

Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum Report: Shire of Murray

29 August 2025



Image description: Seven people sit at a table discussing disability inclusive emergency management.



Acknowledgement:

This project was funded with support from the Australian Government, Disaster Ready Fund Round 2. It is administered by the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services and implemented in partnership with The University of Sydney and local council partners.

Citation: Collaborating4Inclusion (2026). *Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum Report: Shire of Murray*. Centre for Disability Research and Policy, The University of Sydney, 2006.

Contact:

Michelle Villeneuve

Collaborating.4Inclusion@sydney.edu.au

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Purpose | 4 |
| Overview of the Forum..... | 5 |
| Key Themes and Lessons Learned..... | 5 |
| 1. Organisational Preparedness is Often Overly Response-Focused..... | 5 |
| 2. Engaging Families and Communities in Emergency Planning..... | 6 |
| 3. Realistic Expectations and Communication of Roles..... | 6 |
| 4. The Value of Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness | 7 |
| (P-CEP) | 7 |
| 5. The Role of Technology in Emergency Preparedness | 7 |
| Promising Practices and Actionable Solutions..... | 8 |
| 1. Community-Led Communication Networks..... | 8 |
| 2. Reciprocal Evacuation Agreements | 10 |
| 3. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) | 10 |
| 4. Realistic Scenario-Based Training..... | 10 |
| Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward..... | 10 |
| Next Steps..... | 11 |
| Participant Demographics and Participating Organisations | 12 |
| List of Participating Organisations..... | 13 |

Introduction

Emergencies and disasters affect all members of the community, but people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted due to systemic barriers, fragmented support networks, and inaccessible planning frameworks. To address these challenges, the Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forums were facilitated by the Collaborating4Inclusion (C4I) research team. These forums aimed to foster cross-sector collaboration and strengthen local capacity for inclusive emergency management.

In Western Australia, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is committed to ensuring that emergency planning is both inclusive and intersectional. The DIEP forums were designed to identify and address the needs of people with disabilities while also identifying lessons and strategies applicable to other groups at higher risk during emergencies, such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, older adults, and people experiencing homelessness. This approach reflects DFES's focus on person-centred and capability-based strategies to ensure that emergency management practices are inclusive and accessible to all.

The forums are part of a collaborative initiative between DFES, local councils, and community networks to improve emergency preparedness for people with disabilities and other at-risk groups. To ensure accessibility and diverse representation, local councils—supported by DFES—used templates and guidance provided by the research team to invite participants, organise accessible venues, and engage a broad range of networks. Key stakeholders included:

- **People with disabilities and other at-risk groups** along with their carers, advocates, and representatives.
- **Service providers** from the community, disability, aged care, health, and social welfare sectors.
- **Emergency managers** from government and non-government organisations.

The forums introduced the **Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) Toolkit**, which comprises guiding **Principles, Practice Standards, a Maturity Framework**, and the **Organisational Emergency Preparedness**

(OEP) self-assessment. The C4I team facilitated interactive sessions, leading discussions on the DIEM Practice Standards—**Inclusive Planning, Strategic Partnerships, and Accessible Resourcing**. Participants were introduced to the OEP through a facilitated activity, where service providers shared actions they had already taken and engaged in collaborative learning to strengthen the continuity of services for the people they support. Each forum began with a **Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)** activity, which connected personal preparedness to organisational and community-level emergency planning.

To gain insight into the forums' effectiveness, participant feedback was gathered through a feedback survey. The survey captured what participants found valuable, the key lessons they learned, and the actions they planned to implement based on the DIEM approach.

In addition to facilitating the forums, **DFES actively supported each local council** before and after the forums **to engage with the DIEM Toolkit, complete their self-assessments, and develop targeted action plans**. While the forums served as a starting point, they were designed to lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration between DFES, local councils, and community networks. By initiating these relationships, the forums aimed to spark long-term partnerships, foster greater engagement, and encourage a collective approach to developing and implementing inclusive emergency management practices.

To further support capacity-building, participants were provided access to DIEM eLearning modules. Local and state government hosts were invited to participate in the DIEM Certificate Course, an online program introducing the DIEM Toolkit and self-assessment process. All participants were also granted access to open DIEM eLearning resources, enabling them to continue building their capacity for inclusive emergency planning.

Purpose

This report captures the experiences, ideas, and insights shared during the Murray 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 Murray 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

Through facilitated discussions, participants from the Murray DIEP Forum explored key themes across the four focus areas of the DIEM Toolkit: Understanding Emergency Plans of Service Providers, Inclusive Planning, Strategic Partnerships, and Accessible Resourcing. The following themes reflect participant insights, grounded in their contributions.

1. Organisational Preparedness is Often Overly Response-Focused

Participants observed that many organisations focus on emergency response rather than preparedness, creating a reactive rather than proactive approach. While fire drills and evacuation plans are in place, they often fail to account for the realities of emergencies, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“Even your best-laid plans are not going to be enough.”* (OEP Group 1)
- *“You think you’re prepared because you’ve had a fire drill... but the reality is so different.”* (OEP Group 2)

Reflection: There is an opportunity to develop more robust preparedness strategies that include realistic, scenario-based training and planning for both organisations and the individuals they serve.

2. Engaging Families and Communities in Emergency Planning

Both groups identified the need for greater involvement of families and community members in emergency preparedness. Strengthening local networks and connections was viewed as essential to addressing gaps in formal organisational plans and ensuring that vulnerable individuals have access to support during emergencies.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“If the neighbours are on board and make a plan—for someone to come, plan A, plan B—for the neighbour to get them out.”* (Accessible Resourcing)
- *“As a group in this part of town, who is going to check on your neighbour who maybe is in a wheelchair?”* (OEP Group 1)

Reflection: Building stronger community relationships and educating families on emergency plans can help reduce risks for individuals who may otherwise be overlooked during emergencies.

3. Realistic Expectations and Communication of Roles

Participants identified a need to manage expectations around the roles of organisations, emergency services, and individuals during emergencies. Misunderstandings about the responsibilities of emergency services were identified as a recurring challenge, particularly in aged care and independent living contexts.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“A lot of them said, ‘Oh, we’re just going to call Triple Zero and get someone to come get us.’”* (OEP Group 2)
- *“If there’s a fire right now, you think you’re prepared because you’ve had a fire drill. But the reality is so different.”* (OEP Group 2)

Reflection: Establishing realistic expectations through education and clear communication can reduce anxiety and confusion while fostering resilience among individuals, families, and organisations.

4. The Value of Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)

The importance of creating **Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)** plans was emphasised, particularly for individuals with disabilities and those living independently. Participants noted that P-CEP plans should be developed collaboratively and shared with trusted organisations and responders to ensure effective responses during emergencies.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“If we could get every family to write an event plan... and anyone who wanted to share anything with us... could actually share that with us.”* (OEP Group 1)
- *“There still needs to be... how are we empowering service providers to empower their clients to create emergency plans themselves?”* (OEP Group 2)

Reflection: Encouraging the development of P-CEP plans through collaboration between individuals, families, and service providers can enhance preparedness and promote autonomy for people with disabilities.

5. The Role of Technology in Emergency Preparedness

Participants recognised the potential for technology to support emergency preparedness and response. Tools such as client management systems, emergency apps, and digital data-sharing platforms were identified as valuable but should be used with clear governance to address privacy concerns.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“We have a client management system, and all our support workers use an app, so they have access to all the client information.”* (OEP Group 1)
- *“We do our polygon on the map and it goes ping, ping, ping, ping, and shows you exactly who those people are and where to get them.”* (OEP Group 2)

Reflection: Technology can streamline emergency response efforts, but its effectiveness relies on reliable infrastructure, data accuracy, and trust in its governance.

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. Community-Led Communication Networks

Description: Leveraging trusted community communicators to disseminate emergency information to vulnerable populations, particularly in areas with limited connectivity.

Example: *“The local government worked with the Shire of Dandaragan... they would take the emergency warning information, copy and paste it into an email, and send it to about 10 or 15 communicators within the community.”* (OEP Group 1)

Leverages Existing Capacities: Utilises local knowledge and relationships to ensure information reaches individuals who are unlikely to access digital emergency notifications. See Case Example.

Case Example: Shire of Dandaragan – Community-Led Communication Networks

During the Murray DIEP Forum, participants discussed the Shire of Dandaragan’s innovative approach to emergency communication during the Savantes fires as an inspiring case study. This example highlighted how local governments can leverage **trusted community networks** to address the challenges of communicating emergency information to vulnerable populations, particularly in situations where traditional systems fail.

In the Savantes fires, communication networks broke down quickly, leaving many residents—particularly older adults and people with disabilities—without access to timely emergency updates. To address this, the Shire of Dandaragan collaborated with trusted community communicators, such as local leaders and individuals with strong community ties (e.g., a bowls club manager). Emergency warning messages were copied into emails and sent to around 10–15 communicators, who shared the updates with others in their networks. This approach ensured that critical information reached vulnerable

individuals, including those without access to digital tools like the Emergency WA app.

This example demonstrates:

- **Adaptability to Local Contexts:** By identifying trusted communicators with existing community connections, the Shire of Dandaragan ensured that emergency information was effectively disseminated.
- **Bridging Communication Gaps:** The approach addressed known barriers, such as the inability of some populations to access digital communication tools, helping to reach those most at risk.
- **Community-Led Solutions:** The strategy showcased how local networks can complement formal emergency services by leveraging grassroots efforts to support vulnerable populations.

Why This Example Matters for Murray

Although the Shire of Dandaragan is geographically distant from the Shire of Murray, this case study offers valuable insights for similar local-level action. Murray, with its mix of rural and urban communities, faces challenges related to communication barriers and isolation. By identifying and engaging **trusted community communicators**, such as neighbourhood leaders or volunteers from local clubs and organisations, Murray could ensure that emergency information reaches even the most isolated residents.

This example underscores the importance of **local relationships and pre-planning** to create effective, community-led communication systems. Such systems ensure vulnerable individuals are not left behind during emergencies and that information is disseminated quickly and effectively when traditional communication channels are unavailable. By adopting a similar approach, Murray can strengthen its local emergency preparedness and build community capacity to support one another during crises.

2. Reciprocal Evacuation Agreements

Description: Establishing formal agreements between facilities to share resources and provide temporary shelter during emergencies.

Example: *"We also use [aged care facility], which is an aged care facility in Waroona. We collaborate with those as well."* (OEP Group 2)

Leverages Existing Capacities: Builds on existing relationships between facilities to create a safety net for vulnerable individuals.

3. Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)

Description: Supporting individuals to develop personalised emergency plans tailored to their needs, while ensuring these plans are shared with trusted organisations and responders.

Example: *"How are we empowering service providers to empower their staff and their clients to create emergency plans themselves?"* (OEP Group 2)

Leverages Existing Capacities: Builds on individuals' lived experiences and existing service provider relationships to enhance preparedness and resilience.

4. Realistic Scenario-Based Training

Description: Conducting emergency drills and training that reflect the realities of rapid-onset or large-scale emergencies.

Example: *"When you do fire training, I don't think it prepares you. By the time you get them there, the fire's moving freaking really quickly."* (OEP Group 2)

Leverages Existing Capacities: Builds organisational capacity by enhancing staff preparedness and confidence in handling emergencies.

Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

The forum discussions revealed several areas of misunderstanding and tension that represent opportunities for growth and improvement:

1. **Responsibility Deflection:** Some participants assumed that emergency services or external organisations would "come and rescue" their clients during emergencies. This revealed a gap in understanding about the limits of emergency services' capacity in large-scale incidents.

- *“In that case, we would use patient transfers... and would also use the two buses we have.”* (OEP Group 2)
- 2. **Unrealistic Drills and Training:** Fire drills and evacuation plans, while helpful, are often not reflective of actual emergency conditions. This can lead to a false sense of preparedness.
 - *“You think you’re prepared because you’ve had a fire drill... but the reality is so different.”* (OEP Group 2)
- 3. **Misunderstandings Around Vulnerability Registers:** Both groups discussed registers of vulnerable individuals but highlighted systemic and ethical challenges in their use, such as ensuring accuracy and managing expectations.
 - *“The minute they put their name on that vulnerable register, they think there’s an expectation that they’re going to be safe.”* (OEP Group 2)

These dynamics present opportunities for participating organisations to engage in critical reflection, reframe their assumptions, and collaboratively develop more inclusive and actionable preparedness plans.

Next Steps

Participants are encouraged to use the **DIEM Toolkit** and **eLearning resources** to guide their self-assessment and action planning. Key next steps include:

- Supporting the development and testing of **Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP)** plans for individuals with disabilities and integrating these into broader organisational plans.
- Conducting realistic, scenario-based emergency drills to better prepare staff and residents for the complexities of real-life emergencies.
- Hosting family engagement sessions to educate families about organisational plans and their roles during emergencies.
- Strengthening community networks to identify and support vulnerable individuals in emergencies.
- Building reciprocal evacuation agreements with nearby facilities and organisations to ensure mutual aid during emergencies.
- Addressing the psychological and emotional needs of vulnerable populations by including comfort items and support strategies in emergency plans.

By taking these actions, local stakeholders can build on their existing strengths and foster a more inclusive, accessible, and effective emergency management framework. Recognising that systemic change will require sustained advocacy, participants are encouraged to continue engaging with initiatives like DIEM to advocate for broader policy and structural reforms.

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, Shire of Murray.

The DIEP forum was held on 29 August 2025 at the Lovegrove Sports Pavilion in Pinjarra, Western Australia. 18 people from 8 organisations participated in this DIEP forum, having the following roles:

| Participant Role | Number |
|---|---------------|
| Federal Government worker | 0 |
| State/Territory Government worker | 5 |
| Local Government worker | 2 |
| Emergency Services Personnel | 2 |
| Disability Service Provider | 1 |
| Community Service Provider | 3 |
| Aged Care Service Provider | 3 |
| Health Service Provider | 0 |
| Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation | 0 |
| Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation) | 1 |
| Other: | 1 |
| Total | 18 |

List of Participating Organisations

- 1 Bedingfeld Park
- 2 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 3 Down Syndrome WA
- 4 Midway Community Care
- 5 Peel Community Care
- 6 Pinjarra Senior High School
- 7 Rockingham Hospital
- 8 Shire of Murray



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

Citation: Collaborating4Inclusion (2026). *Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP) Forum Report: Shire of Murray*. Centre for Disability Research and Policy, University of Sydney, 2006.

