



ENHANCING AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL LEVEL EMERGENCY RESPONSE CAPABILITIES: LEARNING FROM INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

SUBMISSION FROM HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP AND THE CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY.

Acknowledging the primary role of state and territories in emergency response, what longer-term capacities and capabilities does the Commonwealth need to develop to meet the challenges of the evolving strategic environment?

The principles and approaches outlined in the new [International Development Policy](#) are highly relevant to how we should be responding to domestic emergencies here at home:

- **Genuine partnerships** based on **respect, listening, and learning** from each other.
- Supporting **local leaders** to create **local solutions**.
- Build a system that is **open to new ideas**, that listens and adjusts as needed.
- Transparent in its approach, is **not transactional** in nature, high quality and prioritises local leadership.
- Connecting Australia with **regional architecture**.
- Enhance **community resilience** to external pressures and shocks.
- Anchor our approach in our strengths, including **embedding the perspectives of First Nations Australians**.

Building on this approach, there is much to be learned and leveraged from the international humanitarian and development sector. There is a huge appetite to share learning and knowledge from the international humanitarian sector, which has been recommended by the 2021 [Lessons to be Learned in relation to the Australian Bushfire Season 20219-2020](#):

Recommendation 4

5.56

The committee recommends that the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRRA) **develop and implement a set of operating principles which are guided by Australia's current humanitarian and foreign aid principles**. The principles should establish the role and function of the Agency and outline the ways in which the Agency will provide assistance which is trauma-informed, people-centred, and community-led.

5.57

The values that would inform the development of these **operating principles would be the universal values of humanitarian assistance—impartiality, non-discrimination, political neutrality and cross-cultural awareness**.



Two specific capabilities drawn from the international humanitarian and development sector for the Commonwealth to better meet the challenges of the evolving strategic environment are: [accountability to affected populations](#) (an extension of the [Core Humanitarian Standard](#)), and [leadership development for complex crisis contexts](#) (recognising [the challenges of leadership](#) in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous strategic environments).

At a national level, what are likely to be the key pressure points or challenges for the Commonwealth responding to competing and concurrent crises?

As was seen during the Black Summer crisis of 2019-2020, assistance from outside Australia was required as multiple state and territories were impacted concurrently.

To ensure Australia is better equipped to receive assistance in the future, full implementation of the International Disaster Response Law needs to be prioritised. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Disaster Law have developed the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance (the [IDRL Guidelines](#)) to facilitate this process, which is already underway.

Similarly, challenges exist in the scale and quality of personnel, especially volunteers and skilled non-emergency services specialists, available to address competing and concurrent crises across the country.

These may be addressed by establishing core competencies at the Commonwealth level that personnel must have in order to be 'deployed' to provide assistance following competing and concurrent crises (including across state and territory borders). The tertiary education sector could assist in the development of such core competencies as well as supporting the scaling of existing and new training to strengthen such core competencies across the country.

How could the Commonwealth build community resilience and capability so they are better able to respond to and recover from national-level crises?

Building on the work of Dr. Daniel Aldrich and the concept of social capital is a way to build resilience for communities to prepare for, respond to and recovery from disasters.

'A great deal of research has shown how social capital (the bonding, bridging, and linking connections to others) provides information on trustworthiness, facilitates collective action, and connects us to external resources during disasters and crises.'

[Daniel Aldrich](#)

Furthermore, we know that despite most 'first responders' are community members themselves, there is rarely any support provided to community members before disasters. Greater investment in research and support to community members to prepare to respond and to prepare to recover is critical and can be as simple as funding small local community events where people connect and strengthen networks that can be used during times of crisis.

What models could the Commonwealth explore to replace or supplement support currently provided by the ADF during domestic crisis?

Working with disaster impacted communities requires great care in not causing further harm. Organisations who provide support need to be skilled in psychosocial support in addition to other technical areas. Spontaneous volunteering needs to be harnessed in a way that remains flexible and accessible whilst having appropriate safeguards in place.



The Commonwealth could explore the role of existing professional capabilities currently used primarily internationally to support in domestic crises, such as the RedR Australia roster and the Australian Red Cross delegate pool.

Additional support to explore includes strengthening and upskilling the existing capabilities of Surf Life Saving associations, Local Governments (especially waste management contractors and the engineering departments), and State Emergency Services.

How could we harness the critical role of volunteers and civilian groups under this model?

Utilising an existing capability that is current used for international humanitarian response could be used to supplement human resources. The RedR Australia roster already has about 800 highly trained emergency responders who could upskill on the Commonwealth and state emergency management arrangements and be deployed at short notice. These professionals could dovetail with current volunteer cadre from the Australian Red Cross, State Emergency Services, and other organisations.

The Commonwealth could explore the opportunities available to secondary and tertiary education students, including vocational education students, in gaining academic or financial credit to volunteer in capacities related to enhancing domestic disaster management.

The range of skills provided by [RedR](#) include:

- Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)
- CASH and Voucher (CBI)
- Child Protection
- Civil Military Coordination
- Climate Change
- Communications in Emergencies
- Disability Inclusion
- Disaster Risk Reduction / Disaster Risk Management (DRR/DRM)
- Durable Solutions / Stabilisation and Recovery
- Education in Emergencies (EiE)
- Elections
- Emergency Telecommunications
- Food Security
- Gender/ Gender Based Violence (GBV)
- Information Management / GIS
- Livelihoods
- Localisation
- Logistics
- Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
- Protection
- Preventing Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH)
- Public Health
- Shelter / Site Planning
- Water Security / Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

What role could industry / the private sector play? How can the Government attract increased investment in emergency management from the private sector?

The challenge of engaging the private sector in emergency response is also one that the international humanitarian system has been grappling with for many years – principles have been developed by the World Economic Forum and the United National Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs to guide engagement in this area (see below).

Two further opportunities for the Commonwealth to explore exist. The first is in expanding the role of skilled business volunteers in emergency management (for example, [the Australian Business Volunteers program](#) recently funded by Emergency Management Victoria and the Disaster Ready Fund Phase 1). The second is to further analyse and then encourage greater investment in reducing the economic cost of the social impacts of disasters, building off Daniel Aldrich's insights (above) and the work of the [Australian Business Resilience Roundtable](#).



Guiding Principles for Public-Private Collaboration for Humanitarian Action (WEF and OCHA)

1. Leveraging of core competencies
2. Needs driven
3. Standards and codes of conduct
4. Relationships with government
5. Building local capacity
6. Donation cost coverage
7. Distinction between humanitarian and commercial activities
8. Public relations
9. Reporting, monitoring and evaluation
10. Predictability

What are the critical functions the Commonwealth Government should continue to perform in disaster relief and recovery, in support of local, state and territory governments?

- National Coordination and Leadership: Strengthen its capacity to provide effective national leadership and coordination during emergencies, ensuring seamless communication and collaboration with state and territory authorities.
- Leveraging unique capability: understanding the auxiliary role the Australian Red Cross, it's national and international networks.
- Research and Development: Fund research and development initiatives to stay ahead of emerging threats and technologies that can be leveraged for emergency response, such as advanced communication tools, drones, and predictive modelling. This must extend beyond the current hazard focus of NHRA to include the social dimensions of disasters and emergency responses. Actively seek ways to facilitate learning and engagement with the international humanitarian system, including through Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade investments.
- International Cooperation: Strengthen partnerships and cooperation with the region and international organisations to facilitate mutual assistance during regional emergencies and access to international resources and expertise, for example with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre).
- Climate Change Adaptation: Develop strategies and capabilities to address the increasing impact of climate change on emergencies, including more frequent and severe 'natural' disasters.
- Training and Capacity Building: Establish core competencies for personnel that all state and territory agencies can implement to ensure complementarity across jurisdictions. Continuously train emergency responders at all levels, including federal, state, and local personnel, to ensure they are equipped to handle evolving threats effectively. Consider upskilling Australian-based international humanitarian workers who could provide surge support.
- Community Engagement and Education: Invest in programs that educate and engage the public in emergency preparedness and response, as well as promote a culture of resilience, for example RediPlan.
- Legal and Policy Frameworks: Review and update legal and policy frameworks to ensure they are flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and evolving threats. International Disaster Response Law should be a top priority.
- Crisis Communication: Develop robust crisis communication strategies and capabilities to provide timely and accurate information to the public during emergencies with a focus on multi-cultural communities, for example the [Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership](#).