

National disaster recovery principle 1: Understand the context

Speed read

- Successful recovery is based on an understanding of the community context, with each community having its own history, values, dynamics, risks, stressors, vulnerabilities and strengths.
- Community and individual resilience is influenced by a range of geographic, social and demographic characteristics.
- The impact on the community may extend beyond the geographical boundaries where the disaster occurred.

Key points

Different disasters will have different recovery processes. A range of factors will affect the recovery process, including the hazard type (natural, technological or malevolent), the scale of the disaster, whether the disaster is rapid or slow onset, and the geographic context.

Understand the social context of affected communities. Recovery managers need to consider the social context of affected populations. Some demographic characteristics may impact the vulnerability of communities. These are summarised in the table below.

Social considerations for recovery	
Characteristic	Descriptor
Ageing population	Increasing age can bring deteriorating health and mobility and isolation.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	Have their own beliefs and values around disaster events, how to respond to them and how to manage the reactions of others in their communities. It is important that the needs and wishes of these communities are understood and a concerted effort is made to work with the community to support these needs.
Children and young people	Have very different needs to adults in emergency planning and require targeted and specialised interventions.
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	May struggle to communicate effectively with emergency and relief workers and access information that helps make sense of the event and its aftermath.
Farmers	May face the distressing task of dealing with dead and injured livestock.
Gender	Women, men, and people of diverse gender and sexual identities may require initiatives categorised by gender in recognition of their different needs.

Business owners and operators	May have restricted access to the affected area for themselves, their staff and customers. Lack of access to critical infrastructure can compound the disruption.
People with companion animals, pets, or animal welfare responsibilities	May be temporarily separated from, or have lost, their companion animals or pets. Those who have animal welfare responsibilities will need special consideration.
People with disabilities	May not have access to support, services, personal care, assisted transport, regular medical services and therapies, at least in the early relief and recovery phase. Evacuation and/or relocation from the disaster area may also pose specific challenges.
People living on low incomes	May experience an exacerbation of disadvantage following a disaster. Disasters are one of the main events that can tip people into poverty.
Population shifts	People moving from urban areas to the peri-urban fringe may have less experience and knowledge of disaster risks. Homeless people, overseas tourists and other travellers, may lack social networks – their needs in recovery should not be overlooked.
Recovery workforce	Retaining people with the skills and capacity to develop and deliver recovery services in paid and volunteer roles may be challenging.

Family violence increases after disasters. Family violence is always unacceptable and is a crime in all states and territories in Australia. Research indicates that family violence increases after disasters in four main ways: there is an increase in new violence; there is an intensification of pre-existing violence; the common reluctance of women to report violence against them is intensified after a disaster; and there is a reduction in normal supports.

Some emergency management practices can inadvertently exacerbate some of the issues faced by women experiencing family violence. Rigid arrangements regarding grant payments, temporary housing options and evacuation services often do not take family violence into consideration.

Take action

- Put up the [National Principles for Disaster Recovery poster](https://bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciplesPoster) in your office or recovery centre (bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciplesPoster)
- Use the [Checklist: Applying the principles post-disaster](https://bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciples) (SRRG 2018) (bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciples)
- Use the [National Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines and Checklist](https://bit.ly/RecoveryGEM) (bit.ly/RecoveryGEM)

More information

- [Community Recovery Handbook](#) (2018)
- [Helping children and young people cope with Crisis: information for parents and caregivers](#) (Australian Red Cross, 2010)
- [Bushfire Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre Project: Managing Animals in Disasters](#)