

The 'Clean Up' Recovery Report

2023





Recovery needs a long-term approach

Australian Red Cross has been helping people before, during and after disasters for over a century.

Australian Red Cross is a national leader in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. For over one hundred years, the organisation has walked alongside people facing crises of all kinds.

Climate change is driving more severe, and more costly disasters. These 'once-in-a-lifetime' events are happening more frequently and more intensely, and cause enormous financial and psychological effects on individuals and communities.

Public interest in major disasters or emergencies peaks during the onset of the event, but interest and support can wane relatively quickly. Individuals and communities directly affected by disasters still face significant challenges for months, years and even decades later.

In partnership with Australian Red Cross, the Pine O Clean 'Clean Up Program' highlights the need for long-term approaches to disaster recovery and directly supports impacted communities in South Australia, Northern NSW and more recently in the Northern Territory.

Prepare, respond, recover, repeat

For more than a century, Australian Red Cross has been one of the only agencies that helps communities across the country prepare for, respond to, and recover from all kinds of major disasters and emergencies.

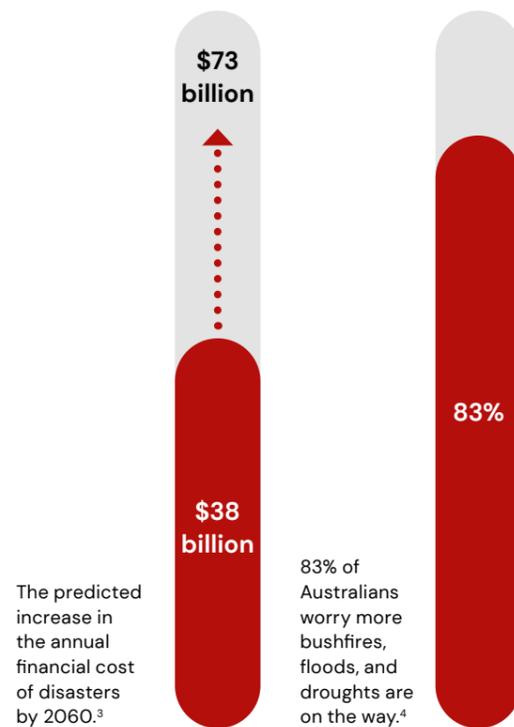
Australian Red Cross staff, members, and volunteers are embedded in communities long after the news cycle has moved on, spending months and even years supporting residents living and working in disaster-affected areas.

The organisation collaborates closely with all levels of government to ensure responses are effective and considerate of the immediate and long-term needs of communities impacted by disaster.

As climate change drives more severe, more frequent, and more costly disasters¹, the expertise and experience of Australian Red Cross has never been more vital. The organisation's staff and volunteers responded to 41 emergency events in the last year alone – that's compared to 18 activations a decade ago. And that number is only expected to rise in the future.

The good news is that preparation makes a big difference when it comes to the way people respond and recover from disasters. In fact, investment in resilience measures can result in less damage, fewer impacts, and a faster, fairer recovery for those affected.²

That's why government funding is critical to ensuring Australian Red Cross can continue supporting people and communities in an increasingly uncertain future.



9m

people reached through the annual preparedness campaign.



382,000

people helped through preparation and recovery efforts.



88,000

people received resources through community events.



20,000

people upskilled through specialised workshops.

Some of the ways Australian Red Cross supported communities before, during and after disasters in FY2022.

1. Naughtin C, Hajkowicz S, Schleiger E, Bratanova A, Cameron A, Zamin T, & Dutta A (2022). *Our Future World: Global megatrends impacting the way we live over coming decades*. Brisbane, Australia: CSIRO. 2. Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities (2021). Special report: Update to the economic costs of natural disasters in Australia. Deloitte. 3. Ibid. 4. Quicke A, & Venketasubramanian S (2022). *Climate of the Nation 2022: Tracking Australia's attitudes towards climate change and energy*. The Australia Institute.



Why supporting communities in disaster is so important

There are many reasons why Australian Red Cross helps people and communities through major disasters and emergencies. Let's take a closer look at what's driving that need.

Disasters take an emotional toll.

Major disasters and emergencies don't only affect our homes, roads, and public spaces. They also take an enormous psychological toll on people and communities.

However, the emotional damage wrought by bushfires, floods, drought, and extreme weather events is often invisible to the wider public.

Quality of life, relationships, and work capacity may be strained after a major disaster, and it's almost impossible to quantify the knock-on economic and psychosocial effects.

In fact, the economic impact of major disasters on our mental wellbeing can far exceed what it costs to repair the physical damage sustained by infrastructure and physical possessions. In some cases, the long-term cost can be at least double⁵ when all those intangible costs are taken into account.

Individuals, communities, governments, and support agencies are all impacted by disasters, but recovery can be particularly challenging for marginalised people.

Repeated or compounding emergencies make it extremely difficult to feel prepared for what's around the corner and often intensify the associated longer-term impacts on health and wellbeing⁶, especially when other risk factors are also in the mix.



\$337m the estimated economic burden of a bushfire event on the mental health of 150,000 people.⁷

These might include chronic health conditions, a history of mental health challenges, low socio-economic or migrant status, or age, among many others.

It's important to remember that no two roads to recovery look the same – especially when it comes to our mental health and wellbeing. That's why Australian Red Cross works alongside communities long after the immediate disaster response and clean-up effort has ended.

5. Phoenix Australia (2022). *Trauma experienced by Australian communities following a natural disaster: Preliminary economic assessment*. 6. Ibid. 7. Leppard C, Gibbs L, Block K, Reifels L, & Quinn P (2022). *Public Health implications of multiple disaster exposures*. The Lancet: Public Health, vol. 7, issue: March, pp. 274–286.

Australian Red Cross is there when needed most, no matter what.

While many people who've experienced these events recover well with the support of their family and friends, Australian Red Cross aims to promote self and collective efficacy to actively support community-led recovery.

Australian Red Cross provides psychological first aid and reunification support in person and over the phone immediately after disasters and emergencies across Australia.

Disasters are escalating.

The major disasters we're facing are growing in intensity, impact, and frequency. We live in a globalised, hyper-connected, technologically reliant society. This interconnectedness means we're all more vulnerable to repeated disasters and major emergencies and we feel the disruption and long-term impacts more acutely.

In fact, the reality is that many communities are facing multiple "once-in-a-lifetime" events in rapid succession – some less than a year apart. In the last few years alone, bushfires and floods have caused devastation across the country, impacting some communities one on top of the other. This devastation was also compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years.

Businesses struggle, livelihoods are jeopardised, mental health suffers, family and community relationships are strained, and lives are lost. Physical and emotional damage is complex and far-reaching.

And this escalation is being driven, in large part, by climate change, which makes it more difficult to prepare for and bounce back from disasters, especially in places that are struck by multiple events in quick succession.



80% of people living in Australia have experienced disasters like flooding, heatwave, or drought in the last five years.⁸

We're not as prepared as we should – or could – be.

With the scale of disasters we're facing increasingly testing the community, government, and emergency sector's capacity to respond, we cannot wait for flooding, bushfires, drought, or a pandemic to arrive on our doorstep. Being prepared helps communities to better manage the immediate and longer-term impacts of disasters.

But building resilience takes investment of time, effort, and resources. This aspect of Australia's emergency management planning is critically under-resourced and under-funded.

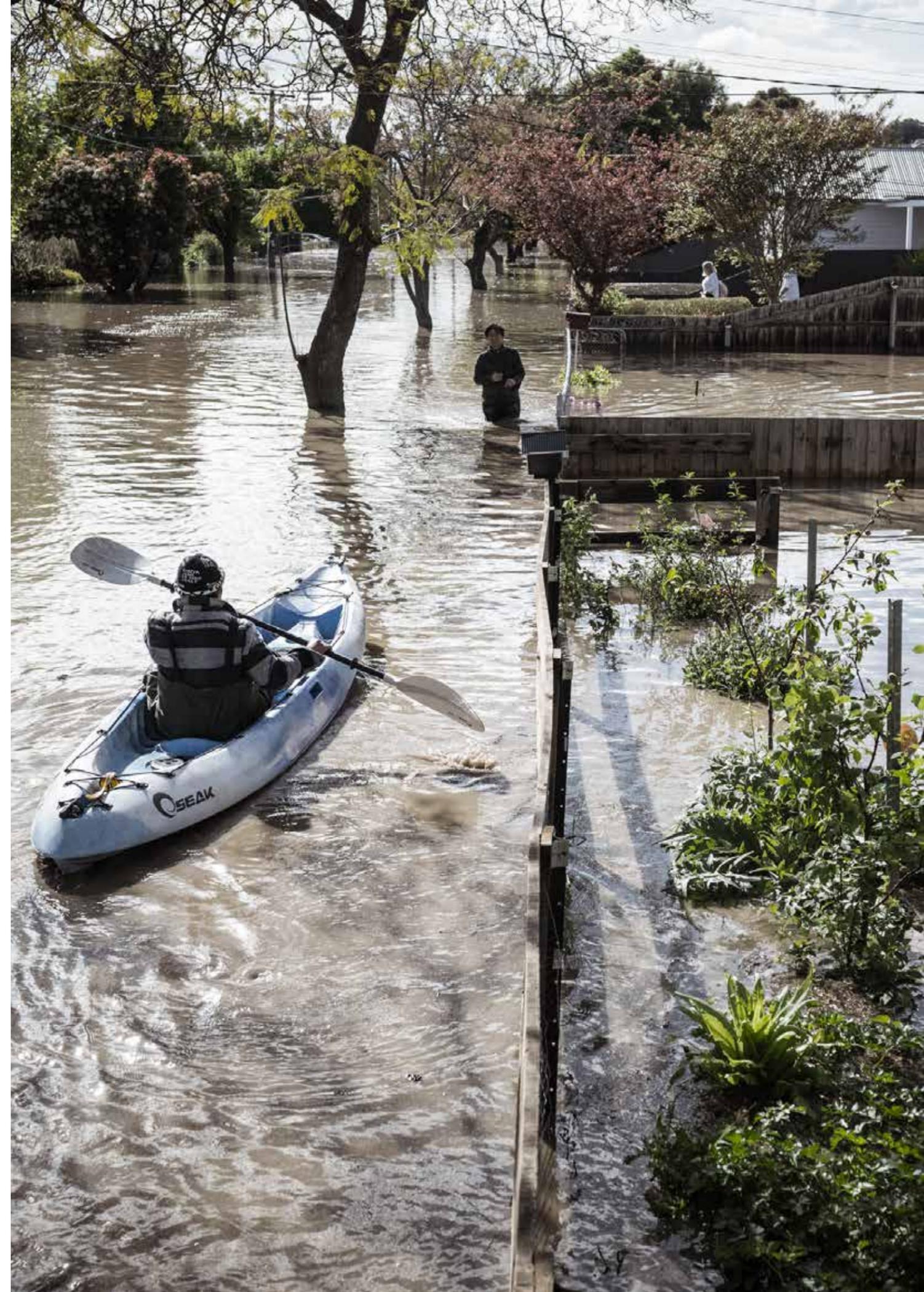
Resilience is enhanced through long-term, community-led initiatives that build on the existing strengths and capacities within local communities, not just individual efforts.

To help people better prepare, our work is guided by four key resilience capacities – knowledge, connection, security, and wellbeing. When these are cultivated and strengthened with Australian Red Cross expertise and support, it helps reduce the impact of disasters and other crises.¹⁰

Collaboration between communities, government and organisations is also a key part of community-led resilience. When we work together before a disaster strikes, response and recovery efforts are better coordinated and better able to meet the needs of those affected.

Enhancing individual and community disaster readiness and strengthening stakeholder collaboration are key objectives of the organisation's evidence-informed preparedness programming. In turn, the emergency response and recovery support provided by Australian Red Cross is enhanced by the resilience communities and individuals build before disaster strikes.

Australian Red Cross research-backed Disaster Resilience Program is just one example of how effective this kind of preventative community-led collaboration can be for more Australians.





 **\$5b** the estimated insurance damages of the 2022 east-coast floods.⁹

Building resilience to disasters.

Based on characteristics of disaster resilient communities identified by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the work of several researchers, Australian Red Cross has identified four adaptive capacities. When these are cultivated and strengthened in people and communities, they enhance their resilience to disasters and other crises.

Resilience requires all four adaptive capacities – if one or more is compromised, people are more susceptible to the impacts of disaster. The activities and programming of Australian Red Cross are guided by these capacities.

- **Knowledge:** People knowing and understanding hazards and local history, plus accessing and using information to make informed decisions.
- **Security:** People having adequate shelter, personal safety, and financial protection against loss of assets and livelihoods.

- **Connection:** People drawing on the support they need through their connections with positive community networks, trust in local institutions, connection to place and strong social capital.
- **Wellbeing:** People judging life positively and generally feeling physically and mentally good. As a result, they can cope with the challenges of disasters, plus the health and social issues that can arise from the onset of shock and stress.

Recovery takes time.

Coverage of a major disaster or emergency often dominates the news cycle in the immediate aftermath. The reality is that attention wanes relatively quickly, and the individuals and communities directly affected by those disasters are left to deal with the fallout for months, years, or even decades after the fact.

Major disasters have the potential to immeasurably alter the lives of those affected. Preventative measures – particularly those that can assist with mitigating psychosocial harm – aren’t adequately funded or prioritised from a policy perspective.

That’s why Australian Red Cross remains embedded in disaster-affected communities for several years after disasters occur, often long after funding has run out.

This unique perspective and unmatched experience means Australian Red Cross is well-placed to advocate for meaningful policy changes that service the long-term needs of those communities.

Disasters do discriminate.

Everyone is tested by major disasters, but marginalised groups can feel the impacts more acutely. These communities often have unique needs that have not been historically understood or prioritised by the emergency services sector.

They face unique barriers to developing disaster resilience and preparedness. Compounding and cascading disaster events mean responses and recovery can be hindered, and inequality can deepen as a result.

That’s why tailored emergency management plans built upon inclusivity and cultural sensitivity are crucial in Australian Red Cross recovery efforts.

For over 100 years, Australian Red Cross has provided disaster relief and support across the migrant, aged-care and housing sectors, and has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to emergency management. The support and programming offered by Australian

Red Cross is backed by evidence, meaning the organisation can identify, prioritise, and address the complex needs of at-risk people when they need us most.

Emergency services are evolving.

Australia’s emergency services are being tested like never before. The systems and processes that have kept people safe for decades are straining under the pressure of major disasters that are increasing in frequency and severity.

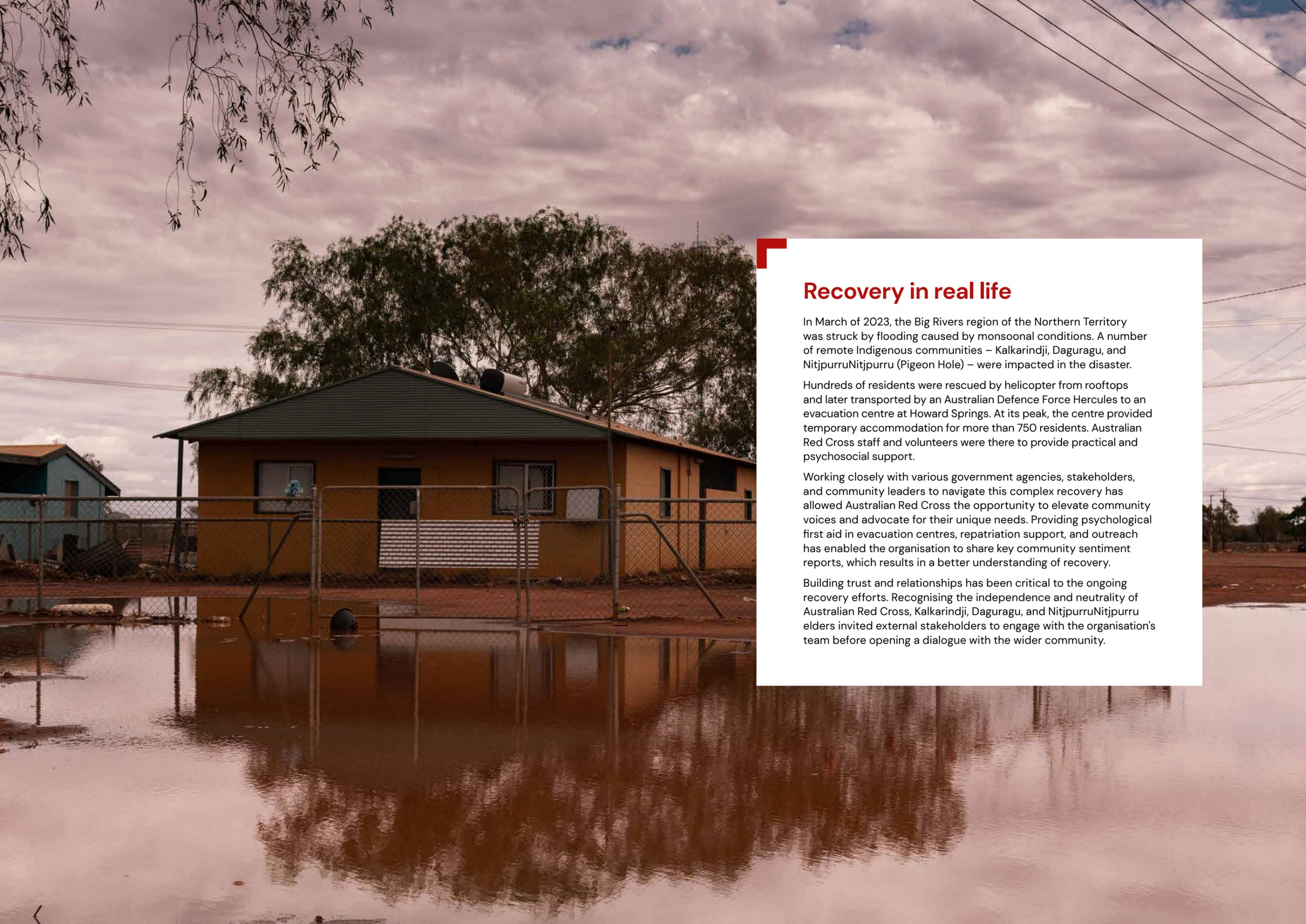
Australian Red Cross collaborates closely with other agencies across Australia to provide support tailored to the unique needs of disaster-affected individuals and communities. We’ve seen the need for streamlined and coordinated emergency management systems up close.

With over a century of experience, Australian Red Cross is well placed to work closely with emergency service partners to coordinate response and recovery efforts, and to advocate for emerging community needs during this incredibly challenging time.

 **21%** of people still experience PTSD, depression, or stress after the 2009 Victorian bushfires.¹¹

9. Australian Treasury (2023, July 19). *The Albanese Government announces inquiry into insurers’ response to the 2022 floods* [press release].

11. Gibbs L, Molyneaux R, Harms L, Gallagher H C, Block K, Richardson J, Brandenburg V, O’Donnell M, Kellett C, Quinn P, Kosta L, Brady K, Ireton G, MacDougall C, & Bryant R (2021). *10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report 2020*. University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.



Recovery in real life

In March of 2023, the Big Rivers region of the Northern Territory was struck by flooding caused by monsoonal conditions. A number of remote Indigenous communities – Kalkarindji, Daguragu, and NitjpurruNitjpurru (Pigeon Hole) – were impacted in the disaster.

Hundreds of residents were rescued by helicopter from rooftops and later transported by an Australian Defence Force Hercules to an evacuation centre at Howard Springs. At its peak, the centre provided temporary accommodation for more than 750 residents. Australian Red Cross staff and volunteers were there to provide practical and psychosocial support.

Working closely with various government agencies, stakeholders, and community leaders to navigate this complex recovery has allowed Australian Red Cross the opportunity to elevate community voices and advocate for their unique needs. Providing psychological first aid in evacuation centres, repatriation support, and outreach has enabled the organisation to share key community sentiment reports, which results in a better understanding of recovery.

Building trust and relationships has been critical to the ongoing recovery efforts. Recognising the independence and neutrality of Australian Red Cross, Kalkarindji, Daguragu, and NitjpurruNitjpurru elders invited external stakeholders to engage with the organisation's team before opening a dialogue with the wider community.



Addressing the practical aspects of recovery

Disaster recovery is often focused on strengthening the social and emotional wellbeing of people and communities. But there are also practical components to recovery, including post-disaster hygiene considerations.

Hygiene in focus.

The facilitation and implementation of hygiene best practices are an important consideration in Australian Red Cross collaborations with emergency service agencies. This is especially important in evacuation centres and recovery hubs in the aftermath of a disaster.

Australian Red Cross recognises that clean, hygienic environments can help disaster-affected communities feel supported. That's why it pays special attention to high-traffic areas and communal spaces.

Viruses and bacteria can spread quickly in locations where hygiene and cleanliness aren't prioritised, so Australian Red Cross provides:

- Single-use protective apparel and equipment for use during cleaning.
- Disinfectant products like Pine O Clean wipes, sprays when used as directed on label, and garbage bags for communal use.
- Education on appropriate cleaning and disposal practices.

Of course, different disasters require different responses and this is especially true when it comes to hygiene. In partnership with Australian Red Cross, the Pine O Clean 'Clean Up Program' continues to support those affected by the floods in South Australia, Northern NSW and more recently in the Northern Territory.

Key hygiene impacts of fire and flood.

Mould and mildew can penetrate just about any area following a flood. High-quality cleaners can be used to help attack mould as water recedes. While carpet and flooring exposed to flooding can't always be saved, areas with minimal damage can be treated using specially formulated products.

The smell of smoke from a fire can linger for months. Even in properties that are unharmed, it can creep into carpets, rugs, and curtains. Ash from fires can also travel long distances and settle in homes and offices. Sanitisers and high-strength cleaning products may be effective in removing the smell of smoke and ash from homes so disaster-affected communities can focus on recovery.

A human-centred approach works best

Everything Australian Red Cross does is designed to mitigate and minimise the long-term social, emotional, and psychological impacts of disaster on individuals and communities.

Key features of best-practice recovery.

- **Outcomes-based:** Focusing on consequences, not just causes.
- **People-centric:** Putting people and community first in everything we do.
- **Complementary:** Fostering and building upon communities' inherent resilience.
- **Trauma-informed:** Approaching complex needs with empathy and understanding.
- **Culturally sensitive:** Operating in a way that's relevant, tailored, accessible, and inclusive.
- **Evidence-backed:** Embracing expertise, evidence, best practice, and lived experience.

Communities are created by people. They're at the heart of everything Australian Red Cross does, and their wellbeing is its number-one priority before, during, and after disaster strikes. Disasters impact on individuals, households, and communities in complex and wide-ranging ways.

There are the obvious consequences: physical damage and destruction, injury, and loss of life.

But it's the intangible ways in which our overall wellbeing is impacted that makes the ongoing support from Australian Red Cross so important for people and communities.

The five guiding principles for Australian Red Cross.¹²

- Safe
- Connected
- Calm
- Self-efficacy
- Hopeful

When individuals are isolated and disenfranchised, the social quality of our communities is undermined. Plans and goals suddenly fall out of focus, and we can feel unmotivated and powerless – like everything is out of our control.¹³

But when we feel safe, supported, and included, communities thrive¹⁴ – even in the wake of disaster.

12. Hobfoll S, Watson P, Bell C, Bryant R, Brymer M, Friedman M, Friedman M, Gersons B, Jong J, Layne C, Maguen S, Neria Y, Norwood A, Pynoos R, Reissman D, Ruzek J, Shalev A, Solomon Z, Steinberg A, & Ursano R (2007). *Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence*. *Psychiatry*, vol. 70, pp. 283–315.
13. Gordon R (2006). *Acute responses to emergencies: Findings and observations of 20 years in the field*. *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*.
14. Australian Disaster Resilience (2018). *Community Recovery Handbook*.





When your world is turned upside down by disaster, there's comfort to be found in the familiar.

Australian Red Cross helps people affected by disaster rebuild a sense of security, comfort, and belonging by restoring routines and reconnecting them with community support groups.

The time disaster recovery takes and the need for long-term, sustainable support is still not well recognised across the emergency management sector and beyond. This can mean opportunities to mitigate the psychological and social impacts of disasters are often not considered or prioritised – right from ground-level emergency activations through to policy level decision-making.

Australian Red Cross recovery teams work alongside communities providing essential, ongoing recovery support to help minimise the psychosocial impacts through the months and years of rebuilding their lives.

How Australian Red Cross helps.

- Provides psychosocial and wellbeing support.
- Supports remote and hard-to-reach places.
- Prioritises support for disadvantaged and marginalised communities.
- Connects people with social services and helps them navigate complex recovery systems.
- Provides training, education, and technical advice to community leaders to strengthen recovery practice and support.
- Advises and educates our emergency services partners and colleagues.
- Collaborates with governments at all levels.
- Advocates for policy and practice improvements.
- Provides tips and practical recovery support to help households clean up after wind, fire and water damage.
- Helps to maintain a clean and safe environment in evacuation centres and community recovery hubs.

The social capital equation.

Social capital is the foundation of our communities; it's the network of social and economic relationships that connect us and help us solve common problems.

It's built upon the pillars of connection, reciprocity, and trust, and it takes many forms.

But it's not an exclusive club. Social capital is fostered through formal and informal groups and communities of all sizes.

Social capital is defined in communities three ways.

 Trust

 Interconnectedness

 Norms

Social capital can be depleted when major disasters occur, but it is possible – and important – to build it back up. Why? Because it plays a major role in disaster recovery.¹⁵

Research has found people who are well-connected receive more support following a disaster than those who aren't.¹⁶ They're also more likely to band together with their community to lead collective recovery efforts.¹⁷ That's where Australian Red Cross comes in.

Australian Red Cross is embedded in many communities across the country, meaning it's a powerful facilitator and connector in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency. The organisation draws on years of expertise and lived experience to help people cope in healthy ways, connect them to services and information, and encourage community-led action to support the recovery journey.

How Australian Red Cross works in recovery.

Recovery and emergency management go hand-in-hand, but each serves a specific and important purpose. While Australian Red Cross operates across all stages of disasters, let's take a closer look at recovery.

Major disasters and emergencies touch all aspects of our lives. That's why Australian Red Cross is informed by a recovery model (see Figure 1 below) that encompasses the natural, social, financial, cultural, political, and built capitals.

Australian Red Cross works primarily in the social capital, but the interconnected nature of the recovery model is such that the organisation's experience and expertise is broadly applicable across all capitals.¹⁸

This means taking a whole-of-community approach when planning for and co-ordinating recovery services to ensure as many people as possible are supported when disaster strikes.

Collaboration and co-ordination between Australian Red Cross employees, volunteers, and emergency services' partners means everyone understands their role and responsibilities in the crucial days, months, and years following a disaster.

Figure 1: Key interconnected aspects of community recovery informing our work.¹⁸



15. Aldrich D (2010). *Fixing recovery: Social capital in post-crisis in resilience*. The Selected Works of Daniel P Aldrich. Department of Political Science Faculty Publications. Paper 3. 16. Ibid. 17. Ibid. 18. Quinn P, Gibbs L, Blake D, Campbell E, Johnston D, & Iretton G (2021). *Guide to Post-Disaster Recovery Capitals (ReCap)*. Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre. Melbourne, Australia.



Recovery in real life

It's easiest to understand the application of psychological first aid when you see it in action.

Fleur Creed and her husband, Ron, had not long moved to the tiny town of Dallarnil in Queensland before it was struck by successive floods in 2022. The pair had purchased a decommissioned church, which they intended to renovate.

The project had only just got underway when "tsunami-like" flood waters inundated the town, destroying many of their possessions and leaving them without shelter.¹⁹

The couple sadly lost their beloved dog – a blow made more difficult by the fact that they weren't yet acquainted with their neighbours or the wider community, and emergency services struggled to reach them.

Practical assistance did come, but Fleur says it's the ongoing support they've received from Australian Red Cross that's helped the most. In addition to attending community meetings and mental health sessions facilitated by local staff and volunteers, Fleur and her husband have received vital financial assistance.

"Australian Red Cross has remained in contact with us, checking that we're okay all the way through," she says. "They have really stayed with us, long after the others have all fallen away, and that's been worth a huge amount."

19. Loram L, & Kearnan J (2022, January 13) *Queensland couple lucky to be alive as tsunami-like wave washes them away on top of a water tank.* Australian Broadcasting Corporation.



Australian Red Cross recovery programs.

After disaster strikes, recovery programs are designed to meet the unique needs and challenges of local communities.

Australian Red Cross offers support for hazards of all kinds and work closely with local services, governments, and community groups to deliver immediate and longer-term support.

Program foundations.

-  Applicable to all hazards.
-  Informed by needs.
-  Supported by locals.
-  Built on community strengths, knowledge, and experience.

Importantly, Australian Red Cross encourages community-led recovery; programs are flexible and designed to be adapted to the local context and the unique needs of disaster-affected communities.

The Fundamental Principles of Australian Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, ensures neutral and independent support, and draws on a variety of sources to assist the organisation's expertise in this area, including business partners, academia, government agencies and global and community organisations. Australian Red Cross recovery programs aren't confined to direct service provision. They are well-placed to educate and advise colleagues in the emergency services and community sectors on psychosocial recovery best practices.

Australian Red Cross is an important advocate for people facing compounding disasters and major emergencies. It's a responsibility the organisation takes incredibly seriously. And, where Australian Red Cross has limited capacity to provide recovery support, its advocacy among emergency services, community partners, and all levels of government can be a powerful proxy.

Recovery in action.

Recovery looks different for everyone, and Australian Red Cross doesn't dictate how disaster-affected individuals and communities should recover.

The role of Australian Red Cross is to equip communities with the tools and resources necessary to lead their own recovery – and stick around to support them in that mission.

There are a few important things for disaster-affected communities to consider as they face their new reality.

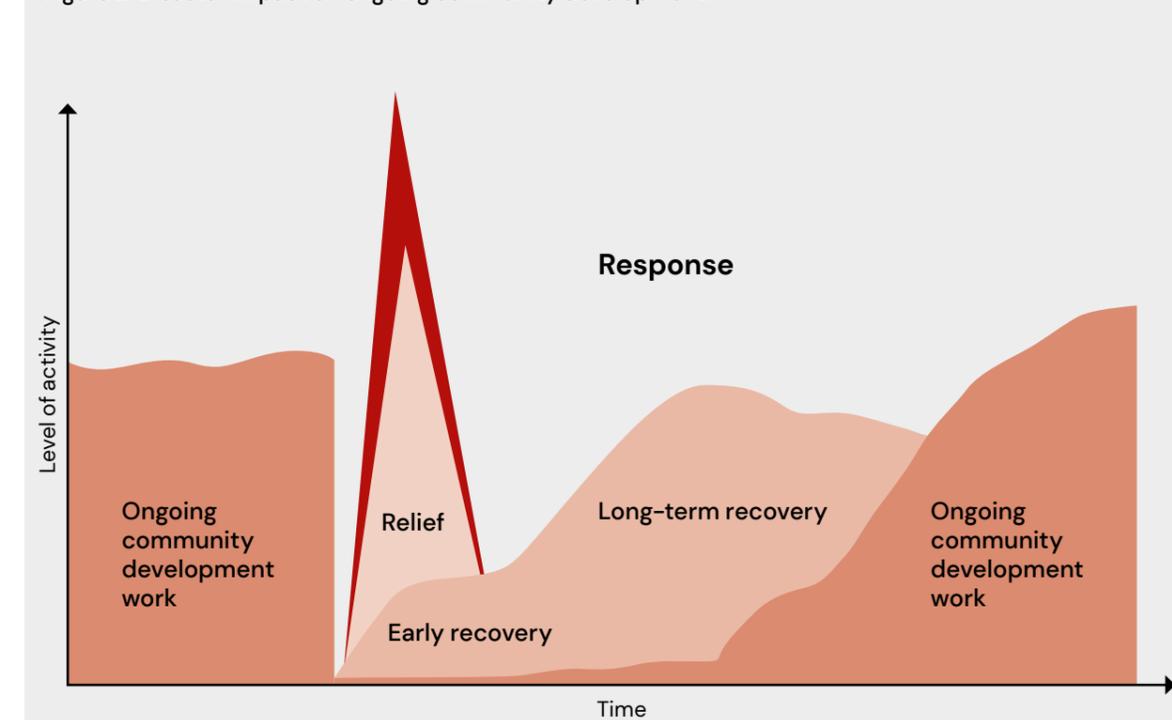
Communities and those supporting them must come together to establish their needs and priorities as recovery efforts get underway. Existing community values, aspirations, development plans, and patterns of local

leadership can and should be considered. They should be integrated too, ensuring the longer-term recovery process leads to ongoing and sustainable improvements.

Both rapid and slower-onset disasters can fundamentally alter a community's development. Understanding a community's vision from the start means the recovery process naturally dovetails into long-term and more sustainable development.

The commitment of Australian Red Cross is a crucial part of this equation. It is realistic about how long recovery operations can be sustained to ensure disaster-affected areas have the best possible chance of realising those long-term goals and aspirations. The organisation is optimistic about what it can achieve for the benefit of disaster affected communities.

Figure 2: Disaster impact on ongoing community development.²⁰



²⁰ Australian Disaster Resilience (2018). *Community Recovery Handbook*, p.32.



Recovery in real life

After enduring the devastating 2022 floods in the NSW Northern Rivers town of Bungawalbin, garlic farmer Mark O'Toole contacted an Australian Red Cross volunteer to facilitate a donation of refurbished bikes to flood-affected members of his community.

It was the positivity of this interaction that made Mark reach out again when he was himself in need of support. Australian Red Cross provided ongoing recovery assistance to help him manage the personal and business impacts of the floods, and while Mark recovered in hospital in Ballina, members of the Bungawalbin community tended and harvested his garlic for him.

This kind of community-led recovery effort is exactly why Australian Red Cross maintains its presence in disaster-affected areas long after the immediate threat has subsided.



The benefits of corporate partnerships are crucial

Working together with corporate partners helps mobilise the power of humanity.

It's taken a century for Australian Red Cross to develop and refine an approach to supporting communities before, during and after disaster strikes. But this hasn't been done alone and important corporate partners have provided invaluable support.

In addition to providing funding to support disaster programs, partners also help in a variety of ways including working directly in communities and driving support. These partnerships provide vital in-kind help and volunteering contributions that make a meaningful and lasting difference to those in need.

Pine O Clean is one such valued partner. In partnership with Australian Red Cross, the Pine O Clean 'Clean Up Program' will help to support nearly 1,700 Australian Red Cross Emergency staff and volunteers to help communities impacted by disasters.

Pine O Clean continue to support Australian Red Cross and those affected by floods in areas such as South Australia, Northern NSW and, more recently, in the Northern Territory. This includes donating products directly to communities to help minimise the impacts of flooding and support with recovery.

Corporate partnerships are only set to grow as we move into an increasingly uncertain future. As climate change takes hold, partnerships will sustain the ability to reach communities facing hardship, to recognise and respond to the unique challenges facing marginalised people, and to leverage the power of social capital as a tool to build community resilience.

With support from partners like Pine O Clean, Australian Red Cross can continue to help people across Australia build resilience, respond in a crisis, and recover from disasters well into the future.

A disaster recovery timeline

The stress of rebuilding and the disruption of community routine, support networks and social life are often referred to as the 'second disaster'.

There is no one path to recovery – what works in one community may not work in another. Recovery programs and emergency services need to be tailored to meet the needs of each individual community.

It's important to be on the ground supporting communities to lead their own recovery and have robust program monitoring systems in place to ensure best-practice responses.

The Australian Red Cross timeline below paints a picture of the complexities after disasters. It shows what their teams on the ground see in the years after a disaster to help them plan and support the individual needs of communities.

0 – 6 months

We deliver 1:1 psychological first aid and timely and accessible information that is vital to helping people access support and make informed decisions.

- Focus on clean up and rebuilding, diminished focus on normal life.
- Strong sense of communities pulling together and sharing resources.
- High energy and focus. Gratitude and thanks expressed.

6 – 12 months

We focus on fostering community connections and delivering wellbeing support through our Recovery Basics, stress management workshops and Wellbeing Toolkit.

- Reality of 'day-to-day' recovery hits. Some people withdraw from their normal social networks.
- Pre-existing issues and life complexities are exacerbated.
- Concerns and anxieties about future disasters increase.

12 – 18 months

We streamline service delivery and recovery planning in partnership with government agencies and other recovery services. We may also help plan and organise disaster anniversary events.

- Formal community consultation processes and support systems established.
- Community support and leadership grows. Volunteer and supporter fatigue increases.
- Enormity of recovery effort means growing concerns for mental health.
- Attention to natural environment and increased interest in being better prepared for the next disaster.

24 – 30 months

We increase our community connection and engagement activities even with marginalised people. We also deliver additional support for people experiencing ongoing stress and fatigue.

- Build greater engagement and connections across communities. Confidence grows as recovery programs develop community resilience.
- Increased First Nations engagement led by desire to learn about caring for the land and environment.

18 – 24 months

Our advocacy for community voices and marginalised groups enables inclusive recovery planning. At this stage, we also deliver increased support for community leaders at risk of fatigue and burnout.

- Focus on the future, sharing knowledge and advocacy drives community action.
- Isolation and division between those who have and haven't rebuilt.
- Several recovery programs in communities come to an end, despite community needs.

30 – 36 months

At this stage, our focus shifts from recovery to resilience. We empower communities to lead the way towards new beginnings and a brighter future.

- Capacity building activities embraced across all community sectors with future-focused processes. Social activities support psychosocial wellbeing.
- Shift from 'recovery' to 'resilience' strengths-based models and reflection on learnings after disaster.
- Some community social groups fracture due to slow recovery process.

Common emotions after a disaster.

- Community anger, frustration, heightened stress and intense fatigue.
- Frustrations with delays and financial pressure due to infrastructure rebuilding delays, and business viability issues.
- Those rebuilding exhausted by slow assessment and lack of building and trade resources.

- Chronic stress puts pressure on mental and general health services.
- Physical and mental health challenges caused by long-term stress.
- Committees formed addressing complex, competing recovery needs.
- Marginalised groups struggle with specific support as services stretched.
- Community dynamics change as people leave and arrive.



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