

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

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Image description: A group of people sit around a table discussing disability inclusive emergency management. In the background, there is another table of people in conversation.



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Purpose	4
Overview of the Forum.....	5
Key Themes and Lessons Learned.....	5
1. Limited Emergency Preparedness Knowledge among Service Providers and Clients.....	5
2. Inconsistent Communication of Emergency Plans	6
3. The Importance of Individualised and Person-Centred Emergency Planning	8
4. Systemic Gaps in Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Groups	8
Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions.....	9
1. Person-Centred Conversations about Emergency Preparedness.....	9
2. Mobilising Community Networks	10
3. Embedding Emergency Preparedness in Organisational Plans	10
Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward.....	10
Next Steps.....	11
Participant Demographics and Participating Organisations	12
List of Participating Organisations.....	13

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 Armadale 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 Armadale 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 Armadale 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. They aim to encourage critical engagement and self-assessment among stakeholders.

1. Limited Emergency Preparedness Knowledge among Service Providers and Clients

Emergency preparedness knowledge and planning were identified as severely lacking across both service providers and clients. Many participants were unaware of the existence of emergency plans for the services they use, and very few reported ever having conversations with their providers about emergency

preparedness. This lack of awareness contributed to a broader sense of uncertainty and insecurity about how to respond to emergencies, particularly for those with significant support needs.

Key concerns included:

- An absence of emergency preparedness discussions at the individual and organisational levels.
- A lack of clarity on what services would be available during emergencies.
- A reliance on informal community networks due to limited awareness of formal resources.

While some participants mentioned an awareness of emergency notifications or limited support for specific scenarios, such as power outages, these did not extend to comprehensive emergency planning.

Participants frequently referenced Robynne's story from Cyclone Marcia (a story told by the facilitator) as an illustration of what happens when emergency planning for people with disabilities is inadequate.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *"Has anybody ever had an emergency preparedness conversation with any services and supports that you may experience in your life?" (OEP Group 1)*
- *"I don't actually know much about the services that are provided to me." (OEP Group 1)*
- *"I don't think I'd be able to rely on emergency services. I always think they've got more important things to do than come and rescue me." (OEP Group 2)*

Key Insight: Across the data, it is evident that there is a critical gap in education and dialogue about emergency preparedness, both at the service provider and individual levels. This reinforces the need for targeted initiatives to build awareness and capacity for emergency planning.

2. Inconsistent Communication of Emergency Plans

While many service providers are required by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Commission to have emergency plans, participants consistently noted a lack of communication about these plans. Participants often did not know whether their providers had emergency

provisions, and those who had some awareness described plans that were generic and unhelpfully vague. This lack of effective communication led to a disconnect between providers and clients, resulting in uncertainty during emergencies.

Significant issues included:

- Inadequate client engagement in emergency planning.
- "Tick-box" compliance with legislative requirements without meaningful action.
- Assumptions that clients would know what to do without provider guidance.

Participants called out the lack of a clear communication strategy from service providers to inform clients of emergency plans. Without this communication, people with disabilities are left to rely on emergency services or informal networks during emergencies.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *"Some service providers... [have] plans. But they're tick-box plans. Like, 'Yeah, we've got all these plans.' But how do these guys know about—how does it impact them?" (OEP Group 2)*
- *"We don't know what to expect. A lot of the time, there is a communication breakdown." (OEP Group 2)*
- *"I think some service providers are prepared; others don't prioritise staff training or don't communicate plans to clients. So, it's really inconsistent." (Accessible Resourcing)*

Key Insight: While compliance with emergency planning requirements exists for some providers, the lack of meaningful engagement with clients results in significant gaps in preparedness. Communication must be prioritised to ensure that individuals with disabilities understand and feel confident in their emergency plans.

3. The Importance of Individualised and Person-Centred Emergency Planning

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that emergency planning must be individualised and co-designed with clients, emphasising their specific needs, preferences, and circumstances. A person-centred approach is essential for building trust and ensuring that plans are actionable and effective during emergencies. Additionally, participants noted that plans should be dynamic, allowing for regular updates as individuals' needs evolve.

Participants also highlighted that emergency plans must account for the intersectionality of disabilities, comorbidities, and other factors, which can impact how emergencies are experienced and managed. The importance of involving clients in decision-making processes to ensure autonomy and respect was also stressed.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *"In my first conversation with them... I have listed that the first three sessions will be around creating safety, and that those three sessions will be around planning for future things."* (Inclusive Planning)
- *"It's not just in that time, in that moment—it's always important to change. The plan should be a living document."* (Inclusive Planning)
- *"It's really important for people who might have a hearing loss that there's a text number they can text for help, not just a 1-800 number."* (Accessible Resourcing)

Key Insight: The emphasis on personalised approaches to emergency planning underscores the necessity for service providers to not only involve clients in designing their plans but also to treat these plans as evolving documents that can adapt to changing circumstances.

4. Systemic Gaps in Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Groups

The data highlighted several systemic challenges that hinder effective emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. These included:

- Limited access to disability-friendly evacuation centres and resources.
- The absence of inclusive communication methods for emergency updates.
- A lack of funding and training for organisations to implement best practices.

Participants also noted the challenges faced by smaller organisations and independent providers, particularly in terms of accessing resources and meeting compliance requirements.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *"The Armadale Arena... it's an old hall, so it was built to old standards. We are looking at getting it overhauled, but it's probably going to be two years before it goes through."* (OEP Group 4)
- *"When you have volunteers or people who have volunteered, there's a need for emergency services rather than relying on support organisations... there's just not enough capacity."* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *"There's no funding to do something like this, training like this. There is no funding available for organisations to train staff."* (Accessible Resourcing)

Key Insight: Addressing systemic gaps, such as infrastructure accessibility, resource allocation, and funding for training, is essential for creating a truly inclusive emergency management framework.

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 Armadale community.

1. Person-Centred Conversations about Emergency Preparedness

Participants underscored the importance of starting with individualised conversations about clients' needs and experiences to co-design emergency plans. This ensures that plans are tailored to the unique circumstances of each individual.

Illustrative Example: *"In my first conversation with them... I have listed that the first three sessions will be around creating safety, and that those three sessions will be around planning for future things."* (Inclusive Planning)

Local Capacity Leveraged: This practice draws on the relational capacity of local support workers and service providers already embedded in communities.

2. Mobilising Community Networks

Participants recognised the role of local networks, including neighbours, faith groups, and volunteers, in supporting emergency responses. These networks offer a resource for individuals who may lack formal support systems, providing a foundation for more resilient communities.

Illustrative Example: *"My clients can contact me and then I can refer them on to this person, or this person can actually contact my clients. They've all got consents in place to allow that."* (Accessible Resourcing)

Local Capacity Leveraged: Utilises existing informal networks and relationships in the community to provide rapid and localised support to those in need.

3. Embedding Emergency Preparedness in Organisational Plans

Integrating emergency preparedness into all organisational plans, such as access and inclusion plans, ensures that disability considerations are embedded into broader emergency frameworks.

Illustrative Example: *"Looking at our LEMC [Local Emergency Management Committee] arrangements... we said, 'Where are we talking about access and inclusion?' And then we looked at our access and inclusion plan and we said, 'Where are we talking about emergency management?'"* (Strategic Partnerships)

Local Capacity Leveraged: Builds on existing organisational processes and structures, such as LEMCs and access and inclusion plans, to ensure cross-departmental collaboration.

Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

This forum revealed critical areas for growth and highlighted the following tensions and opportunities for learning:

1. **Responsibility Deflection:** Participants expressed concern about service providers placing the onus of emergency planning on individuals with

disabilities. This dynamic reinforces systemic inequities and highlights the need for service providers to engage proactively in planning.

2. **Gaps in Vulnerability Registers:** While vulnerability registers were discussed as a potential resource, participants pointed out that they could create a false sense of security if individuals solely rely on being "on the list" without having their own plans in place.
3. **Training and Resource Deficits:** The lack of accessible training and resources for service providers and communities was a recurring theme. Participants described how funding limitations exacerbate these challenges, particularly for smaller organisations.

By reframing these dynamics as opportunities for growth, stakeholders can use these insights to critically evaluate their roles and assumptions. Collaborative efforts and shared accountability will be key to addressing these challenges and advancing inclusive emergency management.

Next Steps

The findings underscore the importance of local action to advance disability-inclusive emergency planning. Suggested next steps include:

- Using the **DIEM Toolkit** and eLearning resources to conduct self-assessments and begin action planning.
- Strengthening collaboration across sectors, including disability services, emergency management, and local government.
- Including people with disabilities and their support networks in planning processes to ensure plans are person-centred and actionable.
- Advocating for systemic improvements, such as funding for training and updates to infrastructure, at the state and national levels.

By focusing on local strengths and fostering collaboration, stakeholders can make meaningful strides toward an inclusive and accessible emergency management framework.

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, City of Armadale.

The DIEP forum was held on 11 September 2025 at the Armadale District Hall in Armadale, Western Australia. 32 people from 17 organisations participated in this DIEP forum, having the following roles:

Participant Role	Number
Federal Government worker	0
State/Territory Government worker	4
Local Government worker	9
Emergency Services Personnel	6
Disability Service Provider	8
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)	3
Other:	1
Total	32

List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Australian Red Cross
- 2 Can Do Training
- 3 City of Armadale
- 4 Curtin University
- 5 Department of Communities
- 6 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 7 Department of Education
- 8 City of Armadale Access and Inclusion Reference Group
- 9 Hannah's House WA
- 10 Navigate Support Coordination
- 11 NDIS Partner in The Community (PiTC) Program
- 12 Rise
- 13 Roleystone Karragullen Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade
- 14 Senses WA
- 15 St. John Ambulance WA
- 16 The Salvation Army WA, Emergency Services
- 17 WA Police Force



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

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