

adrc 26

Australian Disaster
Resilience Conference

19 – 20 AUGUST 2026

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Turns out my admin superpowers were disaster skills after all

REBECCA JOHNSON

COORDINARE South Eastern NSW PHN



Australian Government
National Emergency
Management Agency



Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience





Content Note

This presentation includes discussion of bushfires, disaster impacts and pandemic response.

Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636



680 towns, villages and localities



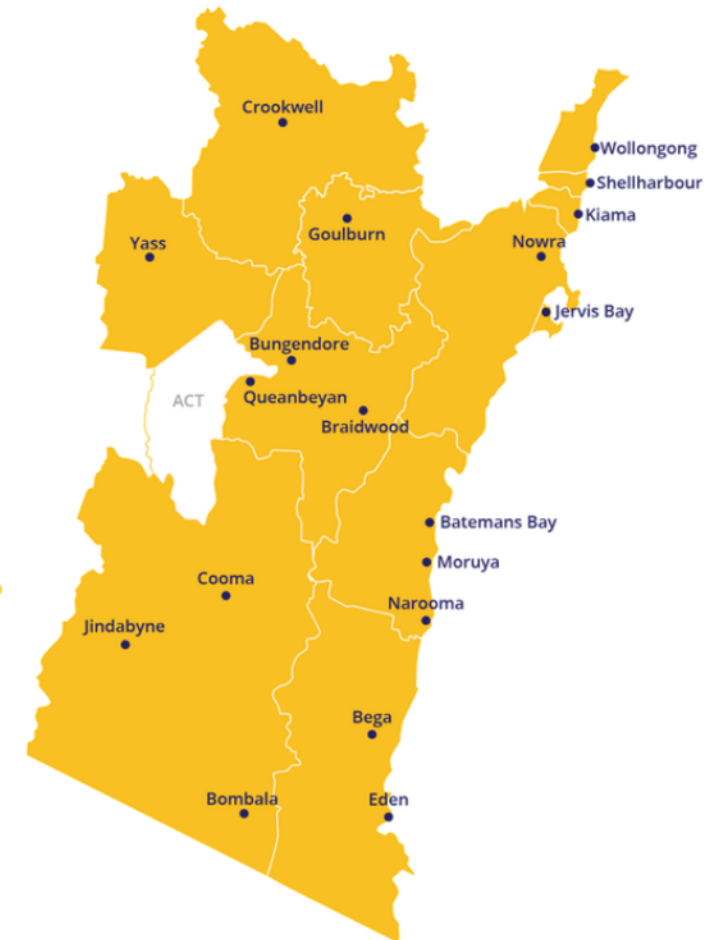
50,000km²

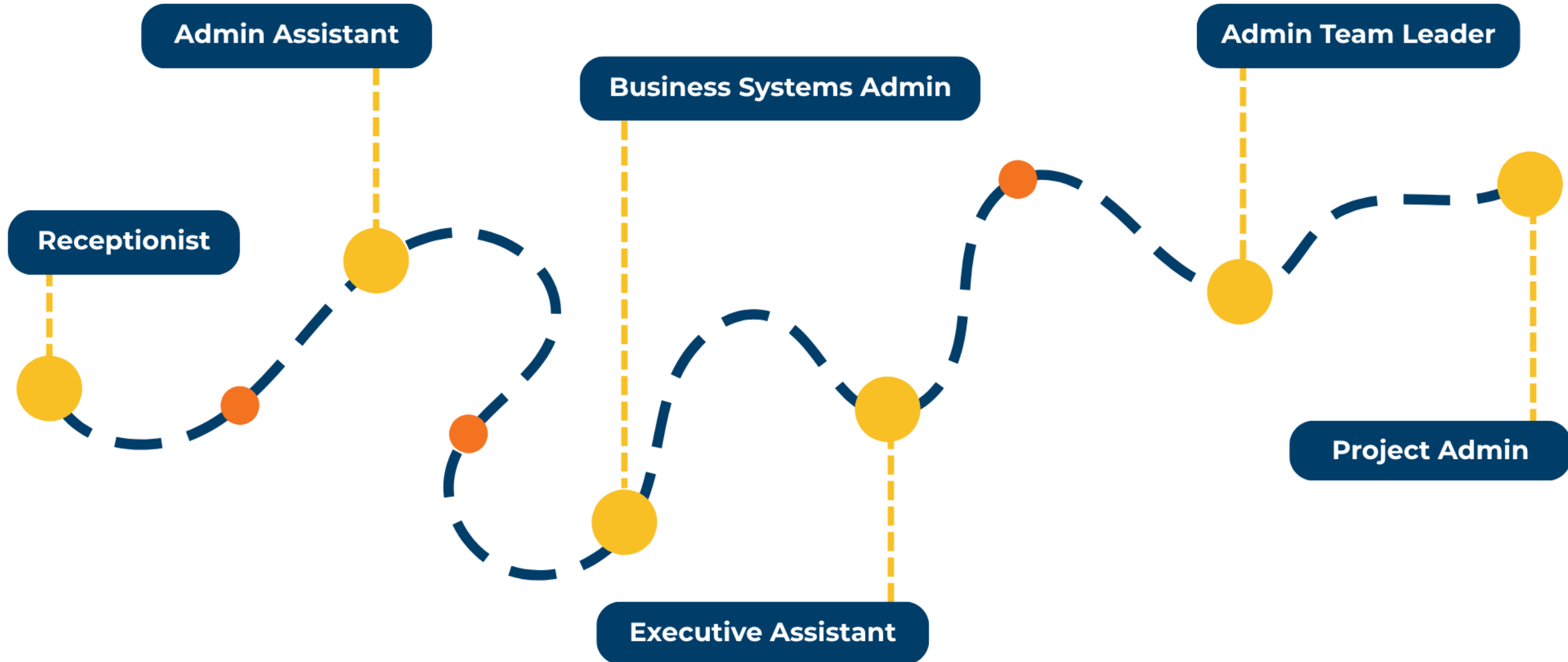


22% residents aged 65+



31,784 older people live alone







New Year's Eve 2019

Photo courtesy of the staff at Lighthouse Surgery, Narooma

Case Study



Lighthouse Surgery Narooma:

A vital role in the 2019/20 bushfire
disaster response

When bushfires threatened Cobargo and Bermagui in 2019, Lighthouse Surgery in Narooma and general practitioner Dr Gundi Muller-Grotjan quickly became central to the disaster response.

Everything changed when the fires reached Cobargo's main street on New Year's Eve said Dr Muller-Grotjan. **"That's when we realised just how much trouble we were in.** The next two weeks were just extraordinary."

With roads cut, communications down, no power and the town isolated, the surgery was the only functioning general practice, and Dr Muller-Grotjan and a registrar the only doctors who hadn't evacuated. Dr Muller-Grotjan quickly stepped into a leadership role, shifting the surgery team's WhatsApp group from casual chatter to a critical information channel. Emergency meetings were held. Staff were asked who could stay, who would evacuate, and what roles they could take on. Some staff even slept at the surgery - a safe, fire-resistant building close to the water. A daily 9am meeting at the surgery became the anchor point for coordination.

"For five days we were pretty much on our own."

- Dr Muller-Grotjan

"No phones, no petrol, no way out, it was about trying to deal with the disaster at hand - lots of people in town, very little resources, and no support network," Dr Muller-Grotjan said.

An evacuation centre was set up on New Year's Day and despite the chaos, those with health skills ensured the community's needs were met. Lighthouse Surgery remained open, and Dr Muller-Grotjan was on call most of the time with the support of three practice nurses.

"Our receptionists were awesome, they tried to keep notes of what was happening. **The team spirit amongst our staff was quite amazing, we all pulled together** and despite it being quite terrible, there was a very strong sense of wanting to do something good for the community"

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**1,353 homes
damaged or
destroyed during
Black Summer
across South Eastern
NSW**

\$1.3M

invested in non-
clinical recovery
support

\$724,000+

community grants
distributed

60+

organisations funded

**Enhanced
Aboriginal
mental health
support**

through local ACCHO
partnerships

**Bushfire Care
Navigation
Support**
established

**Farming
community
resilience
initiatives**

115

local recovery
projects funded

Supporting recovery across South Eastern NSW





COVID-19



Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) update

11 March 2020

COORDINARE is commencing a regular COVID-19 update to support general practice with provision of key information. As the situation is changing rapidly, rather than author new content that may become quickly out of date, COORDINARE's approach will be to provide authoritative web links.

[Read more →](#)

Get COVID tested and join the #swabmob

28 September 2020

Join the #swabmob – that's the key message of a new campaign launched by COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN this week to encourage more young people to get tested if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

[Read more →](#)

Local general practices start providing COVID-19 vaccines

22 March 2021

Almost 40 general practices in South Eastern NSW have started providing COVID-19 vaccinations this week, after being approved by the Department of Health to participate in Phase 1b of the rollout.

[Read more →](#)

Tribute to local primary health workers as South East NSW vaccination rates reach 80 percent

28 October 2021

COVID double dose vaccination rates in the 11 local government areas (LGAs) in South Eastern NSW have officially passed the 80 per cent eased restrictions target. According to the latest statistics, first dose rates have also passed the 90 per cent milestone in every LGA.

[Read more →](#)

#fabvac campaign highlights need for ongoing COVID vaccine protection for Aboriginal community

27 April 2022

With doctors warning that the combination of COVID-19 and flu could make you really sick, a digital campaign that highlights how vaccines make a difference, even for people who've had COVID, is being launched this week by COORDINARE in partnership with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs).

[Read more →](#)



What worked?



What didn't work?



What needs to change?



HealthPathways

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Operation Woolly Wombat

Desktop Disaster Exercise Guide and Toolkit

This resource provides a practical model and toolkit to design and run an organisation-wide disaster desktop exercise.

- [Desktop Exercise Guide](#) (PDF)
- [Desktop Exercise Guide](#) (Word – editable version)

If you use or adapt this model, please acknowledge
COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN as the original source.


An Australian Government Initiative

Operation Woolly Wombat:

A whole-of-organisation desktop scenario to assess and strengthen disaster preparedness

Rebecca Johnson, COORDINARE - South Eastern NSW PHN
Sub-theme: Leadership and mindsets in practice

A practical model to design and run your own organisation-wide disaster scenario, tested in a real-world setting.

1

WHAT THIS IS

A whole-of-organisation, real-time, desktop exercise involving 80+ staff across 4 office locations, with participation from office, home, and in-field environments, using SMS, email injects, workflows and task prompts to simulate a cascading disaster scenario.

85% saw

2

A DAY IN OPERATION WOOLLY WOMBAT

Emergency Warning

- SMS alert issued
- Staff confirm safety and availability
- Accountability processes activated

Things start to shift

- Timed email injects simulate changing conditions
- Incident Controller roles activated to make decisions under pressure
- "Side quest" tasks test key capabilities (e.g. first aid, radios, supplies)
- Multiple teams responding simultaneously across locations

83% participation rate





DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN GENERAL PRACTICE MINI AUDIT

Examine existing plans and procedures, apply business continuity and disaster planning principles, and plan one area for improvement.

RACGP CPD Approved Activity No. 972148 and ACRRM Approved Activity No. 34451



COORDINATED HEALTH ARRANGEMENTS IN A DISASTER SITUATION (SOUTH EASTERN NSW)

Developed jointly by COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN, Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, and Southern NSW Local Health District.

Released 22 April 2026



NSW/ACT PHNs DISASTER MANAGEMENT NETWORK

A collaborative network supporting PHNs to strengthen disaster management capability and develop shared resources, including guidance on the role of primary healthcare in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.





Make clarity your superpower

even a basic
tracker can steady
a team.



Convening is leadership

build
relationships
before you need
them.



Use the strengths people already have

capability is often
hiding in plain
sight.



In the next 30 days...

Pick one messy workflow and tame it.

Resilience often starts with the smallest act of quiet organisation.



Thank you to the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2026
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