patterns and new dependency on technology (e.g., mobile networks).

*When they experienced cyclones, they had landlines that worked... now with an over-reliance on mobile phones... they might not appreciate that they won't be able to do that after the storm. (G4)*

Some attendees spoke about the nature of disasters and how rapidly conditions could change.

*[People need to understand] that sense of vulnerability of change within a disaster. Because we can't always predict, of course, and there is change within*

*the extreme measures of the disaster in itself. [...] Everything that you thought was perfectly working suddenly is not working anymore. [...] Now you've got to dial triple zero, when you've got no power, it's already too late, right? (LG)*

Other attendees had observed that, for some older people, this sense of stoicism might be attributed to fear of being placed in residential care. One attendee recognised that some older people may resist help because they want to maintain their independence in their day-to-day life. He acknowledged that older people may not seek support during a disaster for fear of “what it might mean” in their life going forward.

*People don't want to be seen as vulnerable—they think, if I ask for help, that's the beginning of the end. (G2)*

A key takeaway from this learning is that disaster planning may need to be reframed for older people requiring preparedness support. Throughout the forum, preparedness—and community education about preparedness—was viewed as a strength, not a sign of weakness or dependence.

Attendees identified that many older people, people with disability and people with long-term health conditions who received services were supported under the organisational emergency plans of their providers; however, they reported that they also worried about older people who were not engaged with aged care or disability services and were not receiving formal or informal support to make and implement plans.

*Biggest worry in a disaster is for people who are living alone with no support or very little support. (G2)*

*So that was something that was discussed at length from a disaster perspective with vulnerable elderly, in particular elderly people that are not clients as well. So, they are left there on their own, in their own home, by themselves and what are the steps to fix that scenario? (LG)*

Attendees acknowledged that some people were not connected to support services because they had chosen not to engage with them.

*Speaker 3: We have a lot of fierce local people in our community that, you know, “We're fire resilient, we're fine.” And they don't always have family members around them. And it's actually the people that worries me.*

*Speaker 4: The forgotten ones. Yeah absolutely. Yeah.*

*Speaker 3: Who's keeping an eye on them? Maybe they're not having services, maybe they don't have...*

*Speaker 2: That's the problem that [name] brings up is we're only engaged with people who have services with us. We don't know and again a lot of people don't know that there are services available out to them or they haven't actually been linked with a service provider.*

Speaker 1: *Or they don't think they need them. (G2)*

Attendees were also concerned about was older people who are experiencing homelessness and not connected to services. Attendees spoke about outreach to target this group, but acknowledged this discussion required further consideration.

Speaker 1: *My question is about the older people that are homeless. My worry is that if they're homeless, how do we support them in that situation if there's a disaster? How would we engage with anything or they don't get any support from...? Do we reach out and do more awareness or like?*

Speaker2: *I think before Jasper some of the service in town went to the known areas to speak to some of the ones they knew of. But there's always going to be some people that we just don't know. (G2)*

*The other thing was there was a question that came up around how do we best support people who are living in homelessness. We didn't quite have the answer to that, did we? But it was certainly something around a concern for older people. (LG)*

**Researcher Reflection:** The research team at Collaborating4Inclusion invite attendees to explore our resources on the Homelessness and Disaster Project, which took place in Queensland communities in 2021-2023. There is a suite of resources available at our website: <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/homelessness-and-disaster/>.

This includes webinars, video-based learning modules with people with lived experience of homelessness, and the P-CEP Homelessness Outreach Guide. This can be downloaded here: <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/homelessness-and-disaster/p-cep-homelessness-outreach-guide/>

Attendees acknowledged that economic and social inequalities can limit some older people's capacity to prepare or respond to emergencies.

*If you don't have the money [...] or if you don't have a car [...] or you live in a house on a floodplain. [...] That's the inequity we're talking about. (G4)*

Attendees also noted that there were additional factors to consider for some groups living at home. For example, people living at home with dementia may require extra consideration in their planning:

Speaker 1: *We want to keep people at home longer, so that means we're going to have more of them at home, which, on a good day, if someone's got dementia, they are functioning, but if you've got them on a bad day, especially if things are changing.*

Speaker 2: *They're going to be in a stressful environment, yeah.*

Speaker 1: *It can start to affect them. They're slower, they're more confused, And then you know, the wife, so let's say her husband's got dementia, and the*

*wife is in a wheelie-walker and she's trying to walk him. There's a lot of things going on that we're struggling with.*

Speaker: *Yeah, it really adds an extra dimension that is very difficult, yeah.*  
(G1)

Understanding the complexity of people's support needs, capabilities and circumstances confirmed the need for person-centred emergency plans—and support for people to create, review and implement them. Attendees emphasised the need to treat older people with respect and agency, rather than as passive recipients of help.

*People get treated as dumb. And then we're the hero for knowing everything. But actually, they're not stupid. We need to teach them, to train them to make smart decisions. Empower them.* (G4)

## **4.5 Service providers play a critical role in maintaining the safety and wellbeing of older people in a disaster.**

*The capacity of service providers is stretched during disaster events, and they may struggle to maintain support services to their clients; as a result, person-centred preparedness and collaboration with other organisations is key.*

Service providers at the forum stated that a personalised plan was typically made with clients during intake.

*What we do is when we have any new participant come, we study all the needs of that new client, that participant, and we organize orientation for the team of support staff so that they are well-equipped what to look for when anything happens. Right from their personal needs to any disaster events.* (G3)

However, during an emergency, services may struggle to support their NDIS and MyAgedCare participants living in the community or in rural/remote areas. There are various reasons for this: road closures due to flooding, which may isolate both staff and clients; reduced capacity of services because staff are managing their personal circumstances; and loss of access to critical resources due to the Bruce Highway being cut-off. Service providers were sometimes unable to physically reach clients to support them—and had to co-ordinate with other services and organisations which had the proximity or resources to access their clients.

*I was trying to welfare check quite a number of clients in regional areas; one being in lower Daintree. And we found out that he actually lived up on a hill, because obviously lower Daintree was underwater. We couldn't get through to him, but found out that he was up on the hill. But the water was still rising to a point and he was living in a tent at that point and he's building his own home on the property. So just, in terms of him, he was on a lot of mental health medications and things like that, which then had been damaged as a result of the weather and the humidity. So then trying to get replacement medications and*

*supplies to him as well. [...] We ended up engaging with the Mossman Support Services who were his service provider at the time. And they managed to get stocks up to him from the Mossman Hospital. (G3)*

Attendees identified that collaboration between aged care and disability service providers was key to ensuring the safety of their clients and staff during a disaster. Some reported strong partnerships with competing services, as well as services they shared participants with.

*Even though we're oppositions, we work together. And yes, I'm quite happy that we work together, because there's things that they do that we don't do. And I think when it comes to a disaster, everyone's got to work together. (G4)*

*It wasn't us versus them. (G4)*

*Anyone that's in supported independent living or you share a participant through organisations, [we co-ordinated to identify] who's got duty of care for this period. [...] When this cyclone came up, it was: "you're probably best to do this, we can do this afterwards." And we shared. There were no issues really. [...] And it wasn't one group trying to dump the hard work. It wasn't like: "Ohh this is going to be crap, you do it." It was: "look, we'll take on this because we're best suited" and yeah, so that worked out really well. (G4)*

Attendees recognised that collaboration, co-ordination and communication was important to ensure safe and timely responses for at-risk clients and to avoid duplicating services. Some attendees suggested formal partnerships, community of practice groups, and forums like this one to establish and maintain networks and address communication gaps between sectors and organisations.

## 5. Attendee Recommendations

Some recommendations emerged from discussions at the forum:

### Recommended Practices

- 1 Identify people in the community who lack formal or informal supports to encourage emergency planning.
- 2 Share responsibility for inclusive emergency management initiatives.
- 3 Strengthen inclusive emergency management through education.
- 4 Include trigger points in personal emergency plans.
- 5 Use community events to increase awareness of P-CEP and the importance of preparedness for older people.
- 6 Use schools to spread preparedness messages in families.

## 5.1 Identify people in the community who lack formal or informal supports to encourage emergency planning.

Attendees discussed the process of making a Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) plan, and that it can help to identify supports that can be leveraged in an emergency and can encourage older people to be connected with formal and/or informal supports that could assist them in an emergency—rather than relying on emergency services. There was some discussion about the merits, pitfalls and limitations of having a vulnerable persons register, however it was noted that having a P-CEP plan clarified the roles of various people who needed to be involved in emergency plans and could ensure older people knew what to do during a disaster event:

*That's why the P-CEP is so important because each person knows what they're supposed to do. The people on this register were sitting at home going, "Well, what am I supposed to do? Like, what am I supposed to take?" And a lot of them were confused, even though they were on the register. They didn't have a PCEP plan, any of them that were on the register. So, I think the P-CEP is the first starting point. And then, I think, one P-CEP plan should have three contacts of people that the person can call. And they know who they have to call, rather than an organization having a big, long list of hundreds of people they need to call. (G3)*

**Key Insight:** P-CEP conversations help to identify people and organisations that can be leveraged in an emergency to support older people and those with support needs. Having contacts that know the individual's plan and the role they may be required to play is an important part of the P-CEP planning process. Another key step is communicating and reviewing the plan with people or organisations that can provide support. P-CEP empowers individuals and reduces reliance on reactive systems during emergencies.

## 5.2 Share responsibility for inclusive emergency management initiatives.

It was acknowledged that people needed to share responsibility with emergency services for personal safety and the safety of their community in disaster events. One attendee explained that giving people in the community the opportunity to support others may help to reduce the strain and risk faced by emergency services workers.

*But I think if we give the community the opportunity to stand up or people in the community to stand up in those sort of setups, I think that we can take the pressure off emergency services and all that to work at a low level. (LG)*

The attendee proposed using volunteers to participate in initiatives that drew on community networks to keep contact with at-risk people in an emergency. An example they gave was a phonenumber, manned by volunteers, which people could call.

*For example, I live at Gordonvale, if there's a flooding in the Barren River, and I'm a nervous person and I ring up and I'm taking up [resources by having] an*

*emergency service person that's coming out to check on me. Whereas if [there was] another person on the end of the phone, like Lifeline, and I could say, "Oh, I live in Riverstone Road, Gordonvale. What should I be looking for?" And that person can say to you, "Well, look, I guess if you live in Gordonvale..." [and that's a long way from Baron River] It has that calming effect. [This means] we're not bringing emergency services to Gordonvale looking to alleviate me. [...] So, then we've got those emergency services that can be where they really are needed. (G2)*

**Key Insight:** There may be willingness and motivation in the Cairns community to support initiatives that are designed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people in a disaster. Involving community volunteers where it is possible and feasible would enable emergency services to focus on where they are needed. An example of this is a volunteer-led phonenumber that concerned people could call for information and support during a disaster.

### 5.3 Strengthen inclusive emergency management through education.

Many attendees recognised the need for education which aimed to strengthen inclusive approaches to emergency management. Respect, empathy and patience were identified as core traits to cultivate. Attendees recommended education of emergency services in inclusive emergency management.

*It's about that respect. Whether it's the emergency management, whether it's the services, saying "oh, they won't do anything anyway." Well that's maybe not in their capability. So actually, conveying a true level of respect and creating some ways to create equality and communication methods. (G4)*

The attendee gave the example of assisting an older person with dementia in an emergency and how this required an approach not typically taught to emergency services personnel.

*You were saying how you did a rescue with a dementia patient and how you've got to be patient. (G4)*

*On a good day, if someone's got dementia, they are functioning, but if you've got them on a bad day, especially if things are changing. [...] It can start to affect them. They're slower, they're more confused. (G4)*

The attendees also discussed the need to understand disability perspectives regarding disaster preparedness.

*There's two sides of the equation. You don't need a master's degree to be a cop, with all due respect. They need to be empowered as well, and, you know, council need to be empowered. You workers need to be empowered. Both sides and most of the time, it's got to be a two-way conversation. (G4)*

**Key Insight:** During the forum, there was recognition that inclusive education programs about disaster preparedness could be delivered to the community and could target older people and marginalised groups. Similarly, emergency services may require formal and/or informal education in assisting and practicing inclusive emergency management.

## 5.4 Include trigger points in personal emergency plans.

Attendees identified the importance of trigger points in disaster plans. An effective emergency plan has trigger points so that people involved know when to initiate their plans and enact various actions or responses based on the conditions of the disaster—or if certain thresholds are met. Plans need to be adaptive and flexible, in case of sudden escalation of events. Emergency plans should account for the unpredictability of disasters in regions like Cairns and these plans—particularly for older people with functional support needs—should support people to take early action at the right time.

People needed to know the trigger points involved in their plans, so that they knew how to respond to the changeable conditions of a disaster event.

*Part of it as well is understanding trigger points. [...] Communicating with people that they need to consider, when something happens, this is what I do next. (G1)*

*The plan must be adaptable to be able to include trigger points. So, if this occurs, this is what we will do. So, it's a moving plan, it's a fluid plan, rather than some of the stagnant plans that we come across where people go, "I am going to stay here because that's what my plan says, because that's what my organization has written." So it does need to be very fluid and trigger points was a great thing that I picked up from this conversation. (LG)*

**Key Insight:** Plans need to be adaptable and fluid to account for various contingencies. Understanding and including trigger points in a personalised emergency plan will strengthen the preparedness of the older person. It will support the individual and their networks to continue taking safe action in a disaster if their initial plan does not happen as predicted.

## 5.5 Use community events to increase awareness of P-CEP and the importance of preparedness for older people.

One attendee observed that barriers for older people were awareness about the need for person-centred planning and visibility of tools like P-CEP. They suggested using community markets and events to encourage older people to build preparedness.

*To get it out there, we discussed the markets. We have markets everywhere today. So, to have something out at each market, so that it's there, it can talk to the population. I don't think we will hit the younger generation. They're too busy to do it with everything else. But the generation, [...] the ones that need the help, those with mobility issues, all that. Most people of that age are at markets. [...] We can at least get the conversation going. (LG)*

This was proposed as a practical, accessible way to distribute information about P-CEP or engage in P-CEP planning conversations with a facilitator.

**Key Insight:** Person-centred emergency preparedness begins well before disasters strike. Community engagement and outreach strategies to increase awareness and provide preparedness support can target particular groups where they frequently go.

## 5.6 Use schools to spread preparedness messages in families.

Education programs targeting children were recommended. One attendee explained the value in embedding preparedness in school curricula and early community education. She explained that children were effective conduits for carrying preparedness messages home to their parents and grandparents.

*Putting the message out to young children, they are vulnerable, they are part of this group as well. They have parents, they have grandparents, they go home and they say, "I got this pack today from whichever group has turned up, Red Cross, SES, RFS, whoever" and that pack then has just started a conversation within a household, which then goes to the next household. So that's a growth, and it's got to be a learning tool that we start somewhere. (LG)*

*Sometimes starting with the older members, it doesn't filter back down. But starting with the younger members, it'll filter up. But I think starting at every opportunity is a great point. But yeah, the packs for young children, get them out in the schools. Get Ready Queensland and P-CEP, it needs to be pushed to the schools. That is our broadest capture of an audience where we can push a message that will then trigger a change within community. (LG)*

This reflects a key message across the forum: that it is important to use every opportunity to start conversations around preparedness. Different age cohorts may require different messaging, but the attendee explained that key information was likely to filter up across generations.

**Key Insight:** Targeting preparedness messaging at children can trigger change within a community. Schools can issue resources to children which prompt older adults to take planning actions themselves.

## 6. Next Steps

The Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation Project has four stages. The forum and this report comprise Stage One.



The Collaborating4Inclusion team invites all forum participants and their networks to be involved in Stage Two of the Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation Project.

### Stage Two: Training P-CEP Facilitators

The project offers 30 local champions from the Cairns region the opportunity to undertake the P-CEP Online Certificate Course. For this project, the course is targeted at facilitating disaster preparedness with older people—including older First Peoples and older people with disability and long-term conditions, as well as the services, communities, networks, families and carers that support them. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Facilitators work with people in the community to make personal emergency plans for how they will manage their support needs and act together with their support network before, during and after a disaster. The course is self-paced, online and involves interaction with other P-CEP learners in the local government areas of the study. The course will also integrate local content relevant to Queensland's disaster management resources.

Every learner will leave the course with a personal emergency preparedness plan and the capability to facilitate P-CEP in partnership with older people, including older First Peoples and older people with disability, in their local community. All P-CEP facilitators will also finish the course with an implementation plan that will support and guide their preparedness support efforts and their collaborative action with other stakeholders.

During the forum, forum attendees were provided with the details to register an expression of interest to enrol in the P-CEP Online Certificate Course as part of the project. Interested people can still register to undertake the course here: <https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=MTW7JHWHY84MNRXK>. Further information about

the course can be provided by the Collaborating4Inclusion research team at [collaborating.4inclusion@sydney.edu.au](mailto:collaborating.4inclusion@sydney.edu.au).

### **Stage Three: Building a Community of Practice**

Learners who complete the P-CEP Online Certificate Course will be invited to participate in and build a Community of Practice (P-CEP Connect) that aims to continue the conversations about person-centred emergency preparedness and provide a forum to support with each other while taking these conversations to people in their communities. People who have already completed the P-CEP course, but would like to be part of the Community of Practice can contact Emma Cooper at [emma.cooper@sydney.edu.au](mailto:emma.cooper@sydney.edu.au) to register their interest.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

Older people, particularly older First Peoples and older people with disability or long-term conditions, face increased risk during natural disasters. Emergency plans cannot rely on standardised plans and resources- they must be tailored to older people's needs and circumstances. They also need to be communicated and coordinated with the people, services and communities that support them. Participants recognised that preparedness support was needed to ensure all older people in their communities had personalised emergency plans that had considered contingencies and trigger points. While the attendees from aged care and disability organisations were experienced in making and reviewing person-centred emergency preparedness plans with their clients, people at the forum were concerned that many older people living in the community were not being supported to make effective plans. Attendees recognised that there was some reliance on emergency services to "save everyone" in an emergency and that there was a sense of complacency due to the stoicism of older people in the region and their history of disaster events.

Attendees offered recommendations, strategies, ideas and initiatives to increase preparedness and reduce risk for older people. Some organisations were implementing effective practices which organisations with less maturity in inclusive emergency management could adopt. These practices and strategies could be shared in greater detail as this project continues in Cairns. We encourage all attendees to be part of future stages of the program to share their wisdom and learn from each other. In addition, the Organisational Emergency Preparedness (OEP) Profile could assist people from aged care, disability and community organisations to embed inclusive emergency management in their services. Communication to councils through the OEP Profile would, in turn, assist councils to understand the capabilities and level of preparedness of disability, aged care and community organisations, so that they could better support providers and their clients.



**Image description:** A group of five people are sitting around a table talking. In the background, there are other groups of people sitting around tables talking.

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## Contact:

Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve

[Collaborating.4Inclusion@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Collaborating.4Inclusion@sydney.edu.au)

