

# Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum Report: City of Albany

2 September 2025



**Image description:** Many people are sitting around several tables having conversations. In the foreground, several people are listening to a woman in a power wheelchair.



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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Purpose .....	4
Overview of the Forum.....	5
Key Themes and Lessons Learned.....	5
1. Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination Across Sectors.....	5
2. Insufficient Disability-Specific Emergency Planning .....	6
3. Challenges in Communication and Information Sharing.....	6
4. The Critical Role of Community Relationships and Neighbourhood Connections .....	7
5. Barriers to Accessible Infrastructure and Evacuation .....	7
6. Recognising Diverse Needs in Emergency Scenarios .....	8
Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions.....	8
1. Leveraging Existing Community Groups to Foster Relationships .....	8
2. Asset Mapping for Accessible Resources.....	9
3. Expanding Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Training .....	9
4. Incorporating Disability Perspectives into Emergency Committees .....	9
Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward.....	10
Next Steps.....	11
Participant Demographics and Participating Organisations .....	11
List of Participating Organisations.....	12

## Introduction

Emergencies and disasters affect all members of the community, but people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted due to systemic barriers, fragmented support networks, and inaccessible planning frameworks. To address these challenges, the Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forums were facilitated by the Collaborating4Inclusion (C4I) research team. These forums aimed to foster cross-sector collaboration and strengthen local capacity for inclusive emergency management.

In Western Australia, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is committed to ensuring that emergency planning is both inclusive and intersectional. The DIEP forums were designed to identify and address the needs of people with disabilities while also identifying lessons and strategies applicable to other groups at higher risk during emergencies, such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, older adults, and people experiencing homelessness. This approach reflects DFES's focus on person-centred and capability-based strategies to ensure that emergency management practices are inclusive and accessible to all.

The forums are part of a collaborative initiative between DFES, local councils, and community networks to improve emergency preparedness for people with disabilities and other at-risk groups. To ensure accessibility and diverse representation, local councils—supported by DFES—used templates and guidance provided by the research team to invite participants, organise accessible venues, and engage a broad range of networks. Key stakeholders included:

- **People with disabilities and other at-risk groups** along with their carers, advocates, and representatives.
- **Service providers** from the community, disability, aged care, health, and social welfare sectors.
- **Emergency managers** from government and non-government organisations.

The forums introduced the **Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) Toolkit**, which comprises guiding **Principles, Practice Standards, a Maturity Framework**, and the **Organisational Emergency Preparedness**

**(OEP) self-assessment.** The C4I team facilitated interactive sessions, leading discussions on the DIEM Practice Standards—**Inclusive Planning, Strategic Partnerships, and Accessible Resourcing**. Participants were introduced to the OEP through a facilitated activity, where service providers shared actions they had already taken and engaged in collaborative learning to strengthen the continuity of services for the people they support. Each forum began with a **Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)** activity, which connected personal preparedness to organisational and community-level emergency planning.

To gain insight into the forums' effectiveness, participant feedback was gathered through a feedback survey. The survey captured what participants found valuable, the key lessons they learned, and the actions they planned to implement based on the DIEM approach.

In addition to facilitating the forums, **DFES actively supported each local council** before and after the forums **to engage with the DIEM Toolkit, complete their self-assessments, and develop targeted action plans**. While the forums served as a starting point, they were designed to lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration between DFES, local councils, and community networks. By initiating these relationships, the forums aimed to spark long-term partnerships, foster greater engagement, and encourage a collective approach to developing and implementing inclusive emergency management practices.

To further support capacity-building, participants were provided access to DIEM eLearning modules. Local and state government hosts were invited to participate in the DIEM Certificate Course, an online program introducing the DIEM Toolkit and self-assessment process. All participants were also granted access to open DIEM eLearning resources, enabling them to continue building their capacity for inclusive emergency planning.

## Purpose

This report captures the experiences, ideas, and insights shared during the Albany DIEP Forum, reflecting the local priorities and challenges identified by participants. It is intended to support participants in progressing their DIEM self-assessment and action planning while building on local strengths and addressing systemic barriers.

## Overview of the Forum

The Albany DIEP Forum convened a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from aged care, disability services, local governments, community organisations, emergency management professionals, and individuals with lived experience of disability. Participants engaged in facilitated discussions across four key 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, including inclusive and accessible evacuation support options.

The forum provided a platform for participants to share their experiences, identify gaps, and develop practical solutions to strengthen disability-inclusive emergency practices.

## Key Themes and Lessons Learned

The Albany DIEP Forum surfaced a range of interconnected themes that reflect the local priorities, challenges, and opportunities for advancing inclusive emergency management. These themes, framed as reflective insights, are grounded in direct participant contributions.

### 1. Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination Across Sectors

The lack of coordination and communication between different sectors—disability, aged care, housing, emergency services, and others—was identified as a significant barrier to effective emergency preparedness. Participants highlighted the existence of silos between organisations and the absence of a unified approach to addressing the needs of people with disabilities during

emergencies. This fragmentation often leads to gaps in support and confusion about roles and responsibilities.

- *"The difficulty... was that the support services she had were cancelled three days before the event. So, what did they have in place to maintain continuity of service?"* (OEP Group 2)
- *"There's maybe a need for a bit more clarity. We've had some really good conversations today about the role of a support coordinator... and the role of the support provider, and that can be confusing, even for people who work within the sector."* (Strategic Partnerships)
- *"Silos, whether it's within organisations or between organisations, are a challenge. These issues keep coming up, but no one is communicating or sharing information effectively."* (Inclusive Planning)

## 2. Insufficient Disability-Specific Emergency Planning

Participants reported that while some efforts are being made to support inclusive emergency planning, these remain ad hoc, inconsistent, and in the early stages of development. There is a need for a more systematic approach that specifically addresses the needs of people with disabilities, who are often disproportionately affected during emergencies.

- *"This is probably the first concrete step we've taken toward including disability and access considerations in emergency planning."* (Inclusive Planning)
- *"We've followed all the frameworks and put all the steps in place—but there's still a huge blind spot that we haven't considered."* (Strategic Partnerships)
- *"It's almost like each agency assumes someone else is going to do it. But no one is actually doing it."* (OEP Group 1)

## 3. Challenges in Communication and Information Sharing

Effective emergency preparedness depends on clear and accessible communication across organisations and with the community. However, participants identified significant gaps in information sharing, both between organisations and with service users. Many people with disabilities are not aware of what services and resources are available to them, and organisations struggle to disseminate this information.

- *"We've got something called My Community Directory... but again, it's: how do we let people know it's there?" (Strategic Partnerships)*
- *"If no one knows about the plan, is it really a plan? Probably not. It's not enough to just create these plans; they need to be communicated clearly to those who need them." (OEP Group 1)*
- *"We talk about having buses and ambulances, but we don't even know where everyone is. There's no centralised information, no shared plan." (Accessible Resourcing)*

## 4. The Critical Role of Community Relationships and Neighbourhood Connections

Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of strong community relationships in emergency preparedness and response. They highlighted how neighbours and local networks often provide vital support during emergencies, particularly when formal service providers are unavailable or services are disrupted.

- *"Maybe there is a notion of getting to know your neighbours again, as we did in the '70s." (Accessible Resourcing)*
- *"The responsibility is on all of us. We need our own personal plan, but we should also ask, 'Why aren't I the one connecting with my neighbours?' Because it's reciprocal." (Inclusive Planning)*
- *"It might not always be physical support that's required... Your neighbour may not physically assist, but they can call you and ask, 'Do you have somewhere to go?'" (Accessible Resourcing)*

## 5. Barriers to Accessible Infrastructure and Evacuation

Participants expressed concerns about the accessibility of evacuation centres and the availability of appropriate transportation and resources for people with disabilities. These barriers highlight the need for significant investment in infrastructure and planning to ensure equitable safety.

- *"You go down—the City Leisure Centre is the evacuation point... but for students that don't have use of their legs, they're stuck in the wheelchair full time because there are none of those facilities you need, like a hoist." (Accessible Resourcing)*

- *"We only have two wheelchair taxis and a handful of buses that are wheelchair accessible. How do we evacuate everyone?"* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *"If we tell people to go to ALAC [Albany Leisure and Aquatic Centre] and it's flooded, they're left with no alternative. Where would they go then?"* (OEP Group 1)

## 6. Recognising Diverse Needs in Emergency Scenarios

A recurring observation was the necessity of tailoring emergency responses to accommodate the diverse needs of people with disabilities. Participants stressed that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for emergency planning, as each person's needs and circumstances are unique.

- *"People need their own levels of preparedness for different scenarios... as you said, individuals face different types of emergencies."* (Inclusive Planning)
- *"You might think, 'Well, I've got to go,' and they're saying, 'We can't.' It's too late now."* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *"Different disabilities require different considerations. Someone in a wheelchair has very different needs from someone with a sensory impairment during an emergency."* (Accessible Resourcing)

## Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions

The following practices emerged during the forum as tangible measures to advance disability-inclusive emergency planning. These practices reflect the insights and strengths shared by participants, as well as the existing capacities within the Albany community.

### 1. Leveraging Existing Community Groups to Foster Relationships

Building relationships between neighbours is a powerful way to enhance emergency preparedness. Incorporating emergency planning into social initiatives like Neighbour's Day can make preparedness feel more accessible and less intimidating.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"The Neighbour's Day grant is to encourage neighbours, especially like if you're on a cul-de-sac, to close off the cul-de-sac and have a game of cricket... Maybe we could incorporate emergency planning into that."* (Accessible Resourcing)

## 2. Asset Mapping for Accessible Resources

Creating a community-wide map of accessible resources, such as wheelchair-accessible vehicles, shelters, and emergency equipment, can help identify gaps and support efficient resource allocation.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"Even understanding the assets we have in the community. For example, how many buses in Albany can transport a wheelchair? How many buses sit idle most of the day? Knowing where they are and who to call would be really useful."* (Strategic Partnerships)

## 3. Expanding Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Training

Participants recognised the value of P-CEP training in empowering individuals with disabilities and their support networks to create tailored emergency plans.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"I will bring this conversation to the [organisation] group this Friday when we meet... Perhaps they've never even thought of it, 'Oh, what happens if?'"* (Accessible Resourcing)

## 4. Incorporating Disability Perspectives into Emergency Committees

Ensuring the presence of individuals with lived experience on Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) can ensure that the unique needs of people with disabilities are considered during planning and decision-making processes.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"You actually need someone representing the disability sector on the Local Emergency Management Committee."* (Strategic Partnerships)

## Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

The Albany DIEP Forum provided a valuable platform for participants to share insights and identify challenges related to disability-inclusive emergency planning. However, several areas of tension, misunderstanding, and growth emerged that warrant critical reflection:

- **Tensions in Responsibility:** A recurring dynamic in the discussions was the tension between individual responsibility and organisational responsibility. While some participants emphasised the need for individuals to take ownership of their preparedness, others questioned how feasible this is for people with high support needs. This dynamic reflects a broader societal tendency to shift responsibility without providing adequate tools or resources.
- **Blind Spots and Assumptions:** The forum revealed critical blind spots in current emergency planning, particularly regarding the diverse and complex needs of people with disabilities. Participants acknowledged that existing plans often fail to account for individuals with sensory impairments, mobility challenges, or those without formal service providers. It was evident that assumptions about available resources and the role of organisations can have significant consequences during emergencies.
- **Inclusivity in Participation:** While the forum brought together a diverse group of participants, the absence of representatives from key sectors, such as Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and some disability service providers, was noted. Their inclusion in future discussions will be essential to ensure a truly inclusive approach.
- **The Role of Lived Experience:** The forum highlighted the power of lived experience in fostering understanding and challenging assumptions. Participants with disabilities provided critical insights that prompted other stakeholders to question their practices and consider new approaches.

## Next Steps

The Albany DIEP Forum has laid the groundwork for advancing disability-inclusive emergency planning in the region. To build on this momentum:

- **Facilitate Action-Oriented Workshops:** Organise follow-up workshops to co-develop actionable strategies with stakeholders, focusing on asset mapping, communication improvements, and P-CEP training.
- **Leverage the DIEM Toolkit:** Encourage participants to use the DIEM Toolkit and eLearning resources for self-assessment and to guide their action planning.
- **Strengthen Local Collaboration:** Use the insights from the forum to foster stronger partnerships between sectors and integrate the voices of people with disabilities into emergency management committees.
- **Promote Awareness and Capacity Building:** Develop accessible resources and training for emergency service personnel, service providers, and community members to increase disability confidence and awareness of diverse needs during emergencies.

This report serves as a foundation for local self-assessment and action planning, emphasising the importance of inclusive and collaborative approaches to emergency preparedness. By leveraging local strengths and fostering community connections, Albany can lead the way in disability-inclusive emergency management while contributing to broader systemic advocacy.

## Participant Demographics and Participating Organisations

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 host, The City of Albany.

The DIEP forum was held on 2 September 2025 at the City of Albany Civic Rooms in Yakamia, Western Australia. 26 people from 11 organisations participated in this DIEP forum, having the following roles:

<b>Participant Role</b>	<b>Number</b>
Federal Government worker	1
State/Territory Government worker	6
Local Government worker	5
Emergency Services Personnel	3
Disability Service Provider	2
Community Service Provider	1
Aged Care Service Provider	0
Health Service Provider	0
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	0
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	8
Other:	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

## List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Albany Secondary Education Support Centre
- 2 Albany State Emergency Services
- 3 APM Communities, NDIA Partners in the Community (PiTC) Program
- 4 CarersWA
- 5 City of Albany
- 6 Community Living Australia
- 7 Department of Communities
- 8 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 9 Department of Transport
- 10 Department of Education
- 11 St. John Ambulance WA



**Image description:** Ten people sit around a table discussing disability inclusive emergency management.

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