Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum Report

City of Wanneroo and City of Joondalup, Western Australia, 22 August 2025

Image: A group of people self-assessing their role and contributions to inclusive emergency management planning and practice.

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Introduction

Emergencies and disasters impact all members of society, but people with disabilities often face disproportionate risks due to systemic barriers, fragmented support networks, and inaccessible planning frameworks. The Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) initiative, funded by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), was developed in collaboration with the University of Sydney's Collaborating4Inclusion research team. DIEM promotes cross-sector collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and ongoing improvement to advance a nationally consistent approach to disability-inclusive emergency management.

This is the fourth phase of the Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) initiative, which addresses the disproportionate risks faced by people with disabilities during emergencies. Earlier phases launched the DIEM Toolkit—a practical resource to support inclusive emergency management planning.

The DIEM Toolkit, which includes Principles and Practice Standards, was endorsed by the National Emergency Management Ministers Meeting (NEMMM) on 15 November 2024. NEMMM agreed for the Toolkit and its components to be implemented nationally, ensuring consistency across Australia in the development of inclusive emergency management plans and practices.

DIEM implementation aligns with NEMMM priorities 3 and 5, which focus on preparing communities to be more resilient to the impacts of disasters and building future capabilities for prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, with people at the centre. It also supports governments in delivering on Health and Wellbeing Policy Priority 4 under Australia's Disability Strategy (2021–2031) and advancing Recommendation 5.4 of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. This recommendation calls for a review of national agreements, strategies, and plans that affect people with disability, including those related to emergency management.

The current DIEM project phase focuses on promoting awareness and adoption of the Toolkit. This includes facilitating Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) forums, which foster cross-sector conversations to identify and address the support needs of people with disabilities in emergencies and build willingness and capability to share responsibility for delivering inclusive support.

DIEP forums bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government agencies, community and disability service providers, emergency management professionals, people with lived experience of disability, and advocates.

Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum

The Collaborating 4 Inclusion Research Team, operating out of The University of Sydney's Impact Centre for Disability Research and Policy, facilitated this forum with funding support from the Australian Government National Emergency Management Agency.

The forum aimed to advance inclusive emergency management by introducing the DIEM Toolkit and facilitating discussions that emphasised the interconnectedness of inclusive

emergency management plans and practices at three levels: individual, organisational, and community.

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 these topics:

- **Understanding Emergency Plans of Service Providers**: Exploring organisational preparedness and continuity planning.
- **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. This topic included conversations about Inclusive and Accessible Evacuation Support Options centred on identifying supports that enable safe, dignified, and inclusive evacuations.

Purpose of the Forum and Report

Using a collaborative and participatory approach, the forum facilitated rich, multi-stakeholder conversations to identify systemic challenges, practical opportunities, and promising practices.

The purpose of this report is to distil key findings from the discussions, synthesise cross-group themes, and highlight actionable insights. By reflecting the voices of participants and showcasing examples of innovation, this report serves as both a baseline and a resource for advancing disability-inclusive emergency management in the local context where the DIEP forum was held.

Recognising the urgent need for systemic change to rectify long-standing inequities and ensure inclusive planning for all. This report aims to:

- Identify challenges and opportunities for disability-inclusive emergency management as discussed by forum participants.
- Amplify promising practices shared by participants to inspire action.
- Encourage ongoing collaboration and shared learning among diverse sectors and communities.

The following sections overview the forum participants, present a synthesis of thematic findings from the forum discussions, and share promising practices. We close the report with concluding remarks and next steps.

How to use this report

Thematic Synthesis as a Foundation: The thematic synthesis presented in this report reflects the rich discussions and diverse insights shared by forum participants. It captures the experiences and expertise of those who attended, representing a range of sectors, communities, and lived experiences. This synthesis serves as a starting point for fostering strategic partnerships and building a shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges in advancing Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM). By highlighting key ideas raised by forum participants, it lays the groundwork for collaborative efforts to strengthen inclusive practices.

Promising Practices: It is important to recognise that the promising practices outlined in this report are a synthesis of what was discussed by participants during the forum. These practices are presented as shared insights from their lived experiences and practices without evaluation of these practices. We have included participant insights on promising practices to support ongoing information sharing and local collaboration among participants and stakeholders, fostering a collective approach to advancing DIEM.

Forum Participants: While the insights reflect the voices represented at the forum, it is important to acknowledge that some key organisations or stakeholder groups may be absent from the discussions. Readers are encouraged to review the list of participating organisations (provided at the end of this report) and adopt a critical approach to inclusion by collaborating with these organisations and their networks, as well as identifying and engaging additional stakeholders. Their contributions can enrich future DIEM planning and collaboration.

Purpose and Application of the Report: This report is intended to be a practical resource for the local host organisation and their cross-sector partners, supporting ongoing efforts to enhance DIEM. It captures the collective dialogue and diverse perspectives shared during the forum, providing insights and examples that stakeholders can use to conduct their DIEM maturity self-assessment, identify areas for growth, and collaboratively plan for more inclusive practices. Rather than providing pre-determined conclusions or recommendations, this report is designed to encourage reflexive thinking, helping stakeholders identify their own priorities and actions through continued collaboration.

Why there no executive summary in this report: The absence of an executive summary is deliberate and reflects the participatory nature of the forum. Readers are invited to engage critically with the findings and use the DIEM Toolkit to drive meaningful and locally relevant change. This report also serves as a call to action for broad and sustained collaboration. The next steps for hosts and participants should include proactive outreach through participant networks to maintain the momentum generated by the forum and expand engagement to reach a wider audience. By doing so, stakeholders can build a genuinely inclusive and resilient approach to emergency management that reflects the needs and contributions of all communities.

This report is part of a broader initiative to build DIEM capability. The research team will synthesise findings across multiple DIEP forums, and a consolidated report with comprehensive recommendations and an executive summary will be developed at that stage. For now, this report is designed to foster dialogue, shared ownership, and local action to advance inclusive emergency management practices.

Participants

This forum report has been shaped by the expertise and contributions of those who participated. Invitation to participate was extended through the networks of the local hosts, City of Joondalup and City of Wanneroo.

The DIEP forum was held on 22 August 2025 at City of Wanneroo Civic Centre in Wanneroo, Western Australia. 28 people from 17 organisations participated in this DIEP forum, having the following roles:

Participant Role	Number
Federal Government worker	0
State/Territory Government worker	2
Local Government worker	7
Emergency Services Personnel	4
Disability Service Provider	5
Community Service Provider	2
Aged Care Service Provider	1
Health Service Provider	2
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	4
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	1
Other**:**	0
Total	**28**

Thematic Synthesis

The following summarises the key themes and promising practices raised. These are orgainsed by each of the four discussion topics.

Discussion Topic 1: Understanding Emergency Plans of Service Providers

Discussion Overview

This facilitated discussion explored what participants understand about organisational preparedness and continuity planning. These groups were provided with the following discussion prompts:

1. What do you know about the emergency preparedness of services you use or provide, such as community, health, disability, housing, aged care, and social welfare?
2. How are these plans structured to ensure continuity of service during emergencies?

Participants were encouraged to take the following into consideration:

- Awareness and Preparedness: Are the service providers well-informed and ready for various emergency scenarios?
- Staff Readiness: Is the staff adequately trained to act during an emergency?
- Communication with Clients: Are the emergency plans communicated effectively to the clients or service recipients?
- Understanding Client Needs: Do the service providers have a detailed understanding of their clients' specific needs during an emergency?
- Questions and Concerns: Discuss any strengths, concerns or queries you have regarding the emergency plans of organisations that support individuals with disabilities.

Discussion Topic 1: Key themes

Two groups discussed this topic. Below is a summary of this discussion, organised thematically.

Validation and Alignment of Emergency Plans

Participants expressed concerns that some service providers' emergency plans are either outdated, inaccurate, or lack validation. The need for collaboration and alignment between various entities' plans was repeatedly highlighted, along with a call for regular reviews and exercises to ensure plans are functional and effective.

- "…on reviewing that, there are a lot of a lot of incorrect information. So, there are some plans, but the plans need to be validated, by others who have knowledge in the space."
- "…any plan involves third parties. And when they actually had a... conversation with somebody...from one of these third parties that had their own plan, the actual two plans worked against each other."
- "...we put together our aged care, the directors that manage the aged care facilities and had an exercise...done it about three times. To make sure that they have plans in place for evacuation purposes."

Staffing and Resource Challenges

Staffing shortages, lack of staff training, and unavailability of resources during emergencies were noted as significant barriers to effective emergency response. Participants highlighted the difficulty of pre-planning for crises due to the dynamic nature of staffing and client needs.

- "We've had a couple of very similar situations where the staff have lived in the area as well as participants. So, it's been [challenging]...what are our staffing contingencies? But a lot of that happens in the moment."
- "...you can't necessarily just put a certain staff member on just in case, there's all these sorts of things that come up as well."
- "If we have a major disaster, even as a provider, we would not be equipped to manage all of that."

Complexity of Addressing Individual Needs

Participants in both discussions discussed the complex needs of people with disabilities during emergencies. They spoke about the necessity of individualised plans that address specific requirements such as mobility aids, medical equipment, and personal care. This was a consistent theme.

- "In that particular case...we did have a person in the house that was a two-person hoist and obviously needed a particular kind of bed, [so] if they had needed to evacuate, that was going to be difficult."
- "Where we run into difficulty in particular is when a family won't take people, which is often the case."
- "We might have four people in a house but one might need to go that way, one might need to go that way...have we got people to action those individual plans?"

Challenges with Information Sharing and Communication

Participants highlighted the challenges related to transparency, privacy laws, and the reluctance of individuals to share personal information about their disabilities. Participants perceived these issues as hindering the development of accurate and effective emergency plans.

- "It's managed by Red Cross...but as far as pre-emptive stuff, I think we're all still...challenged with privacy laws and sharing."
- "People need to opt in themselves...it's a difficult area."

One group proposed specific solutions, such as visual cues (e.g., stickers on doors) to indicate individual needs during emergencies or opt-in registers. The issue of registers raised debate as participants also considered issues such as privacy laws and opt-in concerns that would make a list of "vulnerable people" impractical.

- "Maybe a symbol or a sticker in an emergency on the door would let you know...like I'm talking about...they would put it there themselves."
- "I really need to have a list...a register, with everything on it...Not just on a whiteboard that I'm sitting at, because then boom, boom, everyone knows, you can move on."

The discussions also revealed a communication gap between emergency management authorities and service providers. There were calls for better communication systems, including electronic registers, to ensure accurate and real-time information sharing.

- "We only have finite resources, so we rely heavily on local government and service providers to say, [we need to know] where the people that need additional help are."
- "Individual coordinators from multiple different government departments [were] calling us on multiple phone numbers whilst we're trying to coordinate it."
- "I really need to have a list...a register, with everything on it. That if I get a call, I can go here you go, and I can show on it in real working time these people that they moved here, these people are there. Not just on a whiteboard."

Ongoing Learning and Adaptation

Both groups highlighted the need to learn from past experiences, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and to remain flexible during emergency situations. The ability to adapt plans quickly and effectively was seen as essential. The dynamic and unpredictable nature of emergencies requires organisations to continuously adapt their plans.

Both groups mentioned learning from past emergencies. One group focused more substantially on recent experiences, particularly during COVID-19 and the Wooroloo fires. These examples provided tangible insights into how their systems either succeeded or failed under pressure.

- "During COVID we had...100,000 changes in a day towards policy and procedure. We had to keep up with that, but we also had the Wooroloo fires...we were getting the calls from the Department of Communities to see what we were doing with specific people."
- "You learn a lot in the moment I think as you go on. I think COVID was a big learning curve for us and how quickly you had to think on your feet and get things [done]."

Tension Between Funding and Prioritising Safety

The participants voiced frustration at bureaucratic processes, particularly the focus on funding during emergencies. They highlighted the importance of prioritising safety and care over administrative or financial concerns in crises.

- "The biggest problem we found is having people who were in charge of overseeing governing bodies calling to see how every individual person was and wanting to discuss funding. And the last thing I care about in emergency is money."
- "A proper duty of care is to worry about the person and [about] getting them safe and their needs met to the best that we can in an emergency."

Discussion Topic 1: Promising Practices

After synthesising the discussions, several key **promising practices** emerge that provide actionable insights for improving organisational emergency preparedness. These practices emphasise the importance of person-centred planning, leveraging non-traditional resources, building robust partnerships, and improving communication systems to provide effective and inclusive emergency responses.

Leveraging Non-Traditional Resources

During emergencies, organisations can utilise non-traditional facilities like surf clubs, community centres, or warehouses to provide temporary care, respite, and shelter for non-critical cases. This strategy helps alleviate the burden on traditional emergency services and ensures more inclusive support.

Example: A surf club served as a mini-emergency centre by providing oxygen and basic medical care to non-critically ill individuals during COVID-19. Warehouses and caravan parks were also used for triaging and temporary respite.

Illustrative Quote: “We kept 30 people out of requiring using community resources, purely by using a warehouse that was attached to our office and triaging.”

Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Plans

Developing individualised emergency plans tailored to the needs of people with disabilities can improve outcomes during emergencies. These plans should include critical information about medical equipment, care requirements, and evacuation preferences.

Example: A participant described the importance of creating individualised emergency plans that contain detailed information about equipment (e.g., inflatable mattresses, electric wheelchairs) and medical needs (e.g., catheters, medication), which can help emergency responders and service providers offer effective support.

Illustrative Quote: “Individual emergency plan, ED attendance plan, as well as the individualised person-centred emergency plan...that’s amazing.”

Real-Time Electronic Information Systems

Implementing centralised, real-time electronic systems for tracking the locations and needs of “vulnerable individuals” during emergencies can help improve response efficiency and prevent duplication of efforts.

Example: A participant expressed the need for an electronic system to replace manual whiteboard tracking during emergencies. This would allow real-time updates on individuals’ locations and needs, enabling swift responses.

Illustrative Quote: “If we had an electronic system...I can show on it in real working time these people that they moved here, these people are there.”

Proactive Education and Community Engagement

Educating communities about emergency preparedness and creating tools or guidelines that empower individuals to take proactive steps (e.g., putting visual cues on doors or attending workshops) can enhance preparedness and ensure a more inclusive response.

Example: Participants suggested the idea of an opt-in approach whereby households could put a sticker or symbol on doors during emergencies to visually indicate the presence of individuals needing additional support.

Illustrative Quote: “Maybe a symbol or a sticker in an emergency on the door would let you know.”

Discussion Topic 2: Inclusive Planning

Discussion Overview

This discussion focused on embedding person-centred approaches into every phase of emergency management. Participants were provided with the following definition of Inclusive Planning:

- The inclusive planning standard focuses on ensuring that the support requirements of people with disabilities are fully considered in every phase of emergency management. It involves partnering with individuals to co-design emergency plans based on lived experiences and function-based support needs.

These groups were asked to discuss the following:

- What key actions have we taken?
- What are the challenges to our progress?
- What actions could we take to overcome these challenges?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- What tools could we use to get started?

Discussion Topic 2: Key Themes

The discussion on inclusive planning is organised thematically.

Leveraging Lived Experience and Volunteer Engagement

Participants highlighted the value of engaging both residents and volunteers in emergency planning by leveraging their lived experiences, skills, and knowledge. This approach not only utilises available human resources but also fosters community ownership and participation.

- "We're actually leveraging volunteer wardens so residents who have a lot of time on their hands that really want to get involved. And we're providing training, education for these guys and they absolutely love it, love doing the drills and stuff."
- "Absolutely, like we've got them training each other in their own radio communications and fire panels and stuff like that. So, we're leveraging their own lived experience as well."

Creating Individualised and Flexible Emergency Plans

Participants emphasised the importance of crafting emergency plans that are both individualised and adaptable to diverse scenarios. These plans must account for personal circumstances, support needs, relationships, and living environments.

- "We do an individual emergency and evacuation plan as well as a whole plan, as well as all the variables we can possibly think of."
- "If someone's living in their own home and they're full support, like say full-hoist support, and their boyfriend's visiting, will they be left behind?"

Inclusive Communication and Evacuation Strategies

Participants identified gaps in communication, particularly around emergency alerts, and addressed the importance of inclusive communication strategies. This includes ensuring that

emergency alerts and evacuation procedures consider accessibility needs and anxiety triggers.

- "One of our providers...just brought out a capability to push emergency alerts to [medical alert] devices."
- "Depending on where the person lives, we'll send [alerts] to a group app for all the staff in that house...so we don't have to have people anxious until the moment they need to step into action."
- "Maybe having a symbol or something you can stick...just to say this house is cleared. So, then the police knocking can continue, because they're doing the masses, we're doing the individual."

Cross-Sector Collaboration and Strong Networks

Both informal and formal networks were seen as critical to inclusive planning, particularly for small organisations that may lack resources. Participants stressed the value of relationships with Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs), other service providers, and external stakeholders (e.g., Department of Communities).

- "I feel for those providers that are smaller and disability support providers that don't get to use the same technology and don't get the same feed."
- "I just use the networks that I've worked on for years and I have a number of providers that...jump in and help each other with anything we need."

Capacity Building Through Drills and Training

Conducting regular drills and emergency training sessions, while involving both staff and residents, was identified as a valuable method for improving preparedness. These exercises not only test plans but also reduce anxiety and prepare individuals to act effectively during emergencies.

- "We used to be in a state where the residents were a little bit hostile about the topic...but now we're just, we're fully inclusive...it's taken with a whole different context now."
- "When you just take that step and do these drills and do these practices, you learn so much...they love it, they engage, they participate...it might just be this person just needs to be handed their prosthetic leg to be able to action their own emergency plan."

Importance of Networks for Indigenous and Rural Communities

The discussion highlighted the specific needs of First Nations and rural communities, where deep connections to land, cultural sensitivities, and distance from resources must be considered in emergency planning.

- “With Elders—so if we have to do things where somebody does not want to leave because their connection is so deep, we can get someone that can authorize it directly instead of that Wadjella [Noongar word for “white person”] coming in because that's not good with generational trauma and you don't know what else has happened.”

Discussion Topic 2: Promising Practices

From the discussion, several promising practices were brainstormed through group discussions. Participant championed diverse ways of implementing inclusive planning.

Volunteer Warden Programs

Engaging volunteer wardens and residents in emergency preparedness can strengthen community resilience and foster a sense of ownership. Volunteers can receive training in radio operation, fire safety, and evacuation drills, and can play an active role in planning and response.

Example: Volunteer wardens in aged care facilities are trained to communicate via radios, manage fire panels, and participate in drills to ensure readiness.

Illustrative Quote: "We're leveraging their own lived experience as well...we've got them training each other in their own radio communications and fire panels."

Realistic Emergency Drills

Conducting realistic and engaging emergency drills helps identify gaps in plans, reduces anxiety, and trains participants and staff to act effectively. Drills can be tailored to individual needs and designed to simulate real-life scenarios as closely as possible.

Example: Providers organise drills where participants practise evacuations, and staff use feedback to refine plans. One organisation discovered that by simply handing a prosthetic leg to a participant, they could independently follow their emergency plan.

Illustrative Quote: "We learn so much...they love it, they engage, they participate...this person just needs to be handed their prosthetic leg to be able to action their own emergency plan."

Leveraging Technology for Inclusive Alerts

Integrating emergency alerts into existing medical alert devices or other assistive technologies can ensure that people with disabilities receive timely information in accessible formats, reducing anxiety and increasing response times.

Example: A medical alert provider enabled their devices to push evacuation notifications directly to residents in retirement villages. These alerts could be tailored to avoid unnecessary stress.

Illustrative Quote: "One of our providers...just brought out a capability to push emergency alerts to [medical alert] devices...now we can actually proactively send evacuation alerts."

Cross-Sector Collaboration Through Networks

Formal and informal networks across aged care, disability services, local governments, and community organisations foster collaboration and mutual support during emergencies. These partnerships are strengthened by agreements and regular engagement.

Example: Providers formed affiliations with other organisations and signed legally binding agreements to share resources and help each other during emergencies.

Illustrative Quote: "We've got two hubs in two separate spaces, and I have affiliations with other providers...it's an agreement, it's in writing and the lawyer signed off on it, we have to help each other."

Universal Communication and Visual Cues

Developing simple, universal communication strategies, such as visual cues (e.g., stickers, flashing lights), can support emergency services in identifying and assisting vulnerable individuals, especially those who may not respond to traditional communication methods.

Example: Participants suggested a system where residents could use door stickers or light flashes to communicate with emergency services during evacuations.

Illustrative Quote: "What if the knock on the door was really needed to be [pressing] the buttons for the light flash, so the deaf person saw it, right, as an example...to say this house is cleared."

Storytelling and Immersion Experiences for Training

Using real-world stories and immersive training experiences, such as participating in drills and engagement sessions, helps policymakers and emergency responders understand the lived experiences and specific needs of people with disabilities.

Example: St John Ambulance WA staff were encouraged to attend drills, engagement sessions, and storytelling workshops to better understand the challenges and needs of people with disabilities during emergencies.

Illustrative Quote: "Immersing yourself in a drill where we try to make it as near realistic as possible. You just get that sense and feel of what your mission is now, coming out of that drill, to what you can put in practice and policy."

Discussion Topic 3: Strategic Partnerships

Discussion Overview

This facilitated discussion focused on building collaborative networks across sectors to drive inclusive practices. They were provided with the following definition of Strategic Partnerships:

- The strategic partnerships standard focuses on collaboration across sectors (e.g., government, service providers, disability advocates, and communities). It's about identifying roles, enhancing organisational preparedness, and integrating the strengths of diverse stakeholders into emergency plans.

These groups were asked to discuss the following:

- What key actions have we taken?
- What are the challenges to our progress?
- What actions could we take to overcome these challenges?

If Time Permits:

- Who else needs to be involved?
- What tools could we use to get started?

Discussion Topic 3: Key Themes

The discussion on strategic partnerships is organised thematically.

Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in Emergency Management Structures

A recurring theme was the lack of direct involvement of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in emergency management structures, such as Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs). Participants expressed concerns that disability-inclusive perspectives are often missing from conversations and planning processes.

- "Not one single one of you from anywhere has mentioned bringing a person with a disability into your organisations, into your meetings, into your committees, anything."
- "We get information come to us that's already been signed off…with no input from people with disabilities at all."
- "How come the disability reference group doesn't know about [emergency exercises]?"

Challenges in Maintaining Up-to-Date Networks

Participants repeatedly noted the difficulty of maintaining up-to-date contact lists and ensuring continuity in partnerships due to high turnover in organisations and the fluid nature of community dynamics.

- "The trouble with that is how do you keep it current? That's the real risk."
- "We've had a high turnover and my whole team's changed."

Lack of Consistency in Engagement and Formalisation

While some participants shared examples of successful partnerships and Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), they also pointed to a lack of consistent engagement and formalisation of relationships across sectors. There was a call for more structured and regular interactions, as well as expanded inclusion of diverse stakeholders.

- "We have a disability access inclusion reference group…we'd asked if we could be part of it every 12 months, just like a running kind of invite."
- "I think leveraging on your existing groups that you've already got and just finding a more formalised way of either being a standing item agenda…maybe every six months rather than once a year."

Cross-Sector Collaboration and Expanding Participation

Participants highlighted the importance of broadening the scope of partnerships to include new stakeholders, such as shopping centres, aged care providers, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups. Collaboration across sectors was seen as essential for comprehensive and inclusive emergency planning.

- "At the last LEMC, we talked about inviting a shopping centre representative in to talk about the risks that exist there…to get information exchanged."
- "We're culturally and linguistically diverse and we've got an Aboriginal heritage officer…feeding into the group."

Asset and Network Mapping

Participants identified the need for a robust and up-to-date mapping of resources, assets, and networks to facilitate effective responses during emergencies. Network mapping was highlighted as a key tool to address gaps in knowledge and improve communication flow.

- "Another good activity for a LEMC could be doing a network map, a network tree. These are all the different parts of the puzzle of how they feed into the comms channels."
- "You know there's an evac centre here at Hainesworth Avenue. There's 38 accessible vehicles within a four-kilometre radius of that building…that's the type of stuff we need to have better communication [about]."

Gaps in Disability Inclusion

Participants noted that many current emergency management activities, such as evacuation exercises, fail to include people with disabilities or consider their specific needs. There was frustration at the lack of disability-inclusive practices and a recognition of the need to embed disability perspectives in planning and exercises.

- "You're just talking about an emergency evacuation exercise. How come the disability reference group doesn't know about that?"
- "We should also write the exercises to include this stuff…we never go to that length with our exercises to include the diversity. So, we should."

Utilising MOUs and Formal Agreements

MOUs and other formal agreements were identified as effective tools for resource sharing, collaboration, and consistent communication among partners during emergencies. However, participants noted that these agreements must be actively reviewed and maintained.

- "We just hold the MOU on their behalf, but they have to communicate between incidents."
- "Developing those MOUs…you'd have to think about legalities and working with children and all that sort of stuff."

Discussion Topic 3: Promising Practices

Below are promising practices that participants shared for building strategic partnerships, along with examples and implementation ideas.

Establish Cross-Sector Reference Groups with Disability Representation

Creating or expanding disability access and inclusion reference groups that directly feed into emergency management structures ensures that the needs of people with disabilities are considered. Representation from other vulnerable groups, such as CALD communities and First Nations peoples, is also essential.

Example: Cities of Joondalup and Wanneroo have a Disability Interagency Network and a disability access inclusion reference group that could be expanded and integrated into Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs).

Illustrative Quote: “Not one single one of you…has mentioned bringing a person with a disability into your organisations, into your meetings, into your committees…Never once have [I] been invited to the emergency management meetings.”

Network Mapping and Asset Identification

Creating and maintaining network maps and asset inventories helps identify key partnerships and resources (e.g., accessible vehicles, evacuation centres). These tools can improve communication, resource sharing, and response coordination during emergencies.

Example: Participants suggested mapping relationships and resources (e.g., accessible vehicles within a certain radius of evacuation centres) to facilitate effective responses.

Illustrative Quote: “Another good activity for a LEMC could be doing a network map, a network tree…because you’ll probably find we’ve got little bits out there that there’s no formalised link.”

Formalising Partnerships with MOUs

Developing MOUs between organisations, including disability service providers, aged care facilities, and local governments, ensures clear roles and responsibilities during emergencies. These should be legally binding, regularly reviewed, and operational during crises.

Example: Aged care providers in the region signed MOUs that allow them to relocate residents between facilities during emergencies. These agreements are reviewed every few years to ensure they remain practical and relevant.

Illustrative Quote: “We’ve had 7 exercises at our aged care facilities with the directors…we just hold the MOU on their behalf, but they have to communicate between incidents.”

Embedding Disability Perspectives in Emergency Exercises and Planning

Emergency exercises should incorporate scenarios that involve people with disabilities and address their specific needs. This includes inviting people with lived experience to participate in exercises and provide critical feedback on accessibility.

Example: Participants proposed involving people with disabilities in tsunami evacuation drills to identify accessibility gaps in buildings and evacuation routes.

Illustrative Quote: “Another good point about the tsunami training, it’s all about ambulant people…you want to get as many people in wheelchairs as you can possibly get to invite them to that.”

Leveraging Existing Groups and Community Resources

Strategic partnerships can be strengthened by building on existing relationships, such as collaboration with LEMCs, universities, TAFEs, and local businesses. These partnerships can bring in untapped resources, knowledge, and expertise.

Example: Universities and TAFEs were identified as untapped resources for developing formal agreements and partnerships to enhance emergency preparedness.

Illustrative Quote: "Developing those MOUs…there are probably lots of industry areas within TAFE and the university…so you can probably tap into the social work and the social services."

Developing Consistent Communication Channels

Maintaining consistent communication channels and leveraging existing forums, such as LEMCs or interagency networks, ensures that emergency management maintains disability-inclusive practices as a continuous priority.

Example: Participants proposed making disability inclusion a standing agenda item at LEMC meetings and leveraging existing groups for regular updates and collaboration.

Illustrative Quote: "I think leveraging on your existing groups that you've already got and just finding a more formalised way of either being a standing item agenda…maybe every six months rather than once a year."

Discussion Topic 4: Accessible Resourcing

Discussion Overview

This discussion topic focused on ensuring equitable allocation and deployment of resources to meet accessibility needs. They were provided with the following definition of Accessible Resourcing:

- The accessible resourcing standard ensures the effective pre-planning and deployment of both tangible (e.g., transport, shelters) and intangible (e.g., knowledge, skills) resources to address the needs of people with disabilities at all stages of emergencies.

These groups were asked to discuss the following:

- What key actions have we taken?
- What are the challenges to our progress?
- What actions could we take to overcome these challenges?

If Time Permits:

- Who else needs to be involved?
- What tools could we use to get started?

This discussion topic included prompts about Inclusive and Accessible Evacuation Support Options to centre the discussion on identifying supports that enable safe, dignified, and inclusive evacuations. Prompts included:

- Apart from emergency services, what other support options are available to help people with disabilities evacuate and find shelter safely during a disaster?
- How can these supports ensure that people with disability can make their own choices, are respected, and result in them being safe and included?
- Consider and discuss how these resources can specifically support people with disability:
    - People and Knowledge (Intangible Assets): Think about the knowledge, skills, networks, and capabilities related to disability that could improve access and inclusion at all stages of a disaster.
    - Resources (Tangible Assets): Identify physical resources that could assist, such as vehicles with accessibility features or accommodations that are disability friendly.

Discussion Topic 4: Key Themes

The Role of Networking and Collaboration in Emergency Preparedness

A recurring theme when talking about accessible resourcing was the importance of networking among key stakeholders to ensure effective emergency management. This is deeply connected with the strategic partnerships standard. Participants emphasised that successful accessible resourcing depends on bringing together organisations, agencies, and service providers to share knowledge and coordinate resources.

- "If you don't know who to phone at 10am in the morning, if you don't know the person at the other end of the line, then you don't get the core information you want or need. So, the networking is the key to emergency management."
- "You need to have those key agencies to network together as they know their own local capabilities and resources."

Differentiating Tangible and Intangible Resources

Participants distinguished between tangible and intangible resources, highlighting the need to identify and coordinate both. Tangible resources include physical assets like transportation, safe spaces, and medical equipment, while intangible resources refer to the agencies, coordination mechanisms, and knowledge that help mobilise and manage the tangible resources.

- "Tangible assets are things like taxis, safe places, where people stay. Intangible is like the agencies and the behind-the-scenes organisation of the assets."
- "You contact the intangible to find out what the tangible are, rather than list all the tangibles."

Challenges of Maintaining Up-to-Date Information

There was widespread agreement that maintaining accurate and current information about emergency resources and service providers is a major challenge. The rapid changes in the sector, such as the frequent arrival and departure of agencies, contribute to this difficulty.

- "It used to be called community connect…we don’t use it because…it was too big and wasn’t tailored to the local region and it became very outdated very quickly because providers always come and go and chop and change."
- "The other problem is you don’t know who’s who in the zoo from one six months to another."

Building Individual Capacity for Emergency Preparedness

Participants recognised the importance of empowering individuals with disabilities to take ownership of their emergency preparedness. They proposed tools and platforms that allow people with disabilities to self-register and update their information, which could then be accessed by emergency management teams during emergencies.

- "I think we need to build each individual’s capacity so that they have the insight input and capability and capacity."

- "If you were self-registering into that, you're providing that information to the local authorities…providing as much or as little information as you want."

Key Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

A clear consensus emerged that local government should not be solely responsible for emergency resourcing. Instead, local government should act as a facilitator, bringing together disability service providers, community organisations, and other key stakeholders.

- "I'm not sure if it's fair to expect local governments to take all the responsibility during emergency."
- "The council needs to network with care providers to make sure that they're aware of what emergency patch looks like and that they have their clients well prepared."

Inclusive Technology Solutions

The discussion emphasised the potential of technology to improve accessible resourcing. Apps and online platforms were suggested as tools for individuals with disabilities to register their needs, maintain profiles, and connect with emergency services and support networks.

- "If they're ever developing an emergency app for evacuations…they need to ensure that they consult people with disabilities prior to formatting resources to make sure that it's accessible and suitable for most disability types and ranges."
- "It's like the national assistance card that I mentioned before, where it's traumatic brain injury and autism specific. But something similar to that, that a person with disability can have that app with their information or their emergency support services in it."

Addressing the Complexity of Disability Needs

Participants acknowledged that the diversity of disabilities—spanning physical, sensory, psychosocial, and other types—adds significant complexity to accessible resourcing. Tailored solutions are required to address the unique support needs of individuals across this spectrum.

- "Within disability itself, like our area of expertise is huge. I'm not good at all of disability, but I'm good at this part…the continuum might be 20, not just 5."
- "We have to…tailor that support to whatever it is that that individual person needs."

Discussion Topic 4: Promising Practices

The discussion on accessible resourcing revealed innovative and practical approaches to pre-planning and deploying both tangible and intangible resources.

Building and Maintaining Localised Resource Maps

Developing a decentralised but continually updated resource map that lists disability-specific service providers, tangible assets (e.g., accessible vehicles, shelters), and intangible assets (e.g., local experts, care networks) can address the challenge of outdated information.

Example: In the North Metro region, a "mini database" is being developed to track disability service providers, community groups, and advocacy organisations to assess their inclusivity and resource availability.

Illustrative Quote: “We’ve got our own little mini database of service providers, community groups, advocacy groups that are disability-specific…to see how inclusive they actually are.”

Developing Disability-Inclusive Emergency Apps

Emergency management apps that allow people with disabilities to self-register, create and update profiles, and specify support needs in real time can bridge the information gap between individuals and emergency responders.

Example: Participants proposed an emergency app where individuals could register their details, including medical conditions, assistance needs, and emergency contacts. The app would also provide tailored emergency alerts.

Illustrative Quote: “It’s like the national assistance card…but something similar to that, that a person with disability can have that app with their information or their emergency support services in it.”

Pre-Established Networks of Key Stakeholders

Bringing key stakeholders together regularly for emergency planning and exercises, similar to large event coordination meetings, ensures that organisations understand their roles, resources, and responsibilities.

Example: Participants proposed using Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) to invite disability-specific stakeholders, service providers, and other key players to discuss resource integration and coordination.

Illustrative Quote: “It’s about mechanisms for continuous improvements and effective plans and practice… [the council] needs to network with care providers to make sure that they’re aware of what emergency patch looks like and that they have their clients well prepared.”

Equipping Emergency Management Communication Systems

Ensuring emergency communication materials and platforms are designed with accessibility in mind is critical for effective outreach. This includes exploring alternatives to social media for reliable and consistent communication during emergencies.

Example: Local governments are reviewing emergency communication methods, such as leveraging existing expertise to develop accessible communication platforms.

Illustrative Quote: “Our comms manager… [name of person], she’s looking at it at a fairly healthy level so that we can increase our ability in emergency management to communicate with the community.”

Shared Responsibility for Emergency Planning

Participants emphasised the need for shared responsibility among local governments, service providers, and individuals. Local governments can act as facilitators while service providers take ownership of preparing their clients for emergencies.

Example: Councils could serve as facilitators, convening key stakeholders, while providers take responsibility for preparing their own clients based on disability-specific needs.

Illustrative Quote: "[The council] needs to network with care providers…[but] it's not necessarily an individual level but much more at a key-stakeholder level."

Next Steps

The next steps for the research team include facilitating Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning forums and producing summary reports for each host and their participants. These efforts will involve synthesising lessons learned across Australia and presenting them in a comprehensive synthesis report. This broader analysis will help the team provide informed recommendations to guide future improvements, identify priorities for action and support, and promote nation-wide consistency in advancing Disability Inclusive Emergency Management.

In the meantime, readers are encouraged to use this report as a practical resource, critically engaging with its insights to leverage current opportunities and identify additional stakeholders to enhance inclusive emergency management planning and risk reduction initiatives. By fostering collaboration and expanding participation, we can collectively strengthen the foundations for disability-inclusive emergency management.

We encourage all readers to access the freely available DIEM Toolkit and eLearning resources to further their own knowledge and take meaningful actions toward Disability Inclusive Emergency Management. These resources are designed to support organisations and communities in building the knowledge and skills needed to drive inclusive practices and enhance resilience in partnership with people with disability. By engaging with these tools, you can play a role in advancing inclusive emergency management across Australia. Access the DIEM Toolkit and eLearning resources here: https://www.nema.gov.au/our-work/resilience/diem

List of Participating Organisations

1. Aphasia WA
2. APM Employment
3. Australian Red Cross
4. Bethanie
5. Churches of Christ Sports and Recreation Centre
6. City of Joondalup

7	City of Wanneroo
8	City of Wanneroo Disability Council
9	Community Vision
10	Department of Fire and Emergency Services
11	Kindred Instinct Support Services
12	Lose the Awkward
13	Mullaloo Surf Life Saving Club
14	Rebound WA
15	St John Ambulance WA
16	Uniting WA
17	WA Police Force

Image: A group of people discussing inclusive emergency management planning.

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