

Evacuation planning: Stage 4 – Shelter

Speed read

- Shelter is provided away from the immediate or potential effects of a hazard and aims to meet basic needs of people affected by the emergency.
- People have unique shelter needs that vary throughout the evacuation process.
- Evacuation centre management requires support from multiple organisations and services.

Key points

There are two types of shelter spaces: (1) Planned and designated spaces that are the subject of guidelines. (2) Informal, community initiated sheltering solutions that may emerge in support of evacuated communities.

Authority and responsibility. Evacuation plans identify the lead organisation with authority and responsibility to manage the shelter stage, this will vary depending on the hazard. State or local emergency management arrangements will plan and organise various support organisations to provide support at shelter sites, including evacuation centres. Services required at an evacuation centre change over time, so support organisations need sufficient capability and scalable capacity (surge workforce).

Shelter options:

- Self-shelter options: e.g. staying with family or friends, using commercial accommodation, should be documented in household emergency plans. Some people will not be able to organise their own shelter options.
- Assisted shelter options: (1) evacuation centres, (2) commercial accommodation with pre-agreed arrangements, (3) Specialist facilities such as for people with higher level health and disability care needs.

Consider unique needs of First Nations peoples, people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), women, children, people who are pregnant or breastfeeding, people experiencing homelessness, people experiencing family violence, people with disabilities and older people, people with animals (including assistance animals).

Evacuee support, health safety and security considerations: Plan for access to healthcare, psychosocial support, child friendly spaces, information and updates, and recovery support programs.

Family reunification and registration: Register evacuees' presence at places of shelter and facilitate reunification. Give people different options of how to register, collected into a central system.

Communications in the shelter stage. Provide timely, useful, understandable information in appropriate languages to all evacuees. Remember to keep information and feedback channels open with evacuees in self-shelter options and informal, community-initiated shelters as well as people in evacuation centres.

Documentation. Provide designated shelter details (including person capacity, floor plans, arrangements with owners and ongoing management of the facilities, contact numbers, register of supplies). Include templates for registration, incident report forms, situation reporting templates, resupply request forms.

Evacuation centres

The purpose of an evacuation centre is to temporarily house evacuees who have limited capacity to find alternate accommodation following withdrawal from an area of risk. Unlike other shelter options, an evacuation centre is often not purpose-built for accommodation, but is adapted for this purpose infrequently, or as required. Suitable venues include sporting complexes, community and neighbourhood centres, entertainment venues, showgrounds.

Safety and security in evacuation centres: Appropriately induct staff, volunteers and evacuees to the premises. Meet fire safety, food safety, waste management and control of communicable diseases requirements. Remember security and safety in relation to people who may have intervention orders against them or are registered sex offenders. Restrict access to the centre to evacuees and approved personnel who have a role at the evacuation centre.

Communications in evacuation centres: Provide signage on code of conduct and behavioural expectations, including zero tolerance for drugs, alcohol, antisocial behaviours, racism, homophobia, and domestic or family violence. Use signage / symbols that help people feel welcome and safe, such as LGBTIQ+ symbols.

Documentation. Detail management and reporting structures of the centre, including roles and responsibilities of supporting organisations.

Take action

- Understand sheltering terminology across states and territories– read Appendix 1 of [Evacuation Planning \(AIDR 2023\)](#)
- Consider what makes an evacuation centre fit for purpose. Read the list of recommendations on page 30 of the [Evacuation Planning \(AIDR 2023\)](#)
- Plan for return and recovery of evacuees. See Quick Guide Stage 5: Return, Chapter 7 of [Evacuation Planning \(AIDR 2023\)](#)

More information

- [Evacuation Planning](#), Chapter 6 (AIDR 2023)
- [Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines](#) (Gender and Disaster Australia, 2023)
- [National Planning Principles for Animals in Emergencies](#) (Australian Veterinary Association 2014)
- [Emergency planning for children and young people](#) (Department of Human Services, Victoria)
- [Australian Red Cross guidance on managing evacuation centres](#) (2017)
- [Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers](#) (AIDR 2017).