

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

1 September 2025



**Image description:** A man stands at the front of a room speaking to a group of people. He has a prosthetic leg. Behind him, a PowerPoint presentation is projected onto a screen.



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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 Cockburn 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 Cockburn 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 following themes represent the core insights and reflections shared by participants during the Cockburn DIEP Forum discussions.

### 1. Importance of Neighbourhood Engagement and Local Networks

A strong and recurring theme was the value of neighbourhood engagement and the untapped potential of local networks in supporting people with disabilities during emergencies. Participants highlighted the importance of empowering neighbourhood watch groups, resident associations, and community groups to foster resilience and inclusivity at a local level. These networks, participants argued, are often best equipped to identify and address the needs of individuals in their immediate community, particularly those with disabilities who may require support during emergencies.

Involving neighbours in emergency preparedness efforts can also help combat social isolation and foster a sense of shared responsibility, which is often missing in modern communities. Participants expressed the need to revitalise these connections and create mechanisms for neighbours to collaborate and support one another.

- *"I'm thinking about maybe existing networks that work at a local level, local community level, that might be able to be engaged for this purpose."* (Inclusive Planning)
- *"I agree totally with neighbourhood watch. My thoughts there would be that if you move into an active neighbourhood, watch neighbourhood, that you identify yourself as a person with a disability, and even give them your address, so that if there is an emergency risk, somebody can be charged with, can you go down that street, just make sure, especially this house, make sure they're out or make sure they're catered for."* (Inclusive Planning)
- *"It's almost going back to the old days, isn't it, where you just checked on your neighbours, and you knew everyone in your street, and you made sure that if there was an emergency or a problem, everyone was okay. And it's really sad that we have to remind people to do that now."* (Accessible Resourcing)

Neighbourhood-level engagement is a community-driven approach that strengthens social cohesion and ensures practical support for people with disabilities during emergencies. Mobilising existing networks is an actionable way to bridge gaps in formal support systems.

## 2. Overcoming Fear and Challenging Assumptions

Participants consistently reflected on the barriers introduced by fear and assumptions when discussing disability-inclusive emergency planning. Fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of blame, and fear of the unknown often result in inaction. These fears are compounded by a lack of clear communication with people with disabilities, leading to misconceptions about their needs and capabilities during emergencies.

Participants emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of curiosity, openness, and learning. They highlighted how critical it is to address fear head-on by encouraging conversations with individuals about their needs and

preferences, rather than relying on assumptions. This not only creates trust but also strengthens the preparedness process.

- *“Sometimes it comes down to fear of an incorrect conversation with the person.”* (Inclusive Planning)
- *“Paralysis by fear, even. Fear of blame. That kind of stuff creates drama.”* (Strategic Partnerships)
- *“I think that's the biggest failure, having an attitude of, ‘We know everything,’ because you're not talking to the people who live it every day, and they're the ones who know 100% exactly what the requirements are.”* (Inclusive Planning)

Overcoming fear requires shifting mindsets towards open communication and co-design. By normalising questions and fostering a safe space for dialogue, emergency planning can become more inclusive and effective.

### 3. Gaps in Organisational Preparedness

One of the primary challenges discussed was the gap in emergency preparedness at an organisational level. While many service providers focus on operational compliance and staff safety, participants noted that plans are often not extended to clients or tailored to meet their needs. This lack of client-centred planning creates vulnerabilities for people with disabilities during emergencies, leaving them underprepared and unsupported.

Participants also noted a disconnect between service providers and their clients, with little effort made to ensure that emergency plans are accessible, understood, and functional for the individuals they are designed to serve. This gap highlights the need for organisations to prioritise person-centred planning and provide meaningful communication around emergency preparedness.

- *“Not many service customers or people have access to their emergency preparedness plans... Or they haven't put it into action or discussed it.”* (OEP Group 1)
- *“Based on my experience, they've done enough to look after their organisation and the people who almost work for them in the building. But once the people are out in the community providing services to the end users, there's very little they can do.”* (OEP Group 1)

Organisations must shift their focus from compliance-based planning to inclusive, client-centred approaches that empower individuals and communities to prepare for emergencies.

## 4. Resource Mapping and Accessibility

Resource allocation and accessibility were identified as critical areas requiring improvement. Participants noted that communities often have available resources, such as accessible buses and facilities, but these resources are poorly mapped, underutilised, or difficult to activate during emergencies.

The need for a comprehensive resource registry was a recurring suggestion. Such a registry, participants argued, could consolidate information about available resources and ensure that these resources are accessible, especially during emergencies.

- *“It would be, instead of a register for people with disabilities, where’s the register for everything that’s available? Let’s put that register together.”*  
(Accessible Resourcing)
- *“It’s not just a bus; it’s knowing who has it, how to activate it, and who’s driving it. There’s no point in having resources that sit idle in an emergency.”*  
(Accessible Resourcing)

Comprehensive resource mapping and coordination are essential to ensure that existing community assets are effectively mobilised during emergencies.

## 5. Transportation as a Persistent Barrier

Transportation was identified as a significant barrier during emergencies, particularly for people with mobility challenges. Participants discussed the lack of accessible transportation options and the challenges in accessing vehicles during a crisis. They emphasised the need for proactive measures to address this issue, such as training local drivers and maintaining a database of accessible vehicles.

- *“Transport comes up time and time again. The City [City of Cockburn Council] here has three buses that are wheelchair-accessible... but no one actually knows what to do with it, and how to access it.”* (Accessible Resourcing)

- *“If you’ve got a fleet of buses in the area that are wheelchair accessible, can we train up locals to drive in emergencies?”* (Accessible Resourcing)

Proactive planning to identify transportation options and train local drivers can significantly improve the mobility and safety of people with disabilities during emergencies.

## 6. Inclusive Evacuation Centres

Participants repeatedly discussed the inadequacies of current evacuation centres in meeting the needs of people with disabilities. Standard evacuation centres often lack accessible equipment, such as hoists and appropriate beds, and staff are not always equipped to provide the necessary care. This gap often forces individuals to return home, even in unsafe conditions.

- *“The evacuation centre definitely should be accessible. If someone doesn’t have a place to go, they can definitely go to that evacuation centre, but they’re not nice places to be long-term.”* (Accessible Resourcing, Blue Group 2)
- *“At the evac centre, what was her base need? It was an accessible bed. There was no hoist, and she couldn’t lie down.”* (Accessible Resourcing, Blue Group 1)
- *“It’s almost like we need a cabinet of earphones. If there’s sirens going on, that could really create sensory overload... It’s about everyone having what they need.”* (Accessible Resourcing)

Leveraging partnerships with local facilities and other accessible venues can provide alternative shelter options for individuals whose needs are not met in standard evacuation centres.

## 7. Tailored Communication and Education Strategies

Effective emergency communication relies on the ability to convey information in ways that meet the diverse needs of communities. Participants stressed that communication strategies must consider individual preferences, cultural contexts, and access to technology. While digital solutions, such as apps, are valuable for some individuals, others (e.g., older adults or people with limited access to or comfort with technology) may require alternative communication methods.

Participants highlighted the importance of combining high-tech and low-tech communication tools to ensure equitable access to information. Suggestions included paper-based emergency plans for older adults, apps for those who prefer digital solutions, and simplified, accessible formats to help people understand and act on emergency warnings.

Participants also noted the importance of clear and concise communication. Many highlighted how information overload or conflicting messages could overwhelm individuals during emergencies, further impeding their ability to act.

- *“Don’t give me a solution that’s based on a phone. A piece of paper on the fridge is what people are used to.”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“Sometimes the challenge is total information overload. There’s too much, and it’s too conflicting. It’s just too hard. Whatever it is, short and simple.”* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *“People wait. They’ll wait... and no offence to anybody, but I think that it’ll become a reliance. ‘It’s okay. I can wait because I’ll know I’ll get out.’ And that’s what you don’t want.”* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *“If you don’t know the terminology, you shouldn’t be afraid to ask it either. How do I refer to you? How would you like to be referred to?”* (Inclusive Planning)
- *“I think there should also be campaigns run alongside apps to make people aware of them. Educational campaigns... not just run at nighttime during the week, but during the day on weekends, so those who don’t like going out when it’s dark can still attend.”* (Inclusive Planning)

Tailored communication strategies are essential for ensuring all individuals, regardless of age, disability, or access to technology, are prepared for emergencies. A combination of high-tech and low-tech solutions can meet diverse community needs, while educational campaigns can raise awareness and promote preparedness. Communication strategies should also encourage proactive decision-making to reduce reliance on emergency services and increase individual and community resilience.

## 8. Empowering People with Disabilities

Empowering people with disabilities to take an active role in their emergency planning was seen as a vital strategy for creating more resilient communities.

Participants suggested delivering workshops and providing resources to build confidence, encourage self-advocacy, and ensure individuals understand their role in emergency preparedness.

- *“People who are marginalised need to be supported... They need some support for that.”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“Workshops could empower people to prepare their own plans, advocate for their needs, and build confidence in emergencies.”* (OEP Group 1)

Providing education and resources for people with disabilities enhances their ability to navigate and respond to emergency situations, reducing their vulnerability.

## 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 Cockburn community.

### 1. Neighbourhood Watch Revitalisation for Emergency Preparedness

The reactivation of neighbourhood watch groups is seen as a powerful and locally actionable solution to support vulnerable individuals during emergencies. By fostering communication between neighbours and establishing a system of mutual aid, neighbourhood watch groups can help identify and meet the unique needs of people with disabilities in their communities. These groups can be especially valuable in areas where formal support services are limited.

- *“I think neighbourhood watch is a good one to start trying to ramp that up again, because that was put in for a reason.”* (Inclusive Planning)

### 2. Resource Mapping and Local Partnerships

Participants identified the wasted potential of untapped community resources that could play a critical role during emergencies if effectively mapped. A resource registry that includes information on accessible transportation, support

services, and emergency supplies could streamline the mobilisation of resources when time is of the essence.

- *“It would be, instead of a register for people with disabilities, where’s the register for everything that’s available? Let’s put that register together.”* (Accessible Resourcing)

### 3. Accessible Resourcing through Aged Care Partnerships

The mismatch between the needs of people with disabilities and the capacities of evacuation centres was a critical issue raised. Partnering with aged care facilities, which already have the necessary accessibility features, equipment, and trained staff, was proposed as a practical solution to bridge this gap.

- *“Aged care facilities have the hoists, accessibility accommodations, and trained staff needed for people who can’t use evacuation centres.”* (Accessible Resourcing)

### 4. Tailored Communication Plans

To ensure effective emergency communication, participants recommended adopting a variety of strategies that cater to diverse needs. This includes digital tools such as apps for younger, tech-savvy individuals and low-tech solutions like paper-based plans for older adults.

- *“Don’t give me a solution that’s based on a phone. A piece of paper on the fridge is what people are used to.”* (OEP Group 2)

### 5. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Workshops

Providing workshops that empower individuals with disabilities to take ownership of their emergency planning can help address gaps in preparedness and increase individual confidence. Participants noted the importance of not only educating people with disabilities but also including service providers in training on inclusive emergency preparedness.

- *“People who are marginalised need to be supported... They need some support for that.”* (OEP Group 2)

- *“Workshops could empower people to prepare their own plans, advocate for their needs, and build confidence in emergencies.”* (OEP Group 1)

## Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

The Cockburn DIEP Forum discussions provided rich insights into the challenges and opportunities for advancing disability-inclusive emergency planning. However, several underlying dynamics and tensions emerged during the conversations that warrant critical reflection. These considerations highlight key areas for growth and improvement as stakeholders continue to engage in this work.

### 1. Responsibility Deflection

A recurring theme across discussions was the tendency to shift the responsibility for emergency preparedness onto individuals, informal networks, or other organisations. While participants recognised the importance of self-reliance, they often highlighted challenges in accessing the resources, tools, and support needed to prepare effectively. This raises concerns about the risk of neglecting systemic responsibilities, particularly for those who face barriers to participation, such as people with disabilities, older adults, or individuals without strong local networks.

- *“For me, the take-home message is you’ve got to be responsible for yourself first... You cannot rely on the federal government to come and rescue you, the state government, [or] local government.”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“There are so many people that think, ‘Oh, they’ll come door-knocking,’ I think.”* (Blue Group 2)
- *“People with disabilities might feel like, ‘Oh, well, I’m just being a nuisance. If you’re not going to help me, then I’ll do it on my own,’ but sometimes that can be a detriment to ourselves.”* (Accessible Resourcing)

While self-reliance is important, participants also acknowledged the need for formal systems to provide equitable and inclusive support. It is crucial to strike a balance where individuals and communities are empowered, but systemic responsibility for emergency management is not overlooked.

## 2. Inclusion of Marginalised Voices

The discussions revealed that marginalised groups, particularly people with disabilities, older adults, and carers, are often excluded from emergency planning processes. This exclusion perpetuates gaps in understanding and addressing the diverse needs of these groups. Participants specifically noted how the experiences of older adults living independently, carers, and those with intersectional identities (e.g., disability and cultural diversity) often go unaddressed.

- *“There’s definitely intersectionality. Within the disability sector, there will always be an overlap with aged care, multicultural communities, and First Nations people. Each of those groups has unique experiences of disability, so it’s really important to include them.”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“The carer is a big part of the care recipient’s life. When that person is in danger or in crisis, so is the carer... They actually have different needs in a situation.”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“How many people with disabilities do you have in your planning teams, in your development teams? I don’t want an answer, but it’s a thought bubble for you.”* (Strategic Partnerships)

Inclusive planning must ensure that the voices of marginalised groups are proactively sought, amplified, and integrated into decision-making processes. This involves creating opportunities for people with lived experiences of disability, carers, and older adults to take leadership roles in emergency planning.

## 3. Balancing Local Action and Systemic Change

Participants expressed a strong focus on locally actionable solutions, such as activating neighbourhood networks, mapping resources, and educating communities about preparedness. However, the discussions also highlighted systemic issues that require attention, including siloed practices, funding constraints, and a lack of universally accessible emergency response infrastructure. A key tension was the need to address both immediate local challenges and long-term systemic barriers simultaneously.

- *"We're very much a silo-mentality organisation. It's strange how silo-driven we are."* (Strategic Partnerships)
- *"Sometimes, particularly for organisations that are funded, the funding models themselves get in the way. The way you can spend money doesn't allow you to do innovative things because you've got KPIs you have to meet."* (Strategic Partnerships)
- *"It's almost going back to the old days, isn't it, where you just checked on your neighbours... It's really sad that we have to remind people to do that now."* (Accessible Resourcing)

While participants demonstrated enthusiasm for local action, there is a need for simultaneous advocacy at systemic levels. Addressing broader issues such as funding models, siloed practices, and accessibility within emergency management systems will be essential for sustainable progress.

## 4. Addressing Cultural Norms

Cultural attitudes and social norms emerged as a significant influence on emergency preparedness. In particular, participants identified the "she'll be right" mentality and fear of blame as barriers to proactive action. These attitudes, while deeply ingrained, can result in complacency, procrastination, and a lack of collaboration.

- *"Australians have that really, 'She'll be right, mate,' attitude."* (OEP Group 1)
- *"Sometimes the challenge is the perception of blame. If you do something and you get it wrong, someone's to blame, so you're frozen."* (Strategic Partnerships)
- *"Paralysis by fear, even. Fear of blame. That kind of stuff creates drama."* (Strategic Partnerships)

Overcoming these cultural norms requires a shift towards shared responsibility and fostering an environment of learning rather than fear. Encouraging preparedness and collaboration as positive and proactive behaviours will help challenge these attitudes and build a culture of resilience.

This reflexivity section highlights opportunities for growth by critically reflecting on key tensions and challenges raised during the forum. Addressing these dynamics will help stakeholders align local action with systemic advocacy,

ultimately advancing the shared goal of disability-inclusive emergency preparedness.

## Next Steps

1. **Utilise the DIEM Toolkit:** Participants are encouraged to engage with the DIEM Toolkit and eLearning materials to guide self-assessment and action planning. These resources are designed to support stakeholders in understanding and applying the core principles and practice standards of disability-inclusive emergency management. Facilitating access to these tools can help organisations and community members develop robust, inclusive emergency plans tailored to local needs.
2. **Bridge Silos:** Create regular forums for cross-sector collaboration and shared learning.
3. **Foster Local Resilience:** Leverage existing neighbourhood and community networks to build local preparedness capacity.
4. **Scale Education Efforts:** Deliver workshops and education campaigns tailored to diverse population needs.
5. **Resource Registries:** Develop comprehensive resource registries to optimise the use of local assets during emergencies.

By taking these next steps, stakeholders in Cockburn can build on local strengths, address identified challenges and continue to advance disability-inclusive emergency planning. These actions will not only equip the community to respond more effectively to emergencies but also foster greater collaboration and resilience across sectors and population groups.

## 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 Cockburn.

The DIEP forum was held on 1 September 2025 at the City of Cockburn Administration in Spearwood, Western Australia. 25 people from 8 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	6
Emergency Services Personnel	3
Disability Service Provider	2
Community Service Provider	3
Aged Care Service Provider	0
Health Service Provider	0
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	4
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	2
<b>Other:</b>	
Member of residents group	1
Parent of two people with disability	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

## List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Avivo
- 2 Banjup Residents Group
- 3 City of Cockburn
- 4 Volunteer Centre, City of Cockburn
- 5 Deafblind West Australians
- 6 Department of Communities
- 7 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 8 Laynecdixon
- 9 Lose the Awkward
- 10 Paper Planes
- 11 Red Cross Australia
- 12 Therapy in the Outback
- 13 Uniting WA



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

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