

Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum Report: Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes

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



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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 Bridgetown-Greenbushes 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 Bridgetown-Greenbushes 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 Bridgetown-Greenbushes 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. Fragmentation and Siloed Operations

Participants consistently identified fragmentation and siloed operations as significant barriers to effective emergency preparedness and response. Service

providers, emergency management agencies, and local governance often operate independently, resulting in duplications of effort, missed opportunities for collaboration, and gaps in support for people with disabilities. This lack of coordination was seen as a critical challenge to ensuring consistent and inclusive emergency management practices.

Participants also raised concerns about how fragmentation impacts continuity of care during emergencies, particularly as services rely on overlapping but disconnected planning processes. They emphasised the need for stronger partnerships between organisations, facilitated communication, and shared frameworks for planning.

- *“None of those others know anything about the aged care emergency protections... Each one is absolutely siloed.”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“We need strong partnerships between service providers so they’re not just passing the work off to someone else.”* (Strategic Partnerships)

2. Limited Inclusive Representation in Planning

Discussions in the Inclusive Planning and Strategic Partnerships topics highlighted the absence of people with disabilities, their families, and other diverse community members from emergency planning processes. Participants noted that this lack of representation creates emergency plans that may fail to address the real-world needs of people with disabilities or other vulnerable groups, which limits the inclusiveness and effectiveness of these plans.

Participants emphasised the importance of engaging individuals with lived experience of disability, as well as other underrepresented groups, in emergency planning processes. They discussed how inclusive representation could lead to more person-centred and practical emergency plans that reflect the realities of diverse community members.

- *“Who else needs to be involved? I think that really it’s people with disabilities and their families... those with experience.”* (Inclusive Planning)
- *“People with lived experience, service providers, members of the community, and diversity.”* (Strategic Partnerships)

3. Gaps in Resource Availability and Accessibility

Participants across all groups identified resource constraints as a major barrier to providing equitable support during emergencies. The Accessible Resourcing discussions, in particular, highlighted the lack of accessible transport options, appropriate facilities at evacuation centres, and disability-specific resources such as mobile hoists and air mattresses. These gaps were seen as critical issues that hinder the ability to meet the needs of people with disabilities during emergencies.

Participants noted that addressing resource gaps requires both systemic investment and local solutions. They highlighted the importance of leveraging existing local capacities—such as shared agreements between councils and service providers—to mitigate resource constraints in the short term while advocating for longer-term solutions.

- *“What community transport do we have here that could be accessed? None.”* (OEP Group 1)
- *“Rec centres are the best because no one has the general facilities. Ours is pretty good because you can modify the upstairs if you need space for people.”* (Accessible Resourcing)

4. Communication and Information Gaps

The forum highlighted critical gaps in how emergency preparedness information is communicated. Participants discussed how limited access to clear, centralised information creates challenges for both the public and organisations attempting to coordinate emergency responses. This is particularly concerning for people with disabilities, who may be more reliant on timely and accessible information to ensure their safety.

Participants explored ideas for improving communication, such as using notice boards, centralised data systems, and community mapping initiatives to make emergency information more accessible and actionable. These efforts were seen as essential for building community awareness and ensuring that emergency plans are understood and utilised effectively.

- *“It’s knowing who to get that information from.”* (OEP Group 1)

- *“Or even have it on the shop building, like on a notice board on shops.”*
(Accessible Resourcing)
- *“We need mapping... We need a dedicated map to see where everybody is.”*
(Strategic Partnerships)

5. Empowerment and Capacity Building

Participants highlighted the importance of empowering individuals, families, and communities to take ownership of their emergency preparedness. They discussed how fostering awareness and normalising emergency preparedness as part of daily life could help individuals and communities feel more equipped to manage emergencies when they occur. Participants also noted that collaboration between neighbours, community groups, and organisations can strengthen collective resilience.

The discussions emphasised the value of building a culture of preparedness, where every individual and organisation has a role to play. Participants shared examples of how grassroots actions (e.g., phone trees and neighbourhood-level planning) can fill gaps in formal emergency management systems and provide critical support for vulnerable individuals.

- *“Encouraging the street to be prepared... It’s giving onus of that person to be part of the... Include them in the community.”* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *“If we can get people to start thinking about it, then a lot of this becomes much easier to manage and be involved in.”* (Inclusive Planning)

The key themes from the Bridgetown-Greenbushes DIEP Forum highlight both challenges and opportunities for advancing disability-inclusive emergency management. While fragmentation, resource gaps, and communication challenges remain significant barriers, the forum also demonstrated the potential for local solutions, such as leveraging existing networks, fostering inclusive representation, and empowering communities to take ownership of emergency preparedness. These findings provide a foundation for stakeholders to reflect on their current practices and identify practical steps forward.

Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions

This section highlights practical solutions and promising practices identified during the forum. These practices reflect local strengths and opportunities to take action while leveraging existing community and organisational capacities.

1. Building Local Resilience Groups

Practice: Create or strengthen subcommittees under Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) to foster collaboration and ensure the inclusion of people with lived experience of disability in emergency planning.

Illustrative Quote: *"It might be an opportunity to create one of those resilience groups that was shown before. Now, whether that's a standalone group or a subcommittee of the LEMC..."* (Inclusive Planning)

Capacity Leveraged: Existing LEMC structures and community members with lived experience of disability.

2. Leveraging Community Resource Centres as Community Hubs

Practice: Position Community Resource Centres (CRCs) as communication and coordination hubs for emergency preparedness and response. Use them to distribute emergency information, coordinate volunteers, and provide access to resources.

Illustrative Quote: *"The CRC is probably important because it's in a position to communicate with everyone."* (Strategic Partnerships)

Capacity Leveraged: CRCs' existing infrastructure and role as trusted community centres.

3. Enhancing Accessible Resources at Evacuation Centres

Practice: Ensure evacuation centres are equipped with disability-friendly facilities and resources (e.g., accessible toilets, mobile hoists, designated quiet spaces). Use existing community assets to address these gaps.

Illustrative Quote: *"Rec centres are the best because no one has the general facilities. Ours is pretty good because you can modify the upstairs if you need space for people."* (Accessible Resourcing)

Capacity Leveraged: Existing evacuation centres and local expertise in identifying accessibility needs.

4. Building on Local Agreements

Practice: Expand pre-existing agreements between councils, service providers, and private entities (e.g., Memorandum of Understandings) to ensure resource sharing during emergencies, including transport, accommodation, and equipment.

Illustrative Quote: *“We’ve got a memorandum of understanding between Shire of Bridgetown, Shire of Donnybrook Balingup, and others.”* (Strategic Partnerships)

Capacity Leveraged: Existing agreements and relationships between councils and service providers.

5. Neighbourhood-Level Preparedness

Practice: Empower local communities to organise grassroots initiatives, such as phone trees, to ensure check-ins and support for vulnerable individuals during emergencies.

Illustrative Quote: *“There’s a community group in Balingup... They do the phone tree thing and do the check-ins, and it works really well for them.”* (Inclusive Planning)

Capacity Leveraged: Local knowledge, neighbour relationships, and existing community groups.

Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

The Bridgetown DIEP Forum provided a valuable platform for participants to exchange insights, share experiences, and identify opportunities for improving disability-inclusive emergency management. While the discussions highlighted tangible strengths and local solutions, they also revealed areas for learning and growth. This section encourages stakeholders to reflect critically on these dynamics and consider how to integrate these reflections into their self-assessment and action planning.

1. Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

One of the most prominent themes across the forum discussions was the lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of individuals, service providers, emergency management agencies, and government. Participants frequently expressed uncertainty about who is accountable for different aspects of

emergency preparedness and response, leading to fragmented efforts and responsibility shifting.

Key Examples:

- Participants in the **OEP discussions** questioned whether service providers were adequately prepared to support their clients during emergencies or whether this responsibility should fall to emergency management agencies.
- In the **Inclusive Planning discussions**, participants highlighted uncertainty around the role of individuals with disabilities and their families in taking ownership of their preparedness.

Opportunities for Reflection:

- Participants are encouraged to explore how roles can be clarified within their own organisations and communities. This includes defining who is responsible for specific tasks, such as communicating emergency plans, checking on vulnerable neighbours, and ensuring the accessibility of evacuation centres.

Key Consideration: How can stakeholders establish accountability frameworks that balance personal responsibility, organisational obligations, and systemic support?

2. Data and Tools

The forum revealed varying understandings of tools and systems used in emergency preparedness, particularly vulnerability registers. Participants frequently conflated these registers with broader planning tools, expecting them to provide comprehensive solutions for identifying and supporting all vulnerable individuals in the community.

This misunderstanding may stem from a lack of clarity about the purpose and limitations of vulnerability registers. Participants expressed a desire for tools that not only identify individuals with specific evacuation needs but also map broader community vulnerabilities and inform resource allocation. While registers serve a narrow, legally defined purpose (e.g., evacuation assistance

during declared emergencies), complementary tools (such as neighbourhood phone trees, service provider coordination, and community mapping initiatives) can address broader planning gaps.

Opportunities for Reflection:

- Clarify the specific purpose and legal scope of vulnerability registers as tools for identifying individuals who require evacuation assistance during declared emergencies.
- Explore how complementary tools can enhance community preparedness and response, such as:
 - Neighbourhood-level initiatives, such as phone trees or informal check-ins.
 - Service provider collaboration to ensure their clients' needs are considered in planning.
 - Using existing frameworks, such as the DIEM Toolkit, to guide more comprehensive, inclusive planning.

Key Consideration: How can participants ensure that complementary tools and systems are designed and implemented to meet the full spectrum of needs within the community?

3. Focus on Local Strengths

While systemic barriers (e.g., legislative constraints, funding limitations, and broader policy gaps) remain significant challenges, participants identified a range of local strengths that can be leveraged to drive immediate progress. These include the presence of established Community Resource Centres (CRCs), grassroots resilience networks, and existing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between councils and service providers.

Participants shared examples of how local strengths are already being used effectively:

- CRCs were recognised as trusted community hubs that could play a greater role in emergency planning, communication, and coordination.

- Resilience networks and neighbourhood phone trees were highlighted as simple but impactful grassroots tools for improving preparedness at the local level.
- MOUs between councils and service providers were acknowledged as practical mechanisms for resource sharing, such as transport and accommodation during emergencies.

Opportunities for Reflection:

- Stakeholders are encouraged to build on these existing strengths, identifying ways to formalise and expand their use. For example:
 - CRCs can be equipped with additional training and resources to take on a central role in communication and coordination during emergencies.
 - Local resilience groups can be expanded to include diverse voices, such as people with lived experience of disability, to ensure planning remains inclusive.
 - Existing MOUs can be reviewed and strengthened to include disability-specific resources and contingencies.

Key Consideration: How can stakeholders leverage local resources and relationships to address immediate gaps and create a foundation for long-term progress?

By engaging critically with these areas, participants have the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of roles and responsibilities, enhance their use of tools and systems, and build on local strengths to improve emergency preparedness and response. These reflections should serve as a foundation for self-assessment and action planning, ensuring that emergency management practices in Bridgetown-Greenbushes become increasingly inclusive and effective.

Next Steps

The following next steps are recommended to progress the work initiated during the forum:

1. **Conduct DIEM self-assessments** using the Toolkit to identify gaps and strengths in current practices.
2. **Develop local action plans** based on the promising practices outlined in this report.
3. **Foster collaboration** through workshops, joint exercises, and formalised partnerships across sectors.
4. **Encourage inclusive representation**, ensuring the voices of people with disabilities are central to all emergency planning processes.
5. **Leverage existing capacities** (e.g., CRCs, volunteer networks) to address practical gaps in communication, resources, and preparedness.

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 Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes.

The DIEP forum was held on 8 September 2025 at the Town Hall Building in Bridgetown, Western Australia. 18 people from 11 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	2
Emergency Services Personnel	3
Disability Service Provider	0
Community Service Provider	2
Aged Care Service Provider	1
Health Service Provider	1
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	2
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	1
Other:	
Carer	1
Unknown	1
Total	18

List of Participating Organisations

- 1 APM Communities
- 2 Bridgetown-Greenbushes Suicide Prevention Network
- 3 Bridgetown Community Resource Centre
- 4 Carers WA
- 5 Department of Communities
- 6 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 7 Department of Veterans Affairs
- 8 Geegeelup Village Inc
- 9 Shire of Bridgetown Greenbushes
- 10 St John Ambulance
- 11 WA Country Health Service (WACHS)



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