

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

30 October 2025



**Image description:** Four 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 Karratha 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 Karratha 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 Karratha 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. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness and Continuity of Care

Participants repeatedly underscored the importance of developing and maintaining person-centred emergency plans. While service providers are mandated to create emergency plans for clients under NDIS requirements, the implementation and communication of these plans were often inconsistent.

Discussions revealed that plans are not always collaboratively created or updated regularly, leaving service users, families, and care teams unclear on responsibilities during emergencies.

- *"Disability service providers here in town... have to have person-centred emergency plans, especially for people with disability who live in SIL [Supported Independent Living] houses."* (OEP Group 1)
- *"Each NDIS provider... has to have an emergency management plan for each of their participants. Obviously, it hasn't been collaboratively created."* (OEP Group 2)
- *"Do service providers consider an emergency plan for the clients in that way, or is it just like: we have an evacuation plan?"* (Inclusive Planning)

## 2. Accessibility Gaps in Emergency Shelters and Resources

Participants highlighted how evacuation centres and emergency shelters often fail to meet the needs of people with disabilities. These gaps include inadequate physical infrastructure, overwhelming sensory environments, and a lack of appropriate supports, such as trained personnel.

- *"We don't have a lot of properties that are disability accessible that can be used in temporary accommodation."* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *"In that particular centre, there were over 180 people on a basketball court overnight. The person who required additional needs would not have been supported to the extent that they would need."* (OEP Group 3)
- *"The evac centre, I feel, would be very overwhelming."* (OEP Group 2)

## 3. Cross-Sector Collaboration and Communication

Participants observed significant gaps in collaboration between service providers, government agencies, and emergency services. Information sharing was identified as a critical challenge, with inadequate communication channels and unclear roles during emergencies.

- *"There's no communication, cross-sector communication, or even [inaudible] communication."* (OEP Group 2)
- *"Everyone's got to be on the same page, but we're not duplicating effort. Making sure we're all working together for the greater good."* (Strategic Partnerships)

- *"The city joins with all the other services around that process."* (OEP Group 1)

Participants suggested that formalising these relationships through agreements, such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), could improve coordination and accountability.

#### 4. Proactive Emergency Preparedness

The need for proactive emergency planning was a key reflection. Participants encouraged early identification of risks and clear communication of roles and responsibilities before emergencies occur. Education for communities and service providers was seen as essential for fostering a shared understanding of preparedness.

- *"We have to prepare for this... Let's have it ready for them."* (OEP Group 3)
- *"No one really thinks about it until they have to. And then it's too late."* (OEP Group 2)
- *"Part of what we're doing at schools from now... is starting to educate—not just the staff, but parents and families as well."* (OEP Group 1)

#### 5. Leveraging Local Knowledge and Community Networks

The forum surfaced examples of community-led initiatives that demonstrate the power of local knowledge and relationships in emergency contexts. Participants noted the importance of building on these strengths to complement formal emergency management systems.

- *"We had a thing in our housing estate where the local brigade chief took it upon himself to meet the people in the community... There was a marking... to identify higher-needs individuals."* (OEP Group 3)
- *"Through all those fires over the last couple of weeks, everything we relied on was pretty much industry or community-based."* (Accessible Resourcing)

### Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions

Participants shared a variety of practical, local-level solutions that could improve accessibility and inclusivity in emergency planning. These recommendations leverage existing community capacities and focus on actionable steps.

## 1. Person-Centred Emergency Plans

**Description:** Collaboratively develop and regularly update emergency plans tailored to individual needs, ensuring these include contingencies for unexpected emergencies.

**Example:** *"To have those triggers in place to revisit everything for people with higher needs... Because it's one thing to learn it in training, but then if you don't revisit it, it just gets forgotten."* (OEP Group 3)

**Leverages Local Capacities:** Builds on the expertise of service providers and utilises the lived experiences of people with disabilities and their families.

## 2. Retrofitting Emergency Shelters

**Description:** Upgrade evacuation centres to be inclusive and accessible for individuals with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. This includes installing ramps, accessible bathrooms, tactile signage, and quiet zones.

**Example:** *"We don't have a lot of properties that are disability accessible that can be used in temporary accommodation."* (Accessible Resourcing)

**Leverages Local Capacities:** Engages local contractors, disability advocates, and councils to address infrastructure gaps.

## 3. Cross-Sector Collaboration through MOUs

**Description:** Establish formal agreements, such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), between service providers, emergency services, and government agencies to improve communication and resource sharing during emergencies.

**Example:** *"How can we support each other to ensure that the people who are needing this support are going to get that support, regardless of where it's coming from?"* (Strategic Partnerships)

**Leverages Local Capacities:** Builds on existing relationships within the DIEP network and other collaborative local efforts.

## 4. Disability-Specific Training for Emergency Responders

**Description:** Deliver targeted training for emergency service personnel and volunteers in supporting people with disabilities during crises.

**Example:** *"We need to look at the communities... making this common, that if you*

*are working in any type of situation that's involving an emergency, then you have some element of training of working with people with disabilities."* (OEP Group 3)

**Leverages Local Capacities:** Utilises expertise from local disability organisations and individuals with lived experience.

## Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

The forum revealed several opportunities for critical reflection and growth:

- **Responsibility Confusion:** Participants frequently highlighted uncertainty about roles and responsibilities during emergencies, particularly regarding the continuity of care for people with disabilities. This underscores the importance of clarifying responsibilities across sectors to avoid miscommunication and accountability gaps.
- **Reactive Mindset:** Many discussions pointed to a reactive approach to emergency planning, with participants expressing a need to build proactive systems of preparedness.
- **Unrealised Collaboration Potential:** While participants acknowledged the value of community initiatives and informal networks, these resources were often underutilised in formal emergency plans.
- **Addressing Systemic Factors Locally:** Although systemic issues like funding gaps and policy limitations were discussed, participants recognised the importance of identifying local actions that can mitigate these challenges.

## Next Steps

To advance disability-inclusive emergency preparedness in Karratha:

1. **Adopt DIEM Toolkit and Resources:** Use the DIEM Toolkit and eLearning modules as a foundation for self-assessment and action planning.
2. **Strengthen Local Networks:** Develop formal and informal partnerships to improve collaboration, communication, and resource sharing.
3. **Promote Accessibility:** Advocate for accessible shelter retrofitting and disability-specific resources in emergency facilities.

4. **Provide Targeted Training:** Equip emergency responders and volunteers with the skills and knowledge to support people with disabilities effectively.
5. **Foster Community Resilience:** Build on local knowledge and existing community networks to support vulnerable individuals during emergencies.
6. **Review and Reflect:** Conduct regular post-emergency reviews to identify lessons learned and embed these insights into future planning efforts.

## 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 Karratha.

The DIEP forum was held on 30 October 2025 at the Karratha International Hotel in Karratha, Western Australia. 17 people from 13 organisations participated in this DIEP forum, having the following roles:

<b>Participant Role</b>	<b>Number</b>
Federal Government worker	1
State/Territory Government worker	3
Local Government worker	4
Emergency Services Personnel	1
Disability Service Provider	2
Community Service Provider	1
Aged Care Service Provider	1
Health Service Provider	1
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	3
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	1
<b>Other:</b>	
Education Support Teacher	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

## List of Participating Organisations

- 1 City of Karratha
- 2 Department of Communities
- 3 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 4 Department of Housing and Works
- 5 Embrace Healthcare Solutions
- 6 GROW Therapy Services
- 7 Help In Hand Customised Support Solutions
- 8 Karratha Primary School
- 9 Mighty Orchid Services Pty Ltd
- 10 National Disability Insurance Agency
- 11 One Tree Community Services Inc., Inclusion Support Program
- 12 People With Disabilities WA
- 13 Pilbara Disability Network



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