



Australian  
Breastfeeding  
Association

## Bushfire babies

ABA's Bushfire Project: building disaster  
resilience in Eurobodalla Shire and beyond



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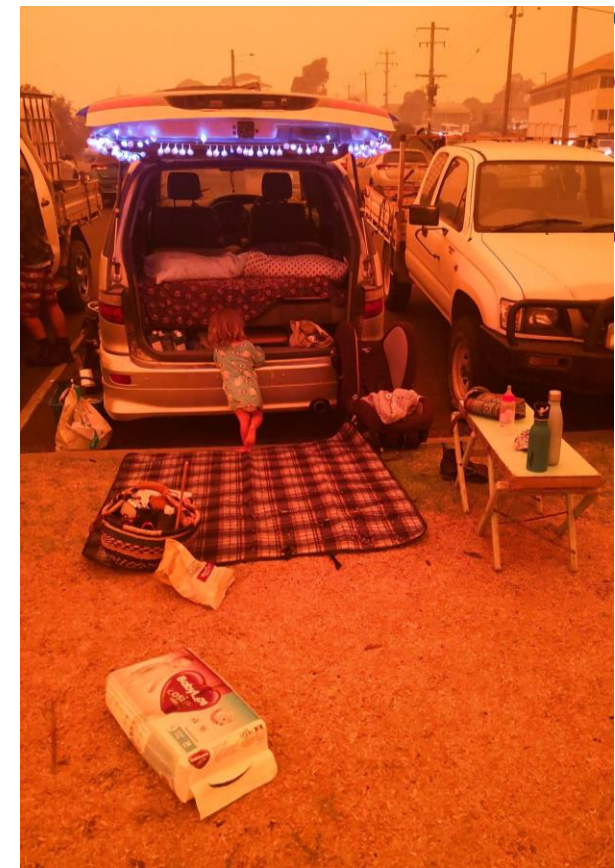
Community Engagement Officer  
Local Project Officer

[breastfeeding.asn.au](http://breastfeeding.asn.au)

# Acknowledgment of Country

The Australian Breastfeeding Association acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and the continuation of the cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

# The Black Summer Bushfires



# Community Protection for Infants and Young Children in Bushfire Emergencies Project



- Launched in July 2022, Eurobodalla Shire NSW
- Aims to:
  - establish an evidence-base to improve planning
  - increase awareness of the needs of young families in emergencies
  - develop resources for parents and emergency responders.

# Brief overview of the project

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Babies and Young Children in the Black Summer (BiBS) Study

- Conducted July - Dec 2022
- Report launch June 2023

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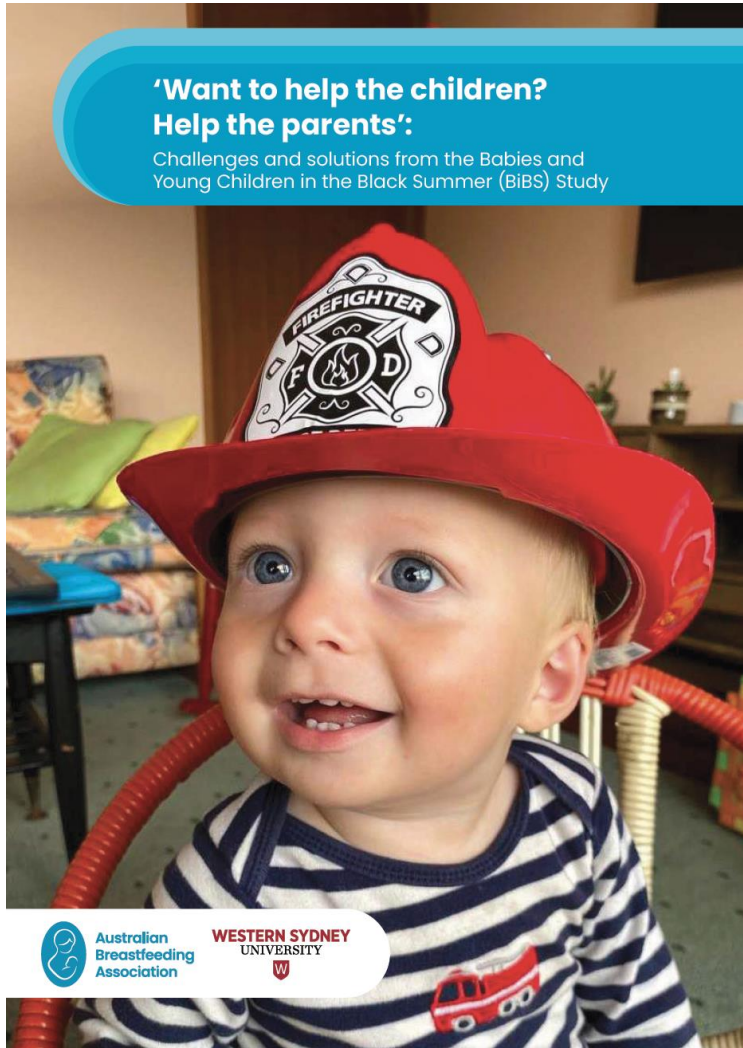
Development of resources, stakeholder/community engagement and education

- June 2023 to present

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Where to next? Future planning for the project and the Eurobodalla



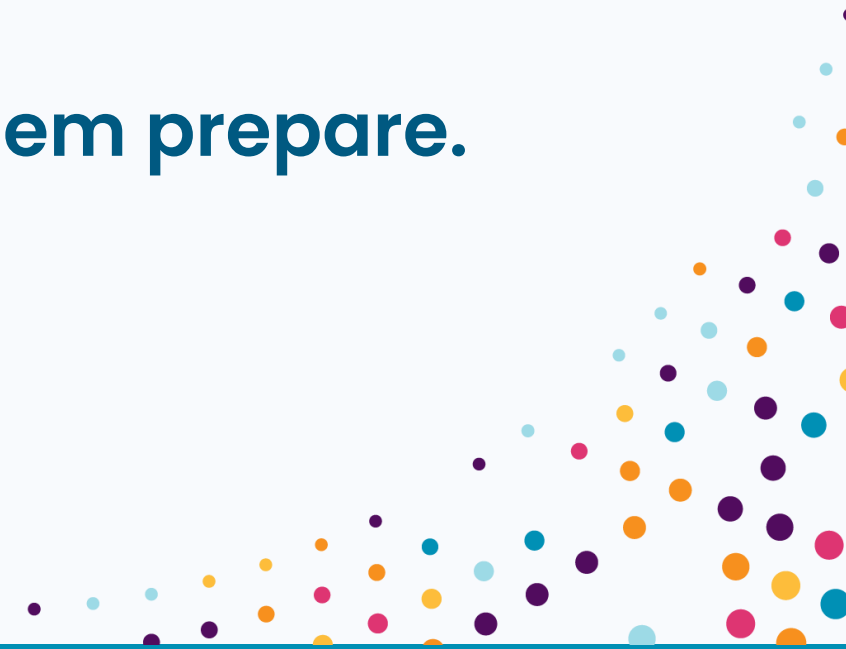


- First Australian research considering the experiences of caregivers of babies and toddlers in a disaster.
- Surveyed and interviewed 256 parents of children from newborn to four years old at the time of the Black Summer Bushfires.
- Surveyed and interviewed 63 emergency responders.
- Interviewed 20 global emergency experts for national policy and practice review.

# Preparedness

**Parents were not prepared, this delayed evacuation and meant they evacuated without necessary items.**

**They lacked resources to help them prepare.**





# Preparedness recommendation and outcomes

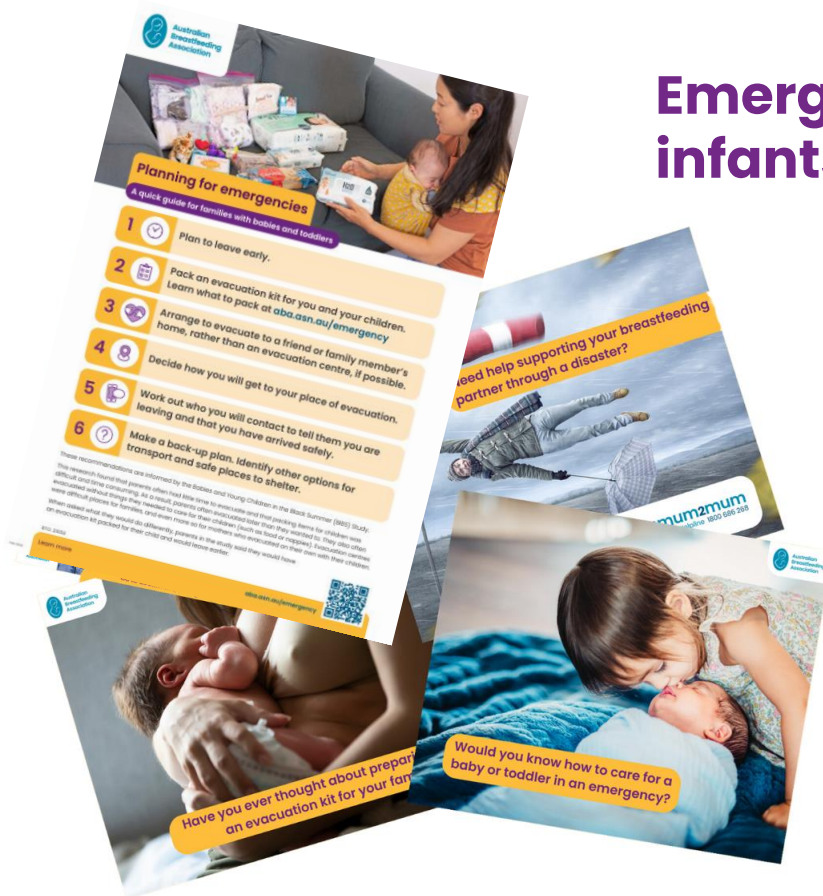
## Emergency preparedness resources for families with infants and young children should be developed.

### What we did

- Evacuation kit lists for various ages and feeding methods
- Planning for emergencies guide
- ABA social media Emergency Prep Week Campaign

### Engaging communities and sharing resources

- Tested and promoted these resources at local events and through local networks.
- These free resources for families are now available online at [aba.asn.au/emergency](http://aba.asn.au/emergency)
- Emergency Prep Week campaign will be launched on @ozbreastfeeding from September 16 – 23.
- Currently working with emergency organisations like the RFS to promote these resources as part of annual Get Ready Day activities.





# Emergency response

**Evacuation centres were challenging and often hazardous environments for families with children.**



# Response recommendation and outcomes



## Separate spaces in evacuation centres

### What we did

- Persistent advocacy at various governmental levels to emphasise the need for separate spaces for families with young children in evacuation centres
- Created evacuation centre scenarios
- Community Preparedness Workshops (CPW)

### Engaging communities and sharing resources

- Participated in the Moruya emergency evacuation exercise to assess and improve evacuation centre setups
- Our CPW had 28 people attending including members of council, childcare workers NEMA, RFS.

# Response recommendation and outcomes



## Emergency responders and health workers should receive training on supporting the caregivers of very young children in disasters.

### What we did

- Free eLearning module for emergency workers
- Community Breastfeeding Mentoring (CBM) workshops
- Partnered with Southern NSW Local Health District to enhance planning and support for infant feeding during disasters.
- Infographic
- Emergency animations

### Engaging communities and sharing resources

- 100 eLearning module completions since September 2023
- We ran two CBM workshops 28 attendees coming from all over the Eurobodalla region.

# Infant feeding

**Problems with feeding infants and toddlers were common (breastfeeding, formula feeding and solid foods)**



## Accurate information, skilled support and practical resources must be made available to support safe infant feeding in emergencies.



### What we did

- Infant feeding fact sheets (i.e. cup feeding, hand expressing, formula feeding and more)
- Emergency breastfeeding support magnets
- Model policy and guidance for managing infant formula donations
- Increased awareness of breastfeeding as an emergency preparedness activity
- CBM workshops

### Engaging communities and sharing resources

- Gathered feedback on sample kits during workshops and at an array of community events.
- Made resources free and available online at [aba.asn.au/emergency](http://aba.asn.au/emergency)

# Recovery

**Parents struggled to care for their babies and toddlers in recovery but children younger than school or preschool age were overlooked in recovery interventions.**



## Recovery support for families with young children

### What we did

- Developed and sought feedback on a Mother Baby Area (MBA) Guide for the Australian and New Zealand context.

### Engaging communities and sharing resources

- Worked with local organisations to plan for an MBA in the Eurobodalla.
- Advocacy: Worked with Local and State government and NSW Reconstruction Authority in an effort to include MBAs in statewide emergency plans.



## Playdates with emergency services

Collaboration between the local councils Children's Services department and emergency services saw this event reach six separate areas within the Eurobodalla Shire.

Emergency services in attendance included:

- Rural Fire Service
- Fire & Rescue
- Police
- Ambulance
- SES
- Marine Rescue
- Red Cross
- Eurobodalla Children's Services
- Australian Breastfeeding Association





## Moving forward our project team is still working in collaboration with:

- **Australian College of Midwives** – Birthing in emergencies guide and birth kit
- **KidSafe** – Safe sleep information
- **NSW Health** – Signage for evacuation centres
- **Local Health District, Primary Health Network, Local & State Government, NSW Reconstruction Authority** – Mother Baby Areas for recovery.



# Challenges



- Small team, BIG project
- ABA is not an emergency organisation.
- Expanding reach outside of ABA's normal audience
- Participant fatigue during recruitment
- Having very little ability to tap into the planning side of emergencies at a local, state, or federal level
- Being bounced around members of government
- Changes in positions, staff moving on

# Looking forward – What's next?

Finalise MBA  
Guidebook,  
continue to  
work on getting  
it into plans

Finalise all  
partnership  
resources

Official  
resources  
launch

Additional  
grants to  
continue to  
develop new  
resources

Partner with  
other  
organisations  
to continue to  
support  
families with  
very young  
children in  
disasters after  
the project is  
finished

Launch ABA  
Emergency  
Prep Week  
campaign

Playdates with  
Emergency  
Services

Collect  
feedback and  
evaluate use of  
resources in  
future  
emergencies

**Our final wish:** That families are better informed and prepared for disasters; and that during and after disasters they are better supported.

# What you can do to support this project



[aba.asn.au/emergency](https://aba.asn.au/emergency)  
[@protectinginfantsinemergencies](https://twitter.com/protectinginfantsinemergencies)

## Spread the word

- Link up with us on social media
- Share our content

## Get involved

- Download and help distribute our resources
- Volunteer to take our research into your local area and spread amongst your community and other organisations

## Advocate for change

- Write to your local member

## Join our network

- Join our mailing list

# Come and chat with our team



You can find a member of our team throughout the conference in **Resilience Lane** and at the **Poster Presentations**:

- Learn more about ABA's Bushfire Project
- Pick up some of our resources
- Chat to our team about how we can support you in your role

Alternatively, you can reach us via email:

[michelle.hamrosi@breastfeeding.asn.au](mailto:michelle.hamrosi@breastfeeding.asn.au)

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## Thank you!

To the mums, dads, grandparents, community members and emergency responders in Australia and overseas who shared their experiences and photos for the BiBS study.

To the ABA volunteers and staff who have given their time and skills to support the project.

To the Australian Government for funding the research via the Preparing Australian Communities grant program.

To our team, Karleen and Alex, for their dedication and hard work on the project.

