

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

28 August 2025



Image description: Five people sit around a table discussing disability inclusive emergency management. In the background, there is another table of people in conversation.



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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 Swan 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 Swan 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 Swan 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. Reactive Approaches and Limited Preparedness

A key concern raised by participants was the prevalence of response-heavy approaches to emergency management, with limited attention to prevention and preparedness. This reactive focus often leaves people with disabilities more vulnerable during emergencies and hinders recovery efforts.

- *"It's more responsive than preventative."* (OEP Group 1)
- *"We don't have a model that fits all of that. Like if someone goes through an emergency, we don't go, 'OK, here's our checklist.'"* (OEP Group 1)
- *"All the money is invested into response... whereas the majority of the money, if you invested it into prevention and preparedness, your response and recovery would actually reduce."* (OEP Group 1)

2. Gaps in Service Provider Roles and Accountability

Participants highlighted a lack of clarity around service provider roles in emergency management. There is a concerning tendency for organisations to pass responsibility between each other, with many assuming emergency preparedness falls outside their remit. This lack of accountability can leave people with disabilities unsupported during emergencies.

- *"A lot of agencies and services, I feel like it's, 'It's not our role, so we're not going to do it.'"* (OEP Group 1)
- *"Making them aware that they have a responsibility in this space... we don't spend enough time on that."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 1)
- *"The reliance on assumptions that haven't been tested... so many assumptions."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 1)

3. Strengthening Cross-Sector Collaboration

Participants acknowledged the need for stronger collaboration across sectors to address siloed communication and fragmented support systems. Many organisations operate in isolation, resulting in inefficiencies in resource allocation and response coordination.

- *"There has just not been that strategic partnership yet... Sometimes it's just like this siloed effect."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 1)
- *"We don't know unless they want to be known, or they're connected to some sort of service or the NDIS."* (OEP Group 1)
- *"Stakeholder swap meetings or even informal resource-sharing frameworks could solve some of these problems."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 1)

4. Cultural Awareness and Inclusion

The forum highlighted the need to prioritise cultural competency and inclusivity in emergency planning. Participants spoke about the importance of tailoring emergency communication and resources to meet the needs of multicultural and linguistically diverse communities, as well as other marginalised groups.

- *"We need to talk to community leaders... and look at how we can tailor emergency preparedness workshops to individual community groups."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 2)
- *"Cultural competency is important... there's nothing worse than when you're joining a brigade and you don't feel like you belong there."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 2)
- *"For the transient community, trust is so low of government... but NGOs and service providers can build those trusting relationships."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 2)

5. Housing Accessibility and Structural Barriers

Participants drew attention to the role of inaccessible housing and inadequate structural planning in exacerbating risks for people with disabilities during emergencies. They expressed concerns about the lack of proactive consideration for emergency scenarios in housing and building codes.

- *"Even in evacuation plans... cool, these amazing buildings are inclusive because they have elevators... but how do you get someone in a wheelchair down if there's a fire?"* (OEP Group 1)
- *"Housing doesn't meet... even just for the standard residential housing, it still doesn't meet wheelchair accessibility."* (OEP Group 1)

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. Embedding Emergency Preparedness into Individual and Organisational Plans

Description: Integrate emergency preparedness into person-centred plans for individuals and organisational business continuity plans. This includes proactively identifying and addressing gaps in support networks and resources.

Illustrative Example: *"How do we help our community prevent this? Or how do our organisations help prevent that? There's never that focus."* (OEP Group 1)

Leverage: Builds on existing frameworks for person-centred planning and community care services, extending these to include emergency scenarios.

2. Facilitating Cross-Sector Resource Sharing

Description: Create forums or platforms for resource sharing between organisations. This could include centralised databases or informal "stakeholder swap meets" to share information on resources and contacts.

Illustrative Example: *"Potentially an action from that could be creating a single source of truth, like a CRM system."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 1)

Leverage: Draws on existing stakeholder networks and community development initiatives to foster collaboration and reduce silos.

3. Community-Led Emergency Preparedness Workshops

Description: Partner with cultural leaders and trusted community organisations to deliver workshops that build awareness and preparedness for emergencies.

Illustrative Example: *"We need to talk to community leaders and consider tailored approaches for diverse groups."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 2)

Leverage: Utilises trusted local leaders and community hubs to reach marginalised groups and promote culturally competent preparedness.

4. Inclusive Design of Evacuation Centres

Description: Develop evacuation centres with sensory rooms, prayer spaces, and accessible facilities to accommodate people with disabilities and diverse cultural needs.

Illustrative Example: *"People with disabilities—or whatever—would need special spaces, maybe where they can have a bit of privacy, sensory rooms... prayer rooms."* (Accessible Resourcing Group 2)

Leverage: Builds on existing knowledge of community needs and partnerships with local organisations.

5. Addressing Housing Accessibility in Emergency Planning

Description: Advocate for housing design and building codes that account for both accessibility and emergency preparedness, ensuring safety and mobility in emergencies.

Illustrative Example: *“The stairwell is designed to be pressurised... but do they know that? Or do they just go, ‘Great, I’m now stuck on this floor that’s burning.’”*
(OEP Group 1)

Leverage: Collaboration with housing developers, local governments, and advocacy organisations to align housing policies with inclusive emergency planning.

Reflexivity: Considerations for Moving Forward

The forum encouraged participants to confront several key areas of tension and misunderstanding:

- **Responsibility Deflection:** Many organisations deflect responsibility for emergency preparedness, assuming it falls outside their role. This approach risks leaving critical gaps in support for people with disabilities during emergencies.
 - *“A lot of services think, ‘It’s not our role,’ which passes the buck to someone else who may also think it’s not their role.”* (OEP Group 1)
- **Assumptions About Vulnerable Populations:** Participants acknowledged the risks of relying on assumptions about who needs support or how they will receive it. These assumptions, when untested, can result in people with specific support needs being overlooked.
 - *“We don’t know unless they want to be known, or they’re connected to some sort of service or the NDIS.”* (OEP Group 1)
- **Cultural and Psychological Barriers:** Emergency planning often overlooks the psychological impact of emergencies and the cultural diversity of communities. Addressing these barriers requires active community engagement and tailored preparedness strategies.

These dynamics represent opportunities for growth. By addressing them, stakeholders in Swan can foster greater collaboration, inclusivity, and preparedness.

Next Steps

This report invites participants to build on the insights and solutions discussed in the forum by undertaking the following next steps:

1. **Use the DIEM Toolkit and eLearning Resources:** Conduct self-assessments and develop action plans that reflect organisational strengths, gaps, and priorities.
2. **Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Break down silos by building strategic partnerships and creating platforms for resource sharing and joint planning.
3. **Prioritise Community Engagement:** Partner with community leaders and organisations to build trust and deliver culturally tailored emergency preparedness workshops.
4. **Invest in Preparedness and Prevention:** Advocate for greater investment in proactive planning measures to reduce reliance on reactive responses in future emergencies.
5. **Promote Inclusion and Diversity:** Ensure the voices of people with lived experience of disability are actively included in every phase of emergency management, and embed cultural competency into emergency planning.

By leveraging local strengths and resources, fostering collaboration, and embracing diversity, Swan can lead the way in disability-inclusive emergency planning and create a safer, more resilient community for all.

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 Swan.

The DIEP forum was held on 28 August 2025 at the Caversham Community Centre in Caversham, 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	4
Local Government worker	8
Emergency Services Personnel	3
Disability Service Provider	2
Community Service Provider	1
Aged Care Service Provider	0
Health Service Provider	0
Worker/Member for Disability Advocacy or Representative Organisation	0
Individual with lived experience of disability (not representing an organisation)	0
Other:	0
Total	18

List of Participating Organisations

- 1 City of Swan
- 2 Department of Communities, Disability and Seniors Practice Support
- 3 Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- 4 Mission Australia
- 5 NDSP Plan Managers
- 6 Red Cross Australia
- 7 Sikh Gurdwara Perth Inc.
- 8 Swan State Emergency Services



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