

Taking preparedness action to scale

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Getting someone to think about, value and take action to prepare themselves for an outcome that is often not immediate or guaranteed, is hard. How about getting three million people across Australia to think about, value and take action to prepare themselves for an emergency, within a five-year timeframe?

That's the challenge that has faced Australian Red Cross since 2015 when an organisational strategy reset delivered a new outcome to its domestic emergency services program: three million people in Australia are equipped to prepare for and recover from a disaster by 2020.

Over the past four years the organisation has reviewed its existing disaster preparedness activities. In addition to our 'business as usual' direct delivery of face-to-face preparedness programs such as Emergency Rediplan¹ and the Pillowcase Program², we have collaborated internally and externally to explore alternative activities, tools and processes to better understand what works and what doesn't work when scaling preparedness action.

We've experimented with different types of technology to understand if we can design solutions that will allow us to reach more people and broaden our impact. Activities have included development of the Get Prepared app as part of our shared value partnership with general insurer IAG, development of tech prototypes through hackathons run in partnership with design agencies such as IBM and use of online testing platforms to test prototypes developed through these activities with potential users to determine opportunities for further development. We've explored virtual reality, digital execution, IoT, voice technology, facial recognition software and data sharing and protection software.

We have explored how we can better work through existing networks by identifying and engaging with groups and organisations for targeted promotion of preparedness action. We've partnered with Airbnb and promoted our preparedness products through the Red Cross Blood Service, the Uber app, the Resilient Sydney initiative, the Queensland carer network and, with financial incentive, through the national Carer Network. And we've experimented with various channels, messages and activities to optimise the promotion of our products through our national preparedness campaign.

Human-centred design

These activities have been undertaken applying 'human-centred design' principles to the way we work. This effectively means putting the user at the centre of all we do, which for Red Cross and our partners means undertaking audience and market research and better applying insights to inform what it is we are trying to achieve, working alongside community members to design the steps we need to take to get there, and testing products and ideas with the people most likely to use them.

Insights

- Unless someone is facing an emergency or has experienced one, people just aren't thinking about emergencies, let alone considering they should prepare for them.
- Even if people are thinking about an emergency and consider taking preparedness action a valuable thing to do, value does not equate to action.
- Even if we design great solutions, it is equally important to be able to motivate people to use them.
- If we are going to motivate people who have not experienced an emergency to take preparedness action, it needs to be relevant and reflect a person's context and needs.

Learnings

The user comes first

Action cannot be forced from the top down. Putting people at the centre of what we do is critical if we are to succeed in motivating action. The most scalable solutions are those that most effectively solve a critical problem or offer an attractive opportunity/experience

¹ Emergency RediPlan. At: www.redcross.org.au/prepare.

² Pillowcase Program. At: www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/resources-for-parents-and-teachers/pillowcase-project.



Red Cross worked with community members to design what was needed for effective preparedness actions.

Image: Red Cross

specific to an individual and their context. One size does not and will not fit all. So, we need to understand our users, their context, needs, attitudes and beliefs and continue to design solutions that meet their needs.

Communities with lived experience of emergencies are the experts

To successfully help individuals to prepare for and recover from emergencies we need to understand the emergency experience as an end-to-end journey and understand the challenges from the perspective of those travelling the path. Understanding the challenges that people faced, and including people with lived experience in the design of solutions, help us to ensure that the actions we are encouraging people to take beforehand will address the common pain points that people experience afterwards.

We need to understand what motivates people to take sustained action

Our insights show us that there are enablers and impediments to people taking preparedness action. While these will be very different depending upon the person and their circumstances, understanding and leveraging these insights will help us to motivate action.

Enablers:

- lived experience of an emergency
- perception that there is an imminent and proximate risk
- a health scare
- witnessing a family or friend experience an emergency
- having a responsibility for others
- gender (middle-aged women are more likely to take preparedness action)

- having a condition that is likely to be exacerbated by an emergency.

Impediments:

- lack of time
- perception that there is not a proximate risk
- inability to take action (real or perceived)
- having other, more pressing priorities
- perception that one is already prepared.

Using evidence to inform decision-making is critical

Having measures for success in place so we were clear on exactly what we were trying to achieve and how we were tracking at any given time was critical. These insights informed next steps and when we needed to discontinue a concept due to lack of interest or uptake.

Working with people who think and do things differently inspires great things

One agency will not scale preparedness action alone. All the progress achieved to date has been significantly influenced by the input and actions of collaborators. What works, what doesn't and what we might test next has been informed by many people who bring different perspectives, questions, tools, experiences and ideas to the table.

Conclusion

Red Cross has significantly increased the reach of its messages and activities to millions of people.

A key ongoing challenge is how we define being 'equipped'; a critical requirement of having a measurable target. Preparedness is not a finite state. It's subjective; what is appropriate for one individual may not be appropriate for another and we often ask people to do things or take actions that are not easily quantifiable.

Balancing the need to fulfil a numerical target with ensuring that we develop solutions that are most appropriate to the needs of communities and that will have affect continues to be a challenge. However, it is one that has forced us to think deeply about how we work and what our activities are achieving. Most importantly, it has helped us to support a greater number of community members in preparing for emergencies than would otherwise have been the case.

Given the seemingly inevitable effects of climate change, increased population densities and exposure to risk, the Red Cross experience provides a salient message for all organisations involved in preparedness programs; namely, the importance of putting the human at the centre of all we do and working collaboratively, not only within, but also external to, the emergency management sector. In doing so, we most effectively maximise our investment and collective effort to contribute to better prepared Australian communities.