

# Foreword

Dr John Bates, Director, Australia Institute for Disaster Resilience

Welcome to the January issue of the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. We are well into the summer season across Australia and New Zealand; responding to and recovering from those natural hazards we expect at this time of the year. The recent experience in Victoria with 'thunderstorm asthma' reminds me that we also need to be ready for the unexpected and to be vigilant in our observations of what is occurring around us.



In this issue we showcase the winners and shortlisted finalists in the 2016 Resilient Australia Awards and the stories behind those projects. There are some amazing projects being undertaken across the country to build resilience. The finalists represent the tip of a growing community that understands we can all make a difference and that it's never too late to think and plan about how to look after one's self. A common thread across the projects is ensuring that the right information is available and that we are empowering people to make decisions, and to take actions, rather than stepping back and waiting for that proverbial 'knight in shining armour' to arrive and save the day. In the face of the severe events that continue to stretch the human and physical resources that we have available in times of emergency, building resilience-thinking and action into our lives is essential. This allows us to contribute to minimising effects of disasters when they occur.

It is timely to reflect on the recent 'thunderstorm asthma' event in Melbourne from a resilience perspective and to use it as an example of the unexpected. At the time of writing, there were at least eight asthma-related deaths attributed to the weather conditions on the day. Many more people required significant medical treatment and thousands of others experienced more severe asthma symptoms. On the day, there was a high pollen count, it was windy and it was in a period known as

the 'hayfever season'. Many people experienced more severe asthma symptoms on that day, while for others this was the first significant episode of asthma they had experienced. It is important to move beyond a just-in-time approach to our personal health and the health of our families. We pay a lot of attention to personal protective equipment when responding to fires, floods and other events. Necessary health treatments are no different and should be regarded as personal protective health equipment.

This is exactly the approach taken by Carlyle Gardens Retirement Village, where the community is committed to developing and maintaining their own capability to be self-supporting in the aftermath of significant natural disaster events.

This edition of the Journal includes key research in understanding risk and warnings and the importance of communication. As you read the Journal, I encourage you to share the articles with your friends and colleagues and to think about what you can do to improve our national resilience to disasters.

**Dr John Bates**

Director, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience