

Community Conversations Forum Report: Emergency Planning with Older People in Hinchinbrook Shire and Surrounding Areas

4 August 2025



Image description: A group of people sitting around tables having a conversation.

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1. Introduction

In partnership with Hinchinbrook Shire Council and Queensland Government, The University of Sydney's Collaborating4Inclusion held an inclusive emergency planning forum in Hinchinbrook Local Government Area (LGA) on 4 August 2025. The event was held at the TYTO Conference and Events Centre in Ingham and facilitated by Assoc. Prof. Michelle Villeneuve of Collaborating4Inclusion. The event was structured as a Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum; however, older people were highlighted in the forum and attendees were encouraged to speak about this group in addition to people with disability. **This forum report focuses on older people, as part of the Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation Project in Queensland (2025).** A second report on this forum focuses on the Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) Toolkit. While there may be some similarities, these are separate reports which discuss different key learnings and participant recommendations.

The forum brought together representatives from Hinchinbrook Shire, Burdekin Shire, and Townsville councils, alongside community organisations, emergency services, and local stakeholders. It focused on exploring preparedness, response, and recovery challenges for at-risk groups, including older adults, people with disabilities, carers, individuals experiencing vulnerable housing or homelessness and other marginalised populations. Participants learn about person-centred and organisational emergency preparedness strategies that could be implemented to positively impact the safety and wellbeing of people in emergencies.

By convening diverse stakeholders and fostering cross-sector collaboration, the forum laid the groundwork for advancing strategic partnerships and driving systemic change in inclusive emergency management. In addition to self-assessing individual-level preparedness, participants engaged in facilitated interactive discussions which were concentrated on five topics:

- **Understanding Emergency Plans of Service Providers:** Exploring organisational preparedness and continuity planning.
- **Inclusive and Accessible Evacuation Support Options:** Identifying supports that enable safe, dignified, and inclusive evacuations.
- **Inclusive Planning:** Embedding person-centred approaches into every phase of emergency management.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Building collaborative networks across sectors to drive inclusive practices.
- **Accessible Resourcing:** Ensuring equitable allocation and deployment of resources to meet accessibility needs.

1.1 Purpose of this Report

This report summarises discussions at the Community Conversations DIEP Forum in Hinchinbrook, 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. This report has been produced in conjunction with the Hinchinbrook DIEP Forum Report; however, the Community Conversations Forum Report has a particular focus on how person-centred emergency preparedness and collaborative partnerships can improve outcomes for older people, including older First Nations people, people with disability and people with long term or chronic conditions, living in these communities.

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 Ingham, Hinchinbrook Shire was held on 4 August. The forum was attended by local and state government representative, service providers from various sectors, and emergency services. The forum was an opportunity to learn from others in the Shire of Hinchinbrook and surrounding community about the preparedness, capabilities and support needs of older people, including older First Peoples, older people with disability and older people with long term or chronic conditions, in addition to 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 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.

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, people with disability, and people with long term or chronic conditions.
- To promote participation in the P-CEP Online Certificate Course for capacity building as part of the Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation project.
- To advance personal and organisational preparedness in the Hinchinbrook community.

2.2 Forum Attendees

As forum host, Hinchinbrook Shire Council worked with their established networks to engage people from three stakeholder groups and invite them to attend the forum. These groups are:

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

A total of 20 people registered for the forum and 15 attended on the day. Among these attendees, 8 organisations were represented.

Attendees were asked to confirm their role/stakeholder group.

Participant Role	Number
Federal Government worker	0
State/Territory Government worker	1
Local Government worker	7
Emergency Services Personnel	2
Disability Service Provider	1
Community Service Provider	2
Aged Care Service Provider	2
Health Service Provider	0
Worker/Member for Advocacy or Representative Organisation	0
Individual with Lived Experience of Disability	0
Other	0
Total	15

2.3 List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Burdekin Shire Council
- 2 Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety
- 3 Everglow Community Care
- 4 Hinchinbrook Community Support Centre
- 5 Hinchinbrook Shire Council
- 6 Lifelong Supports
- 7 Queensland Fire Department
- 8 Townsville City Council

3. Forum Content

3.1 Enabling Preparedness with P-CEP and OEP Profile

Two practical tools to enable preparedness were discussed at the forum. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) is designed to support individual preparedness and the Organisational Emergency Preparedness (OEP) Profile is designed to evaluate and improve organisational preparedness. The Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) Toolkit was also introduced in the forum, but this report will focus on P-CEP and the OEP Profile, as part of the Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation project.

The aged care, disability, community and advocacy sectors can use these two tools to improve the safety, wellbeing and preparedness of older people. Collaborating government organisations and emergency services can also use P-CEP and share the OEP with others in their community.

a.) 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/>

Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)

Discussion:

Forum participants discussed the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Framework as a tool to build disaster resilience for people with support needs.

Action:

Attendees were invited to register their interest to participate in the second stage of this project: undertaking the P-CEP Online Certificate Course.

Link to P-CEP Course EOI:

<https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=MTW7JHWHY84MNRXK>

B.) Organisational Emergency Preparedness (OEP) Profile: 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 as an organisation. It also enables them to share information about their needs, capabilities and assets with partnering organisations and agencies.
- We encourage government organisations, emergency services and other agencies to share the OEP Survey with organisations in their community so that they can better understand the preparedness, assets and needs of their partners.

Organisational Emergency Preparedness (OEP) Profile

Discussion:

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.

Action:

Attendees were invited to complete the online survey in discussion with other attendees from their organisation and other local organisations.

Link to OEP survey:

<https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=JF8YTL4I4EFEA8DK>

3.2 Sharing Experiences, Learnings and Insights

Attendees engaged in three discussion-based activities during the forum. 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. Each of these conversations were recorded, transcribed and analysed. This data was used to produce the following key learnings and promising practices, related to supporting the safety and wellbeing of older people, including older First Peoples and older people with disability or long term conditions.

4. Key Themes

The discussions during this forum revealed the complex interplay of systemic barriers, community strengths, and individual needs. These findings are presented across three of the four phases of emergency management (preparedness, response and recovery) to provide actionable insights for supporting people with additional or complex support needs in an emergency.

Key themes from the forum:

- 1** Preparedness: Challenges, Barriers and Opportunities
 - 2** Response: Challenges During Emergencies
 - 3** Recovery: Long Term Challenges
-

The following sections overview the key learnings from the forum discussions. Quotes have been de-identified but attributed to conversations as part of various activities (Activity 1, 2 and 3) and the large group discussion (Large Group Plenary).

Thematic analysis of forum discussions produced the following key themes.

4.1 Preparedness: Challenges, Barriers and Opportunities

a) Heightened Risk of Older People During Emergencies

Participants discussed the heightened risks for older people, people with disabilities, and those reliant on medical equipment or carers. They highlighted systemic gaps in supporting these groups during emergencies.

- *"There's an expectation that the elderly will go to family and friends. But not everybody has family and friends."* (Individual Preparedness, Activity 1)
- *"A friend of mine is on high-powered anxiety medication... her plan is her meds and her dogs. The rest we'll sort out."* (Individual Preparedness, Activity 1)
- *"A lot of electric chairs didn't have backup batteries... some people were stuck in their chairs when the power went out."* (Individual Preparedness, Activity 1)

Key Insight: Older people, including people with disabilities, and people with long-term or chronic conditions, require tailored emergency plans that account for their specific needs; however, systemic gaps often leave these individuals at risk. Some participants emphasized the systemic failures that undermine individual preparedness. Other participants discussed the need for personal responsibility and fostering a culture of resilience and preparedness in their communities.

b) Inaccessible Resources and Information

Participants identified systemic barriers to accessing emergency preparedness resources, particularly for older adults, carers, and people in precarious housing situations. Reliance on digital platforms excludes those without internet access or digital literacy.

- *"My husband's grandparents are 89 years old, and they were told, 'just apply online.' They don't even know how to turn a computer on."* (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)
- *"People write phone numbers on their fridge—if the number changes, they won't know who to call."* (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)

Participants noted that there was an absence of tailored resources for older adults, people with disabilities, and carers.

c) Barriers for Informal Carers and Families

Carers, especially those who are older adults themselves, face unique challenges in balancing their caregiving responsibilities with their own preparedness.

- *"There's the old generation where if their child has something, they'll say, 'I'll take care of them. It's my responsibility.'" (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)*

Carers often lack the resources or awareness to develop emergency plans, leaving both themselves and those they care for unprepared. Attendees also noted that support systems, such as family, may be less available to people during emergencies.

- *"A lot of those elderly people have very good family support, but when it's a major event like that, the children become affected, and the grandchildren become affected, so the support may not be as readily available as what it was in smaller events or previous events." (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)*

d) The Value of Education and Community Networks

Participants highlighted the value of networks like Meals on Wheels and opportunities to bring communities together through education and intergenerational engagement.

- *"When we deliver Meals on Wheels, we include disaster preparedness materials—it's a simple way to reach people who might not otherwise engage." (Strategic Partnerships, Activity 3)*
- *"We're having intergenerational conversations with grade 12 students leaving home and older people who've been through disasters." (Large Group Plenary, Activity 3)*

4.2 Response: Challenges During Emergencies

a) Overwhelmed Formal Support Services and Fragmented Systems

Service providers of people with disabilities often find themselves overwhelmed during emergencies, relying on emergency services to fill systemic gaps.

- *"We had carers drop off clients at evacuation centres and leave, or call us to go and get someone because they couldn't reach them." (Accessible Evacuation Options, Activity 2)*
- *"Support providers ringing up saying, 'you need to go and get this person,' and it's like, no, you need to be responsible for putting everything in place prior." (Accessible Evacuation Options, Activity 2)*

This fragmentation strains emergency responders and delays support for others in need. Attendees emphasised the need for service providers to engage in preparedness actions, including planning with their clients, well before a disaster event.

b) Transport and Shelter Accessibility

Accessible transport and shelter options remain a critical gap for people with disabilities and older adults during emergencies.

- *"In the Burdekin, there's at least one taxi that is equipped to move somebody in a wheelchair, but it's a one-man operation, and he comes when he feels like it."* (Accessible Evacuation Options, Activity 2)
- *"Evacuation centres are a preservation of life—they're not there to make you comfortable. If you have very specialised needs, you may need to look elsewhere."* (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)
- *"There's very little accommodation for disability needs. A couple of motels are accessible, but beyond that, there's nothing."* (Accessible Evacuation Options, Activity 2)

These barriers prevent timely evacuations and create additional risks for at-risk groups whose needs are not accommodated in evacuation centres and who may not have no other place to evacuate to.

c) Communication Breakdowns

Inconsistent messaging during emergencies disproportionately affects older adults and people with disabilities who rely on non-digital communication methods.

- *"Radio is very good with community messaging, especially for the elderly."* (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)
- *"Not everyone is on Facebook. Posters in chemists, doctor's surgeries, or even McDonald's can help reach more people."* (Strategic Partnerships, Activity 3)

Participants emphasised the need for communication strategies which combined digital and non-digital methods of reaching the community. Printed flyers, radio broadcasts, and in-person communication was seen as a way to address communication gaps and promote inclusion.

4.3 Recovery: Long-Term Challenges

a) Housing and Service Gaps

Attendees identified that housing shortages after disasters often force older people into aged care facilities or other temporary arrangements that are not designed to meet their needs. They recognised that their communities "have an accommodation shortage everywhere" (Large Group Plenary, Activity 2).

- *"We've had residents who've had to come into aged care facilities because they could no longer care for themselves or their child after a disaster."* (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)

Participants called for better recovery planning to prevent displacement and ensure accessible housing options in their communities.

b) Knowledge Retention and Continuity

High staff turnover in service organisations disrupts recovery efforts and weakens the continuity of care.

- *"Turnover means we're constantly starting over with building relationships and understanding roles."* (Strategic Partnerships, Activity 3)

Mechanisms to retain and transfer institutional knowledge are critical for long-term recovery.

c) Collaboration Beyond the Disaster Period

Participants stressed the importance of maintaining relationships and networks beyond the immediate disaster period to support ongoing recovery and resilience.

- *"Continual connection not just leading into and through disaster season."* (Participant Reaction Survey, Key Takeaways)

5. Promising Practices

The promising practices outlined in this report represent a synthesis of what was discussed by participants during the forum. The reader is reminded that these practices are presented as shared insights, without evaluation. Participants and stakeholders are encouraged to engage in ongoing information sharing and collaboration to foster collective learning about these practices. Further investigation is recommended to ensure accuracy.

Promising practices that were shared by attendees at the forum:

- 1 Intergenerational Engagement for Preparedness
- 2 Facilitating Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)
- 3 Community Movie Nights to Build Awareness and Strengthen Relationships
- 4 Prioritising Clients Based on Risk
- 5 Leveraging Existing Community Networks
- 6 Disaster Dashboards as a "Single Point of Truth"

The six promising practices are detailed below.

5.1 Intergenerational Engagement for Preparedness

Intergenerational engagement fosters conversations between younger and older community members about emergency preparedness. By bridging knowledge gaps between generations, this approach creates a shared understanding of risks and preparedness strategies.

Example: As part of the "Get Ready Queensland" initiative, Ingham hosted intergenerational conversations involving grade 12 students preparing to leave home for university and older residents with lived experience of disasters. These sessions encouraged young participants to understand their responsibilities in emergency situations while drawing on the wisdom and

stories of older participants who had navigated past disasters.

Quote: *"We're having intergenerational conversations with grade 12 students leaving home and older people who've been through disasters."* (Large Group Plenary, Activity 3)

5.2 Facilitating Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)

Participants recognised that people in their communities would benefit from P-CEP planning, particularly those who lack formal or informal supports. The P-CEP process helps to identify supports that can be leveraged in an emergency and address gaps in their emergency preparedness. P-CEP supports people to create personalised emergency plans based on their unique needs and risks. The P-CEP methodology fosters autonomy while ensuring that individual requirements are identified, profiled, and integrated into broader emergency plans.

Example: Participants shared how local P-CEP workshops led by P-CEP Facilitators in their local government area (e.g., Burdekin) brought together people with disabilities, service providers, and emergency personnel to co-design preparedness strategies. The P-CEP Facilitators of these workshops were people with lived experience of disability supported through their representative organisation, Queenslanders with Disability Network. These workshops, hosted by council, allowed participants to openly discuss their barriers and needs, while also educating emergency services on how to improve their responsiveness. Two-way learning was enabled by those participating in the P-CEP conversations (e.g., emergency personnel and council staff).

Quote: *"P-CEP gives people with disabilities a structured way to think about their risks and prepare in a way that works for them."* (Strategic Partnerships, Activity 3)

5.3 Community Movie Nights to Build Awareness and Strengthen Relationships

Community movie nights integrate emergency preparedness education into social, informal settings. These events create opportunities for the public to interact with emergency services in a relaxed environment, fostering trust and building relationships.

Example: One participant spoke about her colleague's plans to hold a "Date with Disaster" movie night in Ingham, where emergency services would gather with the community to enjoy a film while sharing resources and answering questions about disaster preparedness. This participant had run similar events in Townsville. By coupling entertainment with education, the initiative aimed to engage community members who might not otherwise attend formal preparedness workshops.

Quote: *"We're doing a community movie night where you get all your emergency services and play whatever movie."* (Large Group Plenary, Activity 3)

5.4 Prioritising Clients Based on Risk

Service providers (e.g., disability services) identified and prioritised clients with the highest levels of need during emergencies, ensuring that limited resources were directed to those most at risk. This practice ensures that the most vulnerable individuals are prioritised during resource allocation and evacuation.

Quote: *"We've risk-assessed all our clients, so we know to focus on those who don't have any other support."* (Accessible Evacuation Options, Activity 2)

5.5 Leveraging Existing Community Networks

Embedding emergency management into daily community services increases awareness and preparedness among at-risk populations, including older people and people with disability.

Example: Established networks like Meals on Wheels were used to deliver disaster preparedness materials alongside regular services, ensuring broader community reach.

Quote: *"We take flyers with us when we deliver Meals on Wheels, adding disaster preparedness information to our usual deliveries."* (Strategic Partnerships, Activity 3)

5.6 Disaster Dashboards as a "Single Point of Truth"

Centralised, reliable information reduces confusion and supports effective responses. Service providers spoke about how they relied on this council resource for timely and accurate information for clients and staff.

Example: Real-time disaster dashboards provided accessible, up-to-date information on flooding, road closures, and other risks. This enabled individuals and organisations to make informed decisions.

Quote: *"The disaster management dashboard (e.g., local council) was our single point of truth...it helped us mitigate risks during the floods."* (Accessible Resourcing, Activity 3)

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 area 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.

Stage Three: Building a Learning Community

Learners who complete the P-CEP Online Certificate Course will be invited to participate in and build a Learning Community that aims to advance their skills, tools and confidence as P-CEP Facilitators. People who have already completed the P-CEP course, but would like to be part of the Learning Community can contact Emma Cooper at emma.cooper@sydney.edu.au to register their interest.

7. Concluding remarks

Older people, particularly older people with disability or long-term conditions, face increased risk during disasters. Emergency plans must be tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of individuals. Plans also need to be communicated and coordinated with the people, services and communities who can support them in an emergency. Effective pre-planning would support disaster risk reduction efforts across the preparedness, response and recovery phases of emergency management.

Attendees offered promising approaches, strategies, ideas and initiatives to increase preparedness and reduce risk for older people. The forum provided participants with a valuable platform for collaboration, learning, and networking. Attendees particularly appreciated the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations and build connections across services, organisations, and community groups. Moving forward, expanding participation to include more local providers and a broader range of stakeholders, while continuing to prioritise inclusion of older people, First Nations people and people with disability will ensure the forum's lasting impact. Those who attended expressed a strong commitment to applying what they learned to advance inclusive emergency preparedness.

We encourage all attendees to be part of future stages of the Partnerships for P-CEP Implementation project to share their wisdom and learn from each other. Taking the P-CEP Online Certificate and engaging with the Learning Community would support sustainable practices to reduce risk for at-risk groups in Hinchinbrook and surrounding areas. The promising practices and strategies shared at the forum could be further developed as the project continues in these communities. In addition, completing 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 using the OEP Profile would, in turn, assist councils to understand the capabilities and level of preparedness of the organisations in their communities, so that they could better support providers and their clients.



Image description: A group of three people sitting around a table talking.

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