

Possibility Lab - Recovery Exercise

Area Profile



Description

Riverview is a semi-rural township located approximately 60 km from a major metropolitan centre, positioned along a low-lying river. The area is characterised by a mix of established residential neighbourhoods, newer housing developments, and surrounding agricultural land. The river and nearby wetlands are central to the town's identity, supporting recreation, tourism, and local livelihoods.

The town has a population of approximately 6,500 residents and has experienced steady growth over the past decade, driven by housing affordability and lifestyle migration. However, significant parts of the community are located within mapped flood-prone areas, with seasonal flooding occurring and major flood events recorded every 15–20 years.

Demographics and Social Profile

Riverview has a diverse but uneven social profile, with varying levels of social and economic resilience across the community.

- Approximately 25% of residents are aged 65+, higher than the state average
- Growing number of young families in new housing estates
- Small but increasing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population
- Lower levels of formal education and income in some long-established areas

While overall disadvantage is moderate, there are pockets of more social at risk groups, particularly among:

- Older residents living alone
- Low-income households in older housing stock
- Renters with limited financial resilience
- Individuals reliant on casual or seasonal employment

Social isolation is an emerging issue, particularly for elderly residents and those living in outlying rural properties with limited transport access.

Community Networks and Social Capital

Riverview benefits from strong informal community networks, which play a critical role in preparedness and recovery.

- Active volunteer groups (e.g., local SES support, sports groups and an active community association)
- Strong neighbour-to-neighbour support culture, especially in older parts of town
- A well-utilised community hall and local sports clubs acting as social hubs
- Faith-based groups and service clubs (e.g., Rotary, Lions) contributing to community cohesion

However, newer residents in developing estates tend to have weaker local connections, which can reduce awareness of risk and available support during emergencies.

Housing and Living Conditions

- Mix of owner-occupied homes and a smaller rental market
- Older housing in flood-prone areas often not built to modern flood resilience standards
- New developments expanding into marginal or low-lying land
- Limited availability of short-term emergency accommodation

Housing affordability pressures have led some residents to settle in higher-risk areas, increasing exposure to flood impacts.

Access and Inclusion

- Limited public transport, with high reliance on private vehicles
- One main access road, which is prone to flooding and isolation during major events
- Digital connectivity is moderate, but some rural areas experience unreliable coverage

Barriers to accessing services may affect:

- Older adults
- People with disabilities
- Low-income households without transport

Health and Wellbeing

- Small local medical clinic, with larger health services located 30–40 km away
- Higher prevalence of chronic health conditions among older residents
- Limited local mental health and disability services

Flood events have previously contributed to stress, anxiety, and longer-term mental health impacts, particularly for residents experiencing repeated inundation.

Economic and Social Stability

Riverview has a small local service centre including a small supermarket, service station, pharmacy, café, primary school, local motel, medical clinic, small hardware store and community hall. More specialised services, including hospital care, major retail and government services, are located in the nearest regional township approximately one hour away.

- Employment largely based in agriculture, tourism, and small local businesses
- High dependence on local conditions and seasonal income
- Limited business continuity planning among small operators

Financial vulnerability can reduce the capacity of households to prepare for, respond to, and recover from flood events.

Key Social Vulnerabilities in a Flood Scenario

- Older and isolated residents requiring welfare checks and assisted evacuation
- Households with limited financial resources unable to recover quickly
- Socially disconnected new residents less aware of risks and support systems
- Displacement pressures due to limited accommodation options
- Increased demand for relief services, including food, shelter, and psychosocial support

Community Strengths for Recovery

- Established volunteer base and strong local leadership
- Previous flood experience improving risk awareness
- Community facilities that can function as relief and recovery centres
- Strong sense of local identity and willingness to support recovery efforts

Disaster Recovery Scenario

RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY PROFILE

POST-DISASTER COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Our community has been impacted by a major flood. Recovery is underway, but many people are still facing significant challenges.



6,500
residents

All parts of the community affected

Significant housing impact

Many homes damaged or uninhabitable

Many households displaced

Staying with family and friends, or in temporary options

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

950
properties affected

- 350 homes deemed uninhabitable
- 600 experiencing moderate damage

1,000
people displaced

Staying with family and friends, or in temporary accommodation

Stress, fatigue and frustration increasing

Uncertainty about housing, finances and the future

HOUSING & DISPLACEMENT

- Many homes damaged or unsafe to live in
- Shortage of rental and temporary accommodation
- Informal housing arrangements breaking down
- Some residents returning to unsafe homes due to lack of options

CARING & ACCESS TO SUPPORT

- Childcare services disrupted or unavailable
- Caring responsibilities limiting ability to work and attend appointments
- Many people struggling to engage with recovery services and supports

ECONOMY & WORKFORCE

- Local businesses facing financial pressure and reduced activity
- Workforce disruption due to displacement and caring responsibilities
- Financial stress increasing, especially for renters and low-income households

HEALTH & WELLBEING

- Rising stress, anxiety and mental health impacts
- Increased demand for health and wellbeing support
- Higher risk for older residents and socially isolated people

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

- Community fatigue and burnout emerging
- Perception of uneven recovery causing tension
- Social isolation increasing, particularly in rural areas and newer estates

SERVICES & SYSTEMS

- High demand for case management and tailored support
- Delays in insurance, grants and rebuilding processes
- Services are stretched and struggling to keep up

KEY COMMUNITY RISKS

Housing instability and displacement

Severe shortage of accommodation

Financial hardship

Especially for renters, low-income and casual workers

Childcare gaps and caring responsibilities

Affecting ability to work and access support

Difficulty accessing and engaging with services

Time, transport and caring pressures

Uneven recovery and community tension

Some left behind, trust at risk

Increased risk of social isolation and mental health impacts

Particularly for vulnerable groups

Riverview is a connected community with strong local spirit and experience with previous floods, but ongoing support, coordination and resources are critical to recovery.

Working together, listening and understanding what matters most will help our community recover and build a more resilient Riverview.

Three weeks ago over the Easter long weekend, Riverview experienced a **major flood event** following a widespread coastal weather system, widespread flooding, road closures, and infrastructure damage across the region and heavy rainfall across the catchment. The river at Riverview peaked at levels exceeding previous flood records, resulting in widespread inundation across low-lying residential areas, farmland, and key infrastructure.

Emergency response operations have now transitioned to recovery. While floodwaters have largely receded, the community is entering a complex and challenging recovery phase.

Impact on the Community

- Approximately **950 properties were affected**, with:
 - 350 homes deemed uninhabitable
 - 600 experiencing moderate damage
- Several low-lying neighbourhoods remain partially inaccessible due to damaged roads
- The main access road into Riverview was cut for 10 days, isolating parts of the community

Displacement and Housing

- Around **1000 residents remain displaced**, with many:
 - Staying with friends and family
 - Using temporary motel accommodation outside the local area
 - Some residents are returning to partially damaged homes due to lack of alternatives
 - Others are staying in caravans and tents on their properties
- Limited local rental availability is creating housing pressure and uncertainty

Access and Isolation

- Key access routes into Riverview were cut for several days, and some remain partially damaged
- The closest major service centre (1 hour away) has limited capacity to absorb ongoing demand from Riverview residents
- Travel for essential services (healthcare, accommodation, supplies) remains difficult for some households

Social and Community Impacts

Community Wellbeing

- Reports of stress, fatigue, and emotional distress are increasing, particularly among:
 - Older residents living alone
 - Families with young children
 - Residents impacted by previous flood events
- Demand for mental health and psychosocial support services is rising, but local capacity is limited and nothing additional has been established or funded.

Uneven Recovery

- Recovery progress varies significantly across the community:
 - More affluent households are progressing repairs quickly
 - Lower-income residents are experiencing delays due to financial constraints and insurance issues
 - Many are realising they didn't have adequate insurance for flood inundation
- Renters are facing greater uncertainty, with some unable to return to properties

Social Disconnection

- Newer estates are showing lower engagement with recovery services, with some residents unaware of available assistance
- Rural and isolated households remain at risk of being overlooked

Critical Infrastructure and Services

- Power has been restored to most areas, though some properties remain disconnected
- Telecommunications are intermittent in outer areas
- The local medical clinic has reopened but is operating at reduced capacity
- Community hall has been set up by the community as a recovery hub and are accepting donations but are finding influx of goods that are not needed

Education

- Approximately half of the classrooms at the local primary school have been impacted by flood damage resulting in the school operating at reduced capacity, requiring temporary arrangements such as shared classrooms and modified timetables.
- Secondary school students will continue to commute to the regional high school out of town, though there's been a decline in attendance for some students as a result of the floods.
- The main childcare centre remains closed due to moderate damage. As a result, many children are required to stay at home, creating significant challenges for working parents and displaced families trying to manage their recovery efforts.

Economic Impacts

- Local businesses have reopened unevenly, with some operating at reduced capacity and others still closed due to damage or workforce disruption
- Agricultural losses are significant, affecting income and local employment
- Riverside tourism and the local riverside motel has been significantly impacted
- Casual and seasonal workers are particularly impacted

Participant Role in the Scenario

The local government authority responsible for Riverview and surrounding communities is currently overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the regional recovery effort following the Coast event. With multiple communities impacted, resources are stretched and targeted support is required for those most severely affected.

Recognising the significant impacts in Riverview, your employer has seconded you to assist with this event.

In this role, you will:

- Work closely with the Riverview community to consider the social impacts, emerging needs, and existing community capacity
- Identify priority actions to support recovery in the coming months
- Consider both immediate and longer-term recovery outcomes

A Local Recovery Coordinator has been appointed for the region and will lead overall recovery coordination. You will work alongside them, with a specific focus on:

- The social and human domains of recovery (e.g. housing, wellbeing, vulnerability, community connection)
- Understanding how these intersect with other recovery domains, including economic, built, and environmental recovery
- Providing advice and recommendations to support coordinated, community-informed recovery planning

Your role is to bring a community-centred perspective, ensuring that recovery actions are inclusive, targeted, and responsive to the needs of those most impacted.

Emerging Issues Over Time – Riverview Recovery

3 Months

You are now approximately three months after the flood event. While initial response and relief activities have wound down, the recovery situation in Riverview has become more complex.

A significant number of households remain displaced, with limited pathways back to stable housing. Many are still staying with family or friends, and some of these arrangements are beginning to break down under pressure.

There are increasing reports of stress, fatigue and frustration, particularly among those facing ongoing uncertainty around housing, insurance or financial support. There are also concerns about a rise in domestic violence.

Financial pressures are escalating, especially for renters and low-income households with fewer options available.

Access to services is becoming more challenging. Demand for support—particularly case management and tailored assistance—has exceeded local capacity and requires additional support.

At the same time, some people are struggling to engage with recovery services due to caring responsibilities, including childcare gaps following the disaster and disruption to local facilities. This is also affecting workforce participation, with some people reducing hours or unable to return to work.

Community dynamics are shifting, with a growing perception that recovery is uneven.

Overall, fatigue is setting in, community engagement is declining, and there is an increasing risk of social isolation, particularly for those who are less connected.

6 Months

You are now approximately six months after the flood event. Recovery has progressed for some parts of the community, but not for everyone. A number of households remain in temporary or unstable housing, with long-term solutions still uncertain.

Longer-term impacts are becoming more apparent. Many people are experiencing ongoing stress, reduced wellbeing, and the cumulative effects of prolonged disruption. There is increasing concern about deepening disadvantage, particularly for those who were already facing disadvantage.

Housing instability continues to drive broader impacts. Some residents have relocated permanently, contributing to population shifts and workforce challenges for local businesses and services.

Childcare gaps and ongoing caring responsibilities remain a barrier to recovery. Some families still lack reliable childcare, affecting their ability to return to work or engage consistently with recovery services and support.

Financial hardship persists, especially for households with limited or no insurance. At the same time, external recovery agencies are beginning to scale down, creating a perceived 'recovery gap' while local services remain under pressure.

The focus is shifting toward longer-term, community-led recovery. Community cohesion is mixed—strengthening in some areas, while prolonged stress and perceived inequities have weakened relationships in others.

There is also a growing focus on future preparedness and resilience, as the community reflects on what comes next. You are working in this context, supporting recovery at this stage.