

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

9 September 2025



**Image description:** A group of people sit around a table discussing disability inclusive emergency management. There is a presentation projected on the wall in the background.



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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 Busselton 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 Busselton 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

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the facilitated discussions during the Busselton DIEP Forum. These themes reflect the collective insights, priorities, and experiences of participants. By identifying and exploring these themes, this section aims to encourage critical reflection, identify opportunities for growth, and support locally relevant action to improve disability-inclusive emergency planning.

Each theme outlined below is accompanied by specific examples and direct participant contributions (quotes) to ensure the analysis remains firmly grounded in the data. The themes are not presented as definitive conclusions but as reflective observations to promote engagement and self-assessment among stakeholders.

## 1. Gaps in Emergency Preparedness and Organisational Planning

The discussions revealed that while there are examples of preparedness among some service providers, emergency planning is inconsistent and often lacks the depth necessary to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities. Participants shared experiences that highlighted the limited visibility of emergency plans across organisations and uncertainty about roles and responsibilities during emergencies. Furthermore, resource constraints and capacity issues emerged as recurring challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas. These gaps create vulnerabilities for both individuals with disabilities and the staff supporting them.

- **Limited Visibility and Inconsistencies Across Preparedness Plans:** Some organisations lacked emergency plans altogether, while others had plans that were neither comprehensive nor inclusive.
  - *"Providers are supposed to have [emergency plans]. I've never seen one."* (OEP Group 3)
  - *"We have emergency management plans, but they don't necessarily go into depth to ensure they are effective and completely inclusive."* (OEP Group 2)
- **Unclear Roles and Responsibilities During Emergencies:** Many participants observed a lack of clarity about which organisations were responsible for ensuring continuity of services, especially during emergencies that impact staff availability or communications infrastructure.
  - *"We don't know how these plans are structured to ensure service continues during emergencies. No one's ever talked about it."* (OEP Group 4)
  - *"It's a very sensitive conversation about who holds the list, and individuals often don't want to be classed as being on a list. But if we don't know, we can't help."* (OEP Group 1)
- **Resource and Capacity Constraints:** Organisations in rural and remote areas face unique challenges in emergency planning, including limited staffing resources and reduced funding. These constraints often make it difficult to provide adequate support to people with disabilities during a crisis.

- *"We've only got a certain number of staff covering 300 to 500 clients in an emergency situation."* (OEP Group 3)
- *"The capacity for organisations is reducing because the need is increasing, and we also have to consider the wellbeing of staff during emergencies."* (OEP Group 4)

Addressing organisational gaps in emergency preparedness requires a focus on consistency, clarity of roles, and improved resource allocation. Organisations should prioritise building robust plans that account for the specific needs of individuals with disabilities while accommodating the limitations of staff and resources.

## 2. Inclusive Planning and Community Resilience

Inclusive planning was a pivotal theme that emphasised the importance of embedding the voices of people with disabilities in every phase of emergency preparedness. Participants noted that co-designed emergency plans, collaborative community engagement, and fostering resilience at the local level are essential for ensuring individuals with disabilities are not left behind during emergencies.

- **Co-Design with People with Disabilities is Essential:** Engaging individuals with disabilities in the co-creation of their emergency plans ensures they are person-centred, functional, and reflective of their unique needs.
  - *"If you're developing to prepare this plan, they need to be involved too. The priorities are for them."* (Inclusive Planning)
  - *"Involving individuals and their families ensures we're not missing something essential."* (Inclusive Planning)
- **Local Networks Enhance Preparedness:** Participants shared stories of how strong community networks, especially in rural areas, play a central role in emergency preparedness. These networks help fill gaps left by organisational systems by fostering self-reliance and collaboration.
  - *"We meet regularly with the volunteer fire brigade and track who's got what resources—tractors, generators, and equipment. It's part of our community mindset."* (OEP Group 3)
- **Resilience is a Shared Responsibility:** Participants recognised that a collective approach to emergency planning—one that involves individuals,

families, service providers, and the community—is key to building resilience.

- *"It's a shared responsibility—individuals, providers, families, and the community all have roles to play."* (OEP Group 4)

Inclusive planning is a shared process that integrates the voices of people with disabilities into emergency preparedness and relies on the strength of local networks to foster resilience and collaboration.

### 3. Communication and Collaboration as a Foundation for Preparedness

Participants identified communication and collaboration as foundational to effective emergency planning. A lack of structured communication channels and siloed organisational approaches were identified as barriers, creating opportunities for improvement.

- **Centralised Systems for Data Sharing are Needed:** Participants repeatedly noted that a unified and secure system to identify vulnerable individuals during emergencies is essential for efficient resource coordination. However, concerns over privacy and data sharing remain significant barriers.
  - *"Wouldn't it be great if DFES had a facility for providers to notify them of incidents, so providers could enact their plans?"* (OEP Group 1)
  - *"We need some kind of map or database to show where vulnerable people are, but I know it's a sensitive topic because of privacy."* (OEP Group 2)
- **Inclusive and Real-Time Communication:** Effective communication with individuals with disabilities and their families during emergencies is critical for ensuring safety and delivering reassurance.
  - *"We could have easily sent a text message during the fire to family members to say everything is under control, but we didn't think of it at the time."* (OEP Group 3)
  - *"We need better communication, like a text message system to tell families, 'Your mum's fine' or 'She's being looked after.'"* (Accessible Resourcing)

- **Collaboration Strengthens Preparedness:** Participants stressed the importance of collaborative frameworks that enable organisations and emergency responders to act cohesively during a disaster.
  - *"We all have our own procedures and plans, but there's no coordination of it all. We end up duplicating work or missing things."* (Strategic Partnerships)

Clear, accessible communication and collaborative frameworks are critical to ensuring effective emergency preparedness. Addressing privacy concerns and creating real-time communication systems are actionable priorities for improvement.

#### 4. Challenges and Opportunities in Accessible Resourcing

Ensuring fair and inclusive access to both physical and intangible resources emerged as a critical challenge. Participants identified clear gaps in accessibility while exploring practical solutions to address these issues.

- **Evacuation Centres Must Be Disability-Inclusive:** Many participants highlighted the need for evacuation centres to be equipped with accessible facilities and assistive resources to meet the needs of people with disabilities.
  - *"For evacuation centres, we need disability units with beds, hoists, bathrooms, and pressure care mattresses all ready to go."* (Accessible Resourcing)
- **Creatively Leveraging Local Resources:** Innovative approaches to utilising existing community assets for emergency preparedness were identified as low-cost, high-impact solutions.
  - *"Wineries have big sheds and kitchens that could be used for long-term evacuation needs."* (Accessible Resourcing)
- **Planning for a Range of Accessibility Needs:** Participants emphasised the importance of having a variety of tools and resources to accommodate the broad range of needs within the disability community.
  - *"We need things like flashcards, social stories, grab-and-go bags—so individuals can communicate and cope during emergencies."* (Inclusive Planning)

By improving access to inclusive facilities, creatively using local resources, and addressing diverse accessibility needs, communities can significantly enhance their ability to respond effectively to emergencies.

## Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions

This section highlights practical, locally actionable solutions shared by participants during the forum. Each promising practice reflects the strengths of the community and demonstrates how existing organisational and community capacities can be leveraged to improve disability-inclusive emergency planning. These practices provide a foundation for local stakeholders to build upon and adapt to their unique contexts.

### 1. Developing Personalised Emergency Plans

Participants highlighted the importance of creating individualised emergency plans for people with disabilities during the onboarding process for services. These plans ensure that unique needs and preferences are documented and addressed before an emergency occurs. **Illustrative Quote:** *"As part of our onboarding process, we develop a risk assessment and create individual plans around emergency situations."* (OEP Group 3)

**Why This is Promising:** By embedding emergency preparedness into existing processes such as client onboarding, service providers can ensure that planning is not treated as an afterthought. This practice leverages existing relationships between coordinators and clients to co-design plans that are genuinely person-centred and actionable in emergencies.

### 2. Community-Led Preparedness Networks

In rural areas, community members have established local networks to coordinate emergency preparedness. These networks bring neighbours together, encourage resource sharing, and help build resilience at the local level.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"We have phone numbers for everyone on our street and meet regularly with the volunteer fire brigade to talk about what we'd do in a disaster."* (OEP Group 3)

**Why This is Promising:** Community networks draw on the strong social bonds in rural areas to ensure preparedness for emergencies. These networks enable

resource sharing (e.g., equipment like tractors, generators) and create informal systems of accountability and support.

### 3. Dynamic Incident Support Groups (ISGs)

The state's emergency management framework includes Incident Support Groups (ISGs), which coordinate efforts between emergency responders, service providers, and other stakeholders during a disaster.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"Under the framework, we set up an Incident Support Group to coordinate services in the incident area. It's key to mitigating risks and ensuring everyone is on the same page."* (OEP Group 1)

**Why This is Promising:** ISGs leverage existing frameworks and involve service providers as liaison officers, ensuring that emergency management teams have access to critical information about the needs of people with disabilities.

### 4. Using Accessible Communication Tools and Strategies

Participants identified the need for real-time, accessible communication with clients, staff, and families during emergencies. Proposed solutions include text-message systems, tailored communications, and the use of visual aids like flashcards.

**Illustrative Quotes:**

- *"We need better communication, like a text message system to tell families, 'Your mum's fine' or 'She's being looked after.'"* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *"We use grab-and-go bags with social stories and flashcards so individuals can communicate during emergencies."* (Inclusive Planning)

**Why This is Promising:** These practices build on existing communication systems (e.g., text messaging and emergency apps) and pre-existing tools like flashcards and social stories, which can reduce anxiety and improve communication in high-stress scenarios.

### 5. Pre-Staging Accessibility Resources at Evacuation Centres

Participants emphasised the need for evacuation centres to be equipped with pre-staged accessibility resources, including assistive equipment for mobility, communication aids, and other disability-related supports.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"For evacuation centres, we need disability units with beds, hoists, bathrooms, and pressure care mattresses all ready to go."* (Accessible Resourcing)

**Why This is Promising:** By pre-staging equipment and accessibility tools, local governments and emergency services can ensure that evacuation centres are ready to accommodate people with disabilities. This proactive approach reduces the risk of exclusion during critical moments in emergencies.

## 6. Leveraging Local Facilities and Businesses for Resource Mobilisation

Participants suggested partnering with local businesses, such as wineries, motels, and gyms, which have resources like large spaces, kitchens, and bedding that can be used during emergencies or disasters.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"Wineries have big sheds and kitchens that could be used for long-term evacuation needs."* (Accessible Resourcing)

**Why This is Promising:** This approach taps into existing community resources, reducing the need for large-scale investment while increasing community buy-in and participation in emergency preparedness efforts.

## 7. Empowering Individuals and Families for Preparedness

Participants discussed empowering individuals and families to proactively engage in emergency preparedness discussions and actions.

**Illustrative Quote:** *"It's a shared responsibility—individuals, providers, families, and the community all have roles to play."* (OEP Group 1)

**Why This is Promising:** Encouraging individuals and families to take ownership of their emergency preparedness ensures that plans are tailored to their needs. This approach also contributes to community-wide resilience by creating a culture of preparedness and collaboration.

## Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

Reflecting on the discussions, several opportunities for growth and improvement were identified:

**Misunderstandings About Vulnerability Lists:** Participants expressed confusion about the purpose and use of vulnerability lists, with some concerned about privacy implications and others unclear about how such lists could support coordination during emergencies.

- *"It's a very sensitive conversation about who holds the list, and individuals often don't want to be classed as being on a list. But if we don't know, we can't help."* (OEP Group 1)
- *"If providers had their own lists and those lists were linked to emergency services, it could help us coordinate responses without breaching privacy."* (OEP Group 1)

**Responsibility Deflection:** Some participants noted that organisations tended to deflect responsibility for emergency preparedness onto others due to concerns about liability and resource limitations.

- *"Different organisations won't work together because of privacy concerns. They think it's a liability issue and don't want the accountability."* (OEP Group 1)

**Limited Awareness Among Stakeholders:** A broader understanding of frameworks, such as incident management systems, was lacking among many participants. This lack of awareness was seen as a barrier to effective collaboration.

- *"What's probably a missed opportunity is more awareness of the framework for agencies such as yours and nursing practitioners."* (OEP Group 1)

By acknowledging these misunderstandings and tensions, stakeholders are encouraged to view them as opportunities to build trust, improve collaboration, and work towards practical solutions for emergency preparedness.

## Next Steps

To advance disability-inclusive emergency planning in Busselton, participants are encouraged to:

1. **Use the DIEM Toolkit and eLearning Resources:** These tools provide essential guidance for self-assessment and action planning, empowering organisations to embed inclusivity into emergency preparedness.
2. **Leverage Local Strengths and Resources:** Build on community networks, local capacities, and existing resources to enhance emergency preparedness efforts.
3. **Foster Collaboration Across Sectors:** Establish formal mechanisms for communication and collaboration among service providers, emergency responders, and community groups.
4. **Address Misunderstandings About Vulnerability Lists:** Facilitate conversations to clarify the purpose of vulnerability lists, address privacy concerns, and identify ways to improve their use for coordination.
5. **Ensure Accessible Resource Allocation:** Advocate for pre-staged accessibility resources and facilities at evacuation centres to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities.

## 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 Busselton.

The DIEP forum was held on 9 September 2025 at the City Administration Building in Busselton, Western Australia. 30 people from 17 organisations participated in this DIEP forum, having the following roles:

<b>Participant Role</b>	<b>Number</b>
Federal Government worker	0
State/Territory Government worker	3
Local Government worker	5
Emergency Services Personnel	6
Disability Service Provider	4
Community Service Provider	3
Aged Care Service Provider	1
Health Service Provider	0
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	3
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	5
Other:	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

## List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Accordwest
- 2 Advocacy WA
- 3 Bushfire Brigade
- 4 Busselton Pride Alliance
- 5 Busselton State Emergency Service
- 6 Capecare
- 7 City of Busselton
- 8 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 9 Enable WA
- 10 GenU (formerly Activ)
- 11 Geographe Education Support Centre
- 12 Lamp Inc
- 13 Naturaliste-Leeuwin District Health Advisory Council
- 14 South West Autism Network (SWAN)
- 15 Yallingup Bushfire Ready
- 16 Yallingup Dunsborough Bushfire Ready
- 17 Yallingup Residents Association



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