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| DFFH Emergency Preparedness and Engagement forum 2025 meeting recording transcript |
| 1 October 2025 |
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**Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 0:19**
Morning, everyone, and a very warm welcome to the Emergency Preparedness and Engagement Forum for 2025. My name is Nora O'Connor. I'm the Acting Director of Emergency Management of the Southeast Team at the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing.
And I have the absolute pleasure of hosting today's event. So a few things before we begin. Today's forum is being recorded and will be shared on the DFFH website in the coming weeks. We are very privileged today to be joined by our Auslan interpreters, Sarah and Michelle. Thank you for being here.
I would also like to thank Gail and Carmel for providing the live captioning. Information about accessing these live captions has been posted on the Q&A chat function and additionally the Q&A chat is open if you would like to submit a question or a comment towards the end of the Forum our panelists.
We'll be answering your questions live, so we encourage you to post any questions you might have. And Please note we can't share anonymous posts, so please include your name.
And finally, at the end of the forum, we will ask you to complete a short survey to provide your feedback so we can continue to strive and improve for next year's event.
So to begin formal proceedings, I would like to officially open today's Forum by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet and dialling in from across Victoria. I am joining you today from the lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people of the Kulin nation.
I recognise their continuing connection to the land, waters and sky, and pay my respect to their elders, past and present. We acknowledge the Aboriginal staff working in the social Services sector for the important work they do in promoting the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal.
And Torres Strait Islander peoples.
So welcome. We are so thrilled to welcome so many of you here today. We have a very full agenda and full of outstanding presenters who are here to share the latest insights and updates on emergency preparedness.
It will be tightly held time wise, so we'll try and get through all of our content as fulsomely as we can. You will hear from the Emergency Management Commissioner, Tim Wiebusch, on how the spring summer predicted weather patterns may influence your preparedness.
We have crucial policy updates for you on behalf of those agencies who are regulated, funded or directly deliver Services on behalf of the department and we are very grateful to Family Care Shepparton who have kindly agreed to share their experience of emergency planning and responding to recent emergencies.
From their own lived experience, I will also be speaking with psychologist Susie Burke and Mr. Tymur Hussein on the Psychosocial considerations for emergency planning. It is my hope today that with all the information we need to help that you need to help keep.
You and your community safe and that we can assist you in prioritising your agency's emergency planning ahead of the high risk weather season.
We do have a lot to cover, so with no further ado, it is my pleasure to introduce Argiri Alisandratos, the Deputy Secretary for Disability, Fairness and Emergency Management at the Department, to provide his opening remarks.
Thank you me.

 **Argiri Alisandratos (DFFH) 3:53**
Thank you, Nora. I would also like to acknowledge the lands on which we meet on today. We are on Aboriginal land, always has been and always will be. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. I'm Argiri Alisandratos, the Deputy Secretary of Disability, Fairness and Emergency Management.
Here at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, it is a pleasure to welcome all of you to our annual Emergency Preparedness and Engagement Forum. Before we look ahead this morning, I first want to take you back to the 17th of December last year.
It was a week before Christmas, a time many of us were winding down for the holiday season, but Bush fires started in the Grampians National Park and then elsewhere across the state. People and services enacted emergency plans.
And in some cases, clients relocated to safer spaces. Local councils opened emergency relief centres. Support agencies provided food, clothes and a place to stay. Crucial emotional and psychosocial support was also provided, including sharing of information and.
Links to recovery supports. During those days through December and into January, our sector worked together to help impacted communities.
And the power of this approach is what I really want to reinforce today. These partnerships between the department and you, the sector, are crucial and you have a crucial role to play because you know your staff and clients and community's unique needs and capabilities.
Through planning, response and recovery, it's about having a complete picture and a comprehensive response. No single agency can do this alone. Everyone needs to bring their unique strengths and perspectives to the table. Everyone needs to be involved.
This idea of shared responsibility in Emergency Management is reflected in our department's vision, safe and supported children and families in stable homes and communities. We know that emergencies impact across all the department's portfolios, which you can see here.
Are extremely broad, so Emergency Management roles are not separate or stand alone, but integral to all our and your work. We are charged with minimising the impact of emergencies on the health and well-being of communities and individuals.
Especially those who face greater risk in emergencies. Our work overlaps with yours through every phase, resilience and preparedness, response and recovery.
Planning and preparedness are areas where the department takes a lead role in our sector. Our core responsibilities are outlined here, but as you've as I've noted already, we also rely on you, our funded agencies to work with clients and your staff to meet these.
In practical terms, this means ensuring your agency's emergency plan is up-to-date, tested and ready to activate, knowing your clients, what they need and how to reach them, and keeping client records and local vulnerable persons registers, which are lists of people in the local.
Community who need help to evacuate in an emergency, all up to date and current. As everyone who works in Emergency Management knows, the time to update information is not during an emergency. Again, the fires last summer were a prime example of how important this work is.
During that emergency, social and health services embedded within the local service system responded to the emergency, and these services were crucial supports for people during the fires. Resources, staff and Emergency Management plans were already in place supporting.
Decisions that kept clients safe. That's what effective planning looks like.
Once an emergency happens, the department also has responsibilities to support people with relief needs as outlined here. In addition, supporting our clients and communities through our close working relationships is critical and where actions you take like activating your emergency plan immediately and keeping.
Lines of communication with the department open are so important.
Recovery is a long game. As we know all too well in Victoria, recovery doesn't end when the fire is out. The department has a broad remit in social recovery, as you can see here. But again, we rely on you to work with us.
On critical actions like providing safe accommodation for those most in need, delivering support and case management, and supporting people's emotional and practical well-being. This is for all people impacted who are needing this support, including our clients.
I know that the work in planning, preparing, responding and recovering often happens quietly behind the scenes, on top of your already full workloads, and often when staff have been directly impacted themselves, but when an emergency hits, it is the reason we can.
Respond quickly and effectively to support communities. Today's forum is about building on that, because every time we come together like this, we sharpen our readiness, we strengthen our partnerships, and we give the people we serve the best chance of getting through the emergency event safely and recovering well.
All the best for a great day, everyone. Let's make the most of it and thank you for being here today.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 9:53**Thank you so much, Argiri, for those reflections on the Events that unfolded in the Grampians and Little Desert National Park fires. And for some of you, those would have been a first-hand experience. As we all know, highlighting the fundamental principle of shared responsibility in Emergency Management is an absolute imperative for us all.
When creating sound management plans, planning together, incorporating an all hazards and all communities approach with stronger collaboration across the sector will undoubtedly see better outcomes for community and for the environment. It's now my privilege to welcome Victoria's Emergency Management Commission.
Tim Wiebusch, who leads the Emergency Management sector and brings important messages about the high risk weather season upon us. Welcome, Tim.

 **Tim Wiebusch (DJCS) 10:43**Thanks, Nora, and good morning, everybody. Pleasure to be amongst you today. I too would like to acknowledge our First Nations people and pay my respects to any of our traditional owners that may be amongst us here this morning. For those that I haven't met before, my name's Tim Wiebusch. I am, I guess, newly minted in some ways, as the Emergency Management Commissioner been in the role now for three months officially, a little bit longer with some acting just before coming into the role, but some of you might have seen me previously in a different uniform. I spent 33 years with Victoria State Emergency Service. So Emergency Management, uh, certainly.
Been part of a long time in my career. I guess for the purpose of today though, I want to share some insights for what we could see for this higher risk weather season and in particular I guess I talk about a mixed bag of risks and opportunities that might come our way.
This season and you'll see that as we go through some of the slides here this morning, like Giri has just done, I also just want to say thank you and encourage you to continue to participate in some of the preparedness activities. Some of you will also be aware that we provide access to what's called the Victorian Annual Preparedness Program.
The VAPP um and that has an online set of modules that goes into more expansive details on some of the topics that I'll talk about today. And for those that have access to the Emergency Management Common Operating Picture or EMCOP, you can access it through there through.
EM learn. So I'd really encourage you to to take that opportunity. Next slide. Thanks.
So this is what we're contending with in terms of increased fire risk for spring. The map shows obviously parts of the Mallee, the Wimmera, the Southwest and all the way through parts of North West Metro down into Western South Gippsland, an increased risk for this spring season and the reason.
For that is the underlying dryness and drought conditions that I'm sure many of you are familiar with. However, if we were to play this out into the summer months, our fire behaviour analysts would tell us that if we don't see average rainfall, and I'll touch on that in a moment.
We could see this map move to being read right across the state with the exception of East Gippsland. So there is definitely an increased risk of fires this coming season and I'll show that in a few slides time as well. Next slide, thanks.
So what is the outlook saying? And this is from the Bureau of Meteorology, I guess for the month of October being our first day now, we're not really seeing a strong push towards, above or below average rainfall for Victoria.
However, that's set to change in November through to January where we're likely to see above average rainfall over that three month period and you can see that on the left hand side of the screen there, particularly in the north of the divide and then in the Far East of the state.
That means we could see flash flooding or riverine flooding being a risk over those months of November through to January if the models come off. So the key piece there is models are only a prediction, they're not a promise. And I guess for the season ahead, that's why we could end up with a bit of a mixed bag.
But the Bureau has a reasonable level of confidence that we will see above average rainfall in November and December in particular. But coinciding with that is above average temperatures for most of Victoria from October through to January. And so that means that if we're only getting small amounts of rainfall and our temperatures are above average.
See evaporation occur and things will dry out again very quickly. And so you'll notice particularly the darker Reds are in the West of the state and those parts West and S Gippsland. And so again we will see parts of the state drying out very quickly and that underlying dryness has now been.
Been with us for over 18 months.
Next slide. Thanks.
What we've also got happening around us in our oceans is that our sea temperatures are likely to be above average over the period of November into December as well. What this means is we can see extreme rainfall events and they've almost doubled since 1958.
And so we've seen these obviously in Victoria from time to time. We get them three or four times a year where that really intense rainfall that our urban settings really struggle to see clear, but also in the rural settings we see what we call.
Overland flow occurring, so not necessarily the rivers and the streams, but just sheets of water across the landscape impacting communities along the way and some of our storm water systems in townships not being able to cope. So again, that is part of the risk environment that we have coming into these next few months next.
Slide. Thanks.
So for this higher risk weather season, it really is a going to be a chance of choose your own adventure. In the West of the state, we are anticipating that we're going to see an above average Bush fire risk. In the northeast and the east of the state, we're likely to see an increased risk of storm with flash flooding and.
Or river rain flooding over the next few months, but with those above average temperatures, heat wave is also a real risk for this forthcoming season, and we've seen that in other parts of the world, which are normally a precursor for our setting here.
With those extra growth in in grasses and the like, thunderstorm asthma continues to be a real risk over this season. Emergency animal disease is still something that we're actively working and planning around. H5N1, the avian influenza is a key risk.
that exists in every other country, with the exception of Australia and the epidemiologists in the animal environment tell us that it's only a matter of time before we will see that H5N1 or bird flu as it might be more colloquially known as in our environment. So preparedness for that is also one.
Well underway, cyber security is an all year round risk as you would know and so again that is something across the time, but particularly for this cohort within the broader DFFH agencies and support agencies in that sense.
The risk of re impacted communities is quite real we think for this season and So what does that mean? We could see with that above average rainfall some of the communities that have been impacted in the past being re impacted by flooding. We could see communities in the West of the state that saw fires last year re impacted by.
Fires again this year or into Gippsland where we've seen flooding in the past or storm activities re-impacted communities again. So that's very much front of mind for us as we head into this season. Next slide, thanks.
I've talked about underlying dryness a couple of times already this morning and I guess these two images just really pay tribute to that or give a real life example. So in Werribee only 10 days ago in a swampland area near the Werribee Racecourse, if you know it, Bush fire occurring in the.
Month of September on the right hand side, you'll see Toongabbie, which is down in Gippsland, a fire that took off again in some of the remote area of South Gippsland and again a key.
Indicator that that underlying dryness is already there and that we're already starting to to see fires occurring. Next slide. Thanks.
This slide looks a little bit busy, but I thought I'd include it to give context for what might be going on around us as a as a state. And this was something that was shared as an exercise scenario at the National Preparedness Summit in Canberra recently with all our fire and emergency services along with government agencies and departments that have.
Emergency Management roles and it really shows that for the western southern parts of Australia the risk of Bush heat wave and flooding is a risk. But if you then look at the blue colours in Central Australia across to the East Coast being Queensland and NSW in particular.
They're actually not anticipating a fire season for some of those areas this year. Rather they're expecting flood arrangements again and you can see some of the time steps and other risks that might come into the arrangements and that's the period to mid-December. If we then go into the next slide which shows from mid-December.
Through to early February, very much for Victoria. You start to see that blue area coming down into East Gippsland, which is the risk of East Coast lows coming off the back of cyclone activity in northern Australia. So these scenarios I guess.
Really call out that the rest of Australia is likely to see concurrent risks and so our ability to draw on resources or support from other jurisdictions may become limited. We're expecting an above average cyclone season in the north, which for us in Victoria means we do see East Coast.
close more frequently, bringing that moisture down the East Coast and into Victoria and sometimes into the Northeast and sometimes even as - Far across into metropolitan Melbourne. So something for us to be mindful of. Again, there's no promises with any of these, but very plausible scenarios.
So if we go to the next slide, we've been talking about for particularly the class one emergencies for fire, flood, storm, et cetera, 6 key priority areas for this forthcoming high risk weather season.
The first of those would probably not be a surprise to this cohort around timely and tailored and relevant warnings. And whilst that might be argued should always be a priority every year, what we're really wanting to nuance this year is that focus on when do we really use emergency warnings.
Because that's the real call to action for communities. Some of the feedback we've had from communities was that in previous seasons, and the last one in particular, emergency warnings, perhaps being up too long or there for many days and losing their impact because people are going, well, if I was asked to leave immediately yesterday.
Why are you still telling me today to leave immediately? So really starting to be focused on our warnings, but also giving really good information about where the incident is and where we want people to go. And I guess for this audience in particular, it then links to item 5, which is around the community consequence and.
relief and obviously relief coordination whilst now sitting with Emergency Recovery Victoria, there are elements obviously that are key contributors from DFFH around temporary accommodation, Psychosocial risk, etc. And so, for our warnings, it's really important that we're telling people
People where they can go to be safe, and if we haven't got a relief Centre that's up and open yet, where can they go? Is it the next major town? Is it somewhere else that we can identify rather than waiting until we've got all the information for that occurring?
That leads to the second priority, which is on evacuation and shelter in place. And again, it's not something necessarily new that we don't give focus to each year, but a really nuanced focus this year is about being clear to communities.
Which part of the community could shelter in place, which part of the community Needs to evacuate, being really clear about what we're asking people to do. And so the focus of our regional preparedness activities for the class one agencies has very much been on evacuation and shelter in place through all the exercising leading up.
To our season that commences today, the third one is around flexibility in our readiness arrangements and really I guess being clear what are we doing ready for the warm start as opposed to once we've actually moved into a response phase and we may need to set up differently to what we would.
Do in readiness and so for this season there are 15 incident control centres have been identified as the primary locations for where we will set up for readiness for fire, flood, storm in that sense whereas the other 30 odd incident control centres will then be used for response if we.
We think it's going to become protracted in duration. The 4th priority is around effective use of our resources and without going through all the detail relevant perhaps more so to some of the class one agencies. The key message here is about managing what is likely to be an extended season.
with our workforces and that would equally apply to those online here today. What are we doing to think about how we can be more flexible in our approaches, only bringing people in for the peak times rather than needing to be there, so shorter shifts um for those agencies that have a volunteer workforce, being able to look at being more
Flexible with our approaches to providing wider access to a broader cohort so that we're not always relying on the same few etcetera, etcetera. And then number six, so I've covered #5 already is around the heat coordination arrangements. They will be changing for this summer.
Period. At the moment, the Emergency Management Commissioner, the individual, so the role that I'm in is the control agency. We are looking to move to a set of control arrangements that sit under an umbrella of coordination.
And so the sub plan for extreme heat, we'll talk about the Emergency Management Commissioner coordinating a number of control agencies being the likes of health or energy or public transport for the various emergencies that they have and sub plans that exist in place and we had a workshop.
As recently as yesterday to communicate some of that as well. So they're the six priorities for us as we head into this higher risk weather. So it's the next slide. Thanks.
I've touched on the fact that there have been regional preparedness briefings occurring across the state, and if you haven't managed to get to one of those, as I indicated earlier, the online modules cover off some of that content in a summarised form and I'd really encourage you to be able to do that.
Mixing in with that is obviously agency and department attestations in terms of their readiness and they've all now been received and processed and we're working through where some of the gaps might be heading into the season ahead.
But we've had a really good take up with those preparedness briefings, really good engagement, not just with the traditional emergency services, but many with the relief and recovery agencies as well. Next slide. Thanks.
So I mentioned earlier that Regional Relief obviously transitioned from DFFH across to Emergency Recovery Victoria late last year and there has been a range of after action review activities taken off the back of the 24-25 high risk weather season.
Working from the bottom of the slide up, one of the key pieces of work out of that is being very clear on what our core emergency relief and recovery offerings or what we call the CERO will be. And that I guess is our commitment with government about the type of Services that we may need to bring in.
And put into place if communities are impacted. So there's almost like a pre agreement with government about some of the support Services that can be given support to get up and going rather than having to go through a process every time.
Obviously there's been a range of briefings and exercising going on with relief and recovery agencies and departments as well. One of the key things there is about how the State Emergency Relief Team - comes together and.
Can really provide that initial support and making sure we've got that joined at the hip with regional control teams and incident control teams as well. And then our final slide for this morning is around the heat arrangements. Again, I've sort of touched on this in part already, but I guess just to talk around some of the next steps.
We are working through a revised sub plan for extreme heat emergencies that was workshopped again with agencies and departments yesterday. That will see a final version of that coordination sub plan document go to the State Emergency Management Planning Committee in.
October later this month and then to the State Crisis and Resilience Council, SCRC in mid-December, which is their next meeting. They will hopefully all being well, then be live in the environment. But probably the key message here is it does not change the roles and.
Responsibilities of any of the agencies and departments that have consequences that they're responsible for managing either as a support agency or as a control agency. It really is about how we bring everybody together during the time of a heat wave to make sure that we're joined up with.
Both our priorities, ensuring effective control is in place, the consequences of being managed, particularly where they're cross cutting and that we do have a process around prioritization of key messages and the like as well, but again.
No changes to roles and responsibilities as they have existed for agencies and departments that have had roles in times of heatwave. So that is it for me this morning. Nora, I'm happy to take any questions that people may have.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 29:40**Thank you so much, Tim. I think we'll collate all the questions to address in the Q&A session at the end, unless anyone has a very quick one we could do now.
OK. Well, let's keep going. Thank you so much, Tim. It's clear there's concerning trends across Victoria with the, as you've described, the ongoing variability in the weather modelling, dry soil in regions that may also face a risk of flooding and heat or ventilator in the air.
And these events also been complexified by the risk of repeat emergency events within the same local regions, so further reiterating the need to plan to stay connected and updated as the season evolves.
It is now my pleasure to introduce Andrea Spiteri, the Executive Director of Emergency Management at DFFH, who is here to outline the 2025 changes to the Social Services Sector Emergency Management Policy, as well as highlighting the resources.
The department has for you to use to support your Emergency Management planning, Andrea.

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 30:46**Thank you very much, Nora, and good morning, everyone. As Nora said, I'm Andrea Spiteri. I'm the Executive Director for Emergency Management for the department. Joining me today are members of the department's Emergency Management branch and the Emergency Management Communications.
Team and I just want to take this opportunity to thank them for their work in bringing you this forum today. Please feel free to post any questions you may have about the presentation straight into the Q&A function.
And the team will respond to your queries as we go and pick up some questions from there for us for a bit later. I'm here today to provide you with an update on the Social Services Sector Emergency Management policy and the associated attestation processes.
To support you and your agency and your emergency preparedness requirements, I'm also going to take the opportunity to highlight a new and innovative resource, one that's been Co produced with our sector partners to assist agencies in planning for emergency psychosocial supports.
Ahead of the upcoming high risk weather season that we just heard about from Tim.
So let's start with the department's Social Services Emergency Management policy update for this year. For those of you who may be new, and for those that have been in the sector for a while, this will be a bit of a refresher for you. The department's Social Services Sector Emergency Management policy aims to.
To protect Victorians health, safety and well-being by outlining how social services plan and prepare for emergencies.
To access a copy of the updated 2025 policy, which has recently been released, you can go to the Department's Service Providers Forum on the our Emergency Management webpage, and that's where all of our relevant information and resources are actually housed.
The team is going to add the link to that webpage in the chat function right now for you. The policy requires services that are funded, regulated or directly delivered by the department to do 3 critical things which are.
On the slide in front of you, one is to have an appropriate Emergency Management plan in place. Two is to review that plan and your preparedness by the 1st of November each year is what we suggest or more frequently if you like. And then three is to report to the department or a test to the department.
That you are prepared for emergencies and we ask you to do that by the 30th of November each year.
The policy outlines actions that home based carers and service providers located in areas of heightened Bush fire risk must take once a catastrophic fire danger day has been forecast for the fire weather district they are located in.
And I just wanted to acknowledge that for some services, some residential services, they also need to relocate on an extreme fire danger day when they're in very, very high risk areas.
So when it comes to Bush fire prone areas and the planning and relocation that you need to undertake, it's important to note that while we've updated some parts of the policy, your obligations as service providers in relation to emergency preparedness haven't changed.
Changed from previous years specifically for Bush fire prone areas. Services that are located in areas of heightened Bush fire or grass fire risk and Tim highlighted before the dangers associated with grass fires as well.
Particularly residential services should undertake additional Emergency Management planning and develop a separate Bush fire survival plan. In that Bush fire survival plan, that should detail early relocation triggers.
A safe relocation destination for your staff and for your clients or residents, transport, how you're going to get to that relocation destination and the processes and procedures that you will go through during relocation to do that safely.
So I do note that Homes Victoria's Fire Services team manage Bush fire survival plans for services where the state owns or is responsible for the property. So they're being developed now. Home based care services such as foster care, kinship care and Aboriginal children and Aboriginal.
Services that are located in areas of heightened Bush fire risk are required to have a Bush fire leave early plan. Previously that's been called just a leave early plan, but it's now called a Bush fire leave early plan to be quite specific about the risk we're trying to address here.
A template for the Bush Fire Leave early plan is available on the website I mentioned earlier, the service providers Emergency Management website when a catastrophic fire danger day is forecast.
It's really important that service providers independently monitor the fire weather forecasts and fire danger ratings for the area that you're in. Prepare to enact your Emergency Management plan and your Bushfire survival plans as necessary and residential and home based care services located in areas of heightened Bush.
Fire risk are required to relocate the day before a forecast catastrophic fire danger day. And as I said before, for some residential services, that's actually the day before an extreme fire danger day. So it's really important to know what your triggers are.
Having said that, other service providers may also choose to factor relocation into the way they deliver their services on those days as well, or other sort of catastrophic fire danger day provisions or processes within their Emergency Management plan for their service.
So each year the department reviews and if requires updates, the Social Services Emergency Management policy prior to the high risk weather season to ensure the policy is both current and fit for purpose.
So this year's updates, we have included new policy inclusions. Aboriginal children and Aboriginal care services are included now under the home-based care service specific policy requirements and if you're looking for those in the policy, that's in section 3.
Three, we've also outlined arrangements for transition supported independent living and short term accommodation and assistance services in a new policy note to recognise the changes that are occurring at the end of the year.
We've updated all our terminology to make sure that that's as contemporary as possible and we've aligned our language right across all of our sort of policies, plans and resources. And additionally, we've updated the sector resources that are available to help you.
To plan to support our funded agencies to have an appropriate Emergency Management plan in place. We've updated the Bushfire Leave early plan template so that that now reflects the current arrangements for Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care services.
And all of these resources and more can all be accessed via that that webpage and having and you can have a look at the link in the in the chat. Please feel free to click on that link that's been posted. Start to familiarise yourself with those resources.
Now or as soon as possible after the forum has finished.
So as I mentioned before, agencies will need to attest to your emergency preparedness and planning. And as we introduced a few years ago, this can be done online in the service agreement module for funded agencies.
So today, being the 1st of October, agencies will receive an e-mail from the department's policy and programs team. So it will come from EM Policy at dffh.vic.gov dot AU.
Notifying you of your need to report. This was sent. It is being sent to the primary and or Emergency Management agency contact that's in the SAM module. So it's important that that remains up to date.
Attesting online is not complex. It can be done simply by completing the Emergency Preparedness Attestation form in SAMs, and you can access that through your My Agency link in the Funded Agency channel. If you're unsure about whether your service is in scope for attestation, you can check.
that really quickly by navigating to the compliance tab in SAM for your agency.
If your agency does provide services that are in scope, you'll see the emergency preparedness attestation form that will be visible and accessible sitting underneath that tab. If your agency services are out of scope for the policy, you won't see the form and you won't be able to access it. So that's pretty easy.
Please note that attestation does close off in the system on the 30th of November and it is a hard deadline. It's generated by the system and if the attestation isn't completed by the 30th of November, then your agency will be immediately identified as non-compliant.
In the system, so please plan now to avoid this. I know it feels like a long way away the 30th of November, but I can't believe it's the 1st of October today. So please look to complete that as soon as possible after you've reviewed your plan. There is also a how to guide to completing the attestation.
That's available in the funded agency channel in the SAM module, so there's plenty of information there to be able to help you to be able to fulfil this requirement. And as I said before, I'd suggest you do that sooner rather than later.
The Emergency Management Team - is going to be posting that document now as well so that you can find that easily and have a look at that. Just a reminder for councils that have joined us today who are providing Services that are in scope for the policy. Just wanted to make sure it's important to note that the requirement to attest.
Is completely separate to other Municipal Emergency Management planning processes.
I also wanted to take the opportunity today to let you know about a resource that we've recently released. Some of you might have seen it. It's a guide to emergency Psychosocial supports. Now this guide replaces a sort of 11 year old framework that we had been working to, which was the Psychosocial support framework.
Work for Emergencies, which was first published in 2014. We've had a lot of emergencies in Victoria in the last 11 years and our understanding of psychological and social impacts of emergencies on communities has unfortunately increased during that time, given the experiences of Victorians.
We've seen an increase in frequency and complexity of emergencies on communities, different types of emergencies, emergencies hitting communities multiple times. And so it's really this guide really represents an important step forward in how we.
Support people and communities during emergencies in terms of their wellbeing. The guide was developed through extensive consultation. We consulted with over 70 sector stakeholders that included Psychosocial practitioners, subject matter experts, councils and other.
All contributed to the development of the guide and their input really helped to shape this guide. So it is contemporary evidence informed principles and practice. The guide provides quite practical information such as the different types and levels of emergency Psychosocial support that can be offered.
And how that, you know, sort of steps into some of the existing mental health Services as well. It talks about the roles and responsibilities of government and sector partners, and it includes some key principles and service delivery considerations that apply in real-world settings.
It also outlines the department's role under the State Emergency Management Plan in relation to our responsibility to coordinate emergency Psychosocial supports to affected communities at the state level. So in summary, the guide has been designed to support the sector to both understand.
And implement emergency Psychosocial responses.
So the guide is for people who are working in the Emergency Management sector, councils, government, non-government organisations and others. It is relevant for executive decision makers, policy developers.
Program staff and people involved in local Emergency Management planning committees and recovery committees as well. It was developed to enhance our collective understanding of Psychosocial impacts for emergencies.
I think it's really important at this point to point out that emergency Psychosocial impacts in this context refers to the interaction of psychological factors that people may experience when they're, you know, exposed to emergency Events and the surrounding social environment. Hence we get the term psychosocial.
The Psychosocial impacts of emergencies can therefore affect people's individual mental health, as well as the broader community and family and community dynamics.
The guide provides a clear sort of evidence-informed approach to delivering Psychosocial supports after emergencies. Section A of the guide delves into this. The Section B of the guide outlines the roles and responsibilities of a wide range of players, including the Victorian government.
Funded service providers, council sector partners. So I encourage you to have a look at that. And then Section C outlines the Psychosocial risks and impacts across emergencies and how they can be mitigated through informed inclusive approaches to.
Planning and service delivery. So that's all discussed in Section C The guide can be used to inform strategy and practice. For example, it can be used as a reference document or training guide when you're planning for Psychosocial supports, when you're training and when you're.
Planning for service delivery as well before an emergency. It's a pretty practical guide, so it can be used during emergencies to quickly assist agencies to activate and coordinate Psychosocial supports.
It does include a template for reporting, and so it will be used also as a guide to that reporting as well, which will help us provide that statewide oversight and situational awareness about Psychosocial Services that are being delivered to communities.
And importantly, and I want to emphasize this, the guide is not just limited to government use. It is publicly available on the department's Disaster and Emergency Recovery website, along with a range of other resources. So I really encourage you when you finish looking at the funded agency channel, I encourage you to.
To have a look at this the dffh.vic.gov.AU/recovery website where you'll see lots of resources including this guide.
So where can where can the guide be accessed? Yes, it can be accessed through the website. Sorry, I was catching up with my notes. So we're just going to take a couple of slides just to delve into this a little bit further and just sort of talk about emergency Psychosocial supports, what they are and what they aren't.
Because this can be a little bit confusing sometimes for people when they're maybe new to the sector or are working out what is covered under sort of emergency Psychosocial support. So emergency Psychosocial supports.
Are services, programs and assistance that's designed to meet the immediate psychological, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual Needs of individuals and communities affected by emergencies. So they aim to reduce the distress.
And promote well-being, support people to cope, function and recover, and they are available before, during and after emergencies. The key features of emergency Psychosocial supports are that they are rapidly deployed in response to an emergency. They're delivered by trained staff.
They are trauma-informed and culturally safe practice. They are focused on people most at risk, including those with limited supports as well, and they reflect community values such as independence and resilience. So a few examples of Psychosocial supports.
Are things like Psychosocial first aid, community engagement, counselling and group counselling, outreach, emergency personal support as well, and then emotional and spiritual support in addition to some of the case support and case management Services that may come in.
During and after an emergency to help people navigate further supports as well.
So we'll just take the opportunity here to clarify what emergency Psychosocial supports are not, because as I said before, there can be a bit of confusion about what falls under a Psychosocial response in an emergency. Well, many services, many Services support people's health and well-being.
Not all of them are designed for the specific and unique conditions and experiences of people in emergencies or the urgency of an emergency environment. So as I as I outlined, emergency Psychosocial supports are designed to be immediate, flexible, trauma informed.
And responsive to social and emotional impacts of emergencies. By contrast, non-emergency Psychosocial supports and Services are more likely to be Services that are offered through existing service providers.
These are highly valuable, these existing services, but they're not necessarily tailored or structured to support people immediately following a critical incident or major emergency. They may, you know, they're often involve, you know, schedule, scheduled or ongoing appointments and support. They may or may not be designed as trauma.
Informed Services and they don't necessarily or can't necessarily adapt easily to rapidly changing conditions or urgency of emergencies, particularly when we need to outreach into communities that have been impacted. So examples of those sorts of Services are general mental health services, general.
General counselling or social work services, general medical treatment through your local GP and physical rehabilitation, pre-existing legal or financial counselling services or some sort of basic services that provide emergency relief position provisions such as food and water and things like that. So making the distinction between the two types of supports is really important because emergency psychosocial teams can focus on the short term well wellbeing needs of both individuals, families and communities.
Using the appropriate tools and methods, people can then receive some timely and appropriate support without sort of confusion about where to go for help. It also supports effective coordination between emergency responders, relief and recovery.
Services and mainstream systems, which provides A smoother transition from response to recovery as well.
So I mentioned a reporting template. This is new. This is something that we will have in place for the first time this season and then we'll review it after that. So really welcome your feedback if you're using this template this this season.
This has been developed for councils to use and capture the services that are being provided by agencies, particularly those emergency psychosocial services during major emergencies.
It will capture the types of services that are being provided and also the number of people that are being supported as well, which is really important to provide us with a picture across the state to inform the coordination of the services and also the funding of the services as well. So councils are requested to fill out the template when they're coordinating.
The provision of psychosocial supports locally within their municipality and to send the document back to the department. But we'll work through that process with you when we're, you know, when we're starting to coordinate these supports.
In an emergency, and I'm touching wood here that you know by some miracle we might get through somewhere without having too many of those. So this will really assist the department in its role as the coordinating agency, both in relief and recovery for psychosocial supports. Again, this template along with the guide can be accessed through.
Our disaster and recovery webpage that I mentioned before.
So on that note, that concludes this year's update on Emergency Management policy for this forum. If you have any questions or queries about anything that's been presented, if you could please pop those into the Q&A function, the team will respond to you now.
Alternatively, the e-mail address is up that I mentioned before, so please feel free to pop any questions you have through to the policy team as well and we can answer those. I hope today's presentations encourage you all to jump online, start to access some of these resources, start to have a look at the.
Attestation requirements to be fully prepared for this season. As Tim mentioned, today is technically the first day of the high-risk weather season for this year. Please go well in your preparedness and planning. Stay safe everybody and thanks.
again for coming to the forum today to hear about this.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 54:44**
Wonderful. Thank you, Andrea, so much. The ability of agencies to respond to emergencies relies on this ability to cope and recover from the insult of the event, which cannot be left to chance. So really reassuring to see these resources are available for the sector.
And at the well-intentioned risk of sounding repetitive, we know that early and effective planning are the linchpin in optimising longer term recovery across the community. Don't go too far, Andrea, we'll be welcoming you back for the Q&A session towards the end of today's forum.
And now I'm really privileged and excited to hear from Angela Armstrong, the Director of Service Development Family Care in Shepperton, about their experience of undertaking emergency planning and then putting that plan into action when confronted by an emergency.
For those of you that don't know, Angela, she's been with Family Care for close to 20 years, has seen the organization grow from 100 staff to nearly 250, with new service provisions including the Orange Door and the Victorian Carer Gateway.
Ange is passionate about people and building social capital within regional areas. Welcome Ange.

 **Angela Armstrong 56:02**
Thank you, Nora.
Yes. So thank you and good morning, everybody and and welcome. As Nora said, I'm Ange from Family Care. I'm really pleased to be here. It's a fantastic opportunity to be able to share some of our experiences and our reflection on our responses in Emergency Management.
Before I start, I would just like to acknowledge the traditional. I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that we're meeting on today, pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. So today I thought it would be helpful just to step through a couple of things that I think.
Is important from a sector-based perspective, so a not-for-profit non-government organisation. I'll talk a little bit about family care and our service provision and then I'll give some details and some reflections on our experiences providing Emergency Management response and recovery.
I then we can update and talk a little bit about our guiding principles that underpin our emergency preparedness and recovery plan. And then lastly, just finish up with some reflections on the human impacts of working in Emergency Management Recovery.
And the other thing I think is important for us, it's really pleasing. We're talking about regional Victoria and I think given Tim's outline, a lot of those, you know, pending emergencies look to be in those regional areas.
So just to talk a little bit about family care and what we do, just to give you some context, as you can see from the slide, we operate across 5 local government areas. They includes Moira, Shepparton, Strathbogie, Mitchell and Murrindindi. We have offices in Cobram, Shepparton, Seymour and Wallan, and we also have a number of outreach offices across Murrindindi, including Kinglake and Alexandra. So quite a big spread across the middle of Victoria. Um, we have a really broad range of service delivery, right through all of life's stages, which is challenging but you know, very rewarding. We are an NDIS provider, which again for the context of today's forum adds another level of complexity to our Emergency Management.
Preparedness and planning, looking after our very vulnerable participants is is very important. We provide as part of NDIS support, coordination and a whole range of specific services for children.
As Nora said, we are also we provide both state funded care carer services plus at the Commonwealth Carer Gateway for Victoria. We're a core agency in the Orange Door which has a main office in Shepparton.
And an access point down in Wallan. And lastly, our biggest service provision is our Child and Family Services portfolio, which works from early intervention, prevention, well-being activities right through to statutory work with child protection as an example.
We have a number of men's programs as well, including men's counselling. So that kind of just gives you the scope of where family care sits and what our footprint looks like.
So now probably more importantly, I'll just go on to talk a little bit about our history and experience. So Family Care has a a long history of working and responding to Emergency Management events. We provided Victorian Bushfire case management services for over five years after the Black Saturday fires and in all honesty, uh, we were underprepared for that recovery and really had to just kind of run on our feet to get that off the ground, which I think even if you could do the best preparedness in the world.
There are often events and the scale of the events, it actually means that you have to be quite pivotal and mobile. Um, but certainly it was a huge learning curve for us. Um, we have also been funded over the years to provide drought counselling and more recently Family Care is a lead agency.
You can see in the Goulburn Flood Recovery Service. I thought that might be interesting to put some of the theory into practice to give you some examples about how we actually created the Goulburn Flood Recovery Service. Sorry, the Goulburn Flood Recovery Service was a local response.
To the 2022 flood event in Shepparton and Seymour Family Care, and obviously there were broader flood events across both Rochester and Echuca. Our service delivery was particularly focused on Mooroopna, Shepparton and Seymour.
We worked very closely with our local partners, Primary Care Connect, Uniting Vic Tas, Connect GV, the Bridge Youth Services, OzChild and Nexus Community Health. We full well know that one service cannot provide all of the responses
The support to a community and therefore we needed a collective effort to enable shared results for the impacted communities. Luckily we've got a very strong local relationship with our local service providers and we're able to leverage off this local strength.
And that included immediate support from our Child and Family Services Alliance partners. Interesting, we didn't actually have signed contracts at the start of our response with ERV Emergency Recovery Victoria.
At that point in time people knew that we had to respond and we did and we did in a really non competitive manner, manner. So out of goodwill we actually got the service off the ground fairly quickly, which was fairly amazing.
Family Care, we were able to lean into our Emergency Management planning and quickly escalate our internal surge team, which in the very early stages was helpful. So just some context for that. We have a number of staff who have experience in working in previous Emergency Management recovery and response.
So we were enabled in work, so we were able to enact our service delivery relatively quickly. I think one of the things that also helped initially is our mobile workforce post COVID.
I think we've grown as an organisation probably across the state and the country, in the world to be able to work remotely. So that was fantastic. This enabled the flexibility to work where our clients were at. Our whole workforce was able to be moved around and adapted to where they needed to be.
And you know, in part that was in potentially another office, if one of our offices was not able to be or working in emergency recovery centre or working in a park or in a playground. So yeah, something's just better.
One of the things I think is interesting around regional Victoria, and that probably goes for any area in. I know there's a lot of regional colleagues in here today. It's hard to draw in the immediate response to an emergency.
The difference or draw the line between clients and staff because as an example, when we had our flood event, our staff and their families and their children and their schooling and their families, as an example, were in exactly the same situation as many of our clients.
So they were all impacted by the event, which means you really have to be emotionally tuned into the recovery and how you do that. Um, fairly emotionally draining and it's quite tolling to work out where the priorities need to be, but it's certainly something that was in the forefront of our minds.
About both providing support and stability and safety to our staff, but also at the same time then a focus on the community that was impacted and what we needed to do.
We had, as an example, a real life example, we had a staff member who had to paddle his canoe um down to his mum's house in Shepparton on numerous occasions in order to see whether she was OK. Um. So yeah, so that that was a there's a lot of um.
You know, learning on the spot really. Again, going back to the shared results, you know, I couldn't stress more about the local partnership and the readiness even within our own agency. We, as I said, as I've said, we were not competitive.
We jointly developed the service model and encouraged our partners to join in the response and it, you know, to get that off the ground so quickly was a fantastic effort. At one point we had over 50 case managers working with an amazing breadth of skills and experiences.
We initially started with the Surge team and then had to develop out through a fairly rapid joint recruitment process. So again, something unusual to be recruiting collectively together with agencies on the interview panels. So the strength was.
Really embedded on the ground, the Golden Slug Recovery Service is still actually operating today. We're funded until the end of December, so we are slowly transitioning out the last of the of the of our clients.
We did actually also have our service model evaluated. We were very proud of it, Um evaluated by Swinburne University Uh and it came back with some outstanding results. Um, that local place-based service collaboration is an amazing model going forward in terms of community-led recovery.
So, yeah, so that was really pleasing. For us going forward, that model of collaboration is certainly built into our emergency plan and we need our partners to share the results. A couple of things I thought might be interesting just before we move on is.
From Family Care's point of view, in terms of our Emergency Management response is our focus on children. Too often our children, our experience is that children are out of sight, their voice is not heard, they're missed, they're not prioritised as being impacted.
So our response to this Emergency Management was all of our staff were trained in trauma informed practice and a range of other children's focused assessment tools. Our principles going forward in our plan is we're absolutely committed to ensuring that the emergency recovery services that we provide.
Are built into our plan and that was also highlighted in the external evaluation.
Um, just before I move on to my final slide, my last couple of slides, in terms of that children's focus work, um, we actually could have done it earlier, um, in the service delivery length, but we did actually have two staff trained up in the Storm Bird.
Group training, which is an evidence-based training, which was working specifically with children seeking impacted by the flood, seeking their feedback, their experiences, their challenges and ways going forward from a therapeutic lens so.
Definitely a plan's not perfect. We've certainly learnt a lot of things over the time, but having that focus on children has been a priority for us. So in a nutshell, that's how we developed and created the our response to the Goulburn Flood Recovery Service and again a couple of principles.
The local place-based response is invaluable. Working with the community when you're part of the community absolutely value adds and that focus on children's safety was a priority.
So I'll just move on just to give a little bit of an overview of our Emergency Management plan. And I think Tim mentioned it before, actually with Emergency Management, I think there's an old notion that you don't need a plan until you actually need it.
Ours is never perfect. It's currently in its review cycle and in its final draft. I thought I might just go through and outline a couple of the guiding principles that we have in our plan. Um.
Our governance roles and responsibilities are really clear and that we have delegated decision making authority across all of our catchment area. An example of that is if you are the most senior person and that could be a case practitioner on the ground.
In in an office or in that delegated area, I mean sorry, in that geographical area, you've got the dele, you have the delegated authority to make decision if there's an Emergency Management event in your regional office. So that is endorsed by our board and our executive and our CEO. So that gives really clear empowerment.
and decision making authority for that staff. Our training and education for our staff is very important. Like all plans, there's no point having a plan that sits on a shelf. So we have regular consultation with our staff.
It's included in our orientation and induction planning and regularly raised at managers and our team leaders meetings as an example.
Something else also highlighted before around that hazard identification. So there are a number of areas already in our catchment that are hazard that have pre-existing hazards. So again sadly Shepparton, Mooroopna, Seymour are prone to flooding.
And I'm at this stage, you know, has there's not, hasn't been a huge amount of mitigation around that. And there's also a lot of dry areas as Tim also talked about this morning, a couple of other principles we embed cultural safety is another principle in our Emergency Management and preparedness plan.
We know that's highly important. We work closely with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ACCO organisations. Plus there's a range of culturally specific organisations that we've got close working relationships with. There's often those really hard to.
Either communicate or hard to engage communities. It's important that we make an effort to do that in emergency recovery. The last point I think that's important is around our ability to pivot our service delivery.
To in as part of our triaging process, so to very um in the immediate response that may have been we looked at are there lighter end programs that we could postpone or put on hold for a little while. Um clearly we had to do a triage process to ensure that our most vulnerable and.
And high risk families continue to receive a complex and intensive service delivery. So what we did in terms of that pivoting, so those Services that were able to postpone or put on hold, those resources were then quickly moved over into our immediate response to the emergency.
I think it's really important that you're able to be flexible to response because obviously there's no event is the same and it depends on the scale. But just again to reiterate, our plan is not a perfect plan, nor is it static.
But there are a couple of things that we are working on to try and continually keep improving it.
Just going back as well and now I'll move on to my second last slide which is around our the human impacts has been already spoken about before and I know that we're the next presenters will talk about that Psychosocial in in more detail.
You know, the pressure and the anxiety to provide Emergency Management recovery is long and staff well-being is paramount. We are conscious of the Psychosocial impacts. It's a really tough balance to, you know, stay the long haul and we were clear around.
Um, making sure we've got additional tailored supports for our staff Uh and flexible in the way that we supported them. There were times as well that we went back to DFFH and had to negotiate Um service Hours or targets in terms of being able to Um modify and.
Move OurService delivery around to respond. So collectively it wasn't just us. Clearly there's a number of our funders and our partners that were, um, really supportive. Um, lastly, um, we are dedicated, we are dedicated and are dedicated to improving our responses, seeking feedback through an internal evaluation. Not only did we have the external evaluation, but we also have a formal internal evaluation process where we consulted with clients through feedback surveys and focus groups, other staff members, surveys, other stakeholders on our statistics.
Around we were really keen to know how we were performing, what we could do better, what things worked really well and how we can learn from that. And finally, a last example of that is in the Emergency Recovery Centre in Shepparton. Very early on we had a family who had.
A child who had autism. The initial setup in the Emergency Recovery Centre was fairly, I wouldn't say chaotic, not being critical, but so their space in their tent was right on a thoroughfare. It didn't have any safe space, so we were called out to the Emergency Recovery Centre.
To put some boundaries and to redesign their space, and that was one of a number of occasions where our expertise was called out to support families.
So finally, thank you. I think I'm just about out of time. Good luck with your planning and I'm not sure I could take questions today due to the size of the virtual room, but the moderators will be capturing any questions in the chat.
And I'm happy to respond to those. There may not be any. And again, thanks very much for the opportunity. Enjoy the rest of the forum. Thanks.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:15:05**Oh, thank you so much, Ange. It's a fantastic presentation. You've just touched on so much here from psychosocial health, trauma informed practice, intake, triage, optimization with a focus on the inclusivity of children.
Which is critical and local place-based responses within your community service lens and also the rigorous evaluation practices you've spoken about, which is great for the ongoing improvement approach. There's a no blame approach, it's just about improving systems to better meet our needs as we move forward.
It's clearly held your organization in good stead and we are very grateful to you for sharing this with us today.
OK, now for we're slightly behind on the time, so I'm just going to move quickly to introduce our two psychologists who've kindly agreed to share their time with us today. We have Doctor Susie Burke, a PhD environmental psychologist and therapist with many years of experience working in disasters.
Climate change and other community threats. Susie specializes in psychological preparedness, psychological first aid and disaster recovery. Tymur Hussain, who is a psychologist, senior leader and clinician within the Child, Youth and Family Services sector. Tymur specializes in supporting children, young people and families.
Impacted by complex trauma, including following disasters, and both Susie and Tymore are part of our DFFH Emergency Management Psychosocial Services panel. So welcome to you both.

 **Angela Armstrong 1:16:42**
Thank you.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:16:44**Thank you, Nora.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:16:47**So to begin, can I start by asking both of you in turn to tell us a little bit about psychosocial support?

 **Suse Burke 1:16:55**Yes. OK. Thank you. Well, Andrea talked quite a lot about it and we thought we'd briefly fill in some of the details given that we're members of the Psychosocial panel. So psychosocial, the term, as Andrea explained, is a mixture of psychological and social. But what we mean by psychological is actually a combination of what we feel in our bodies and what we're thinking in our head and also then what we do in response to how we're feeling and thinking. And these are all impacted, the Ways in which we feel, think and the things that we do when an emergency or disaster happens. And so and it matters because it feels very bad and most uncomfortable.
Most painful. It diminishes our quality of life, but it also diminishes our ability to work and to be able to function well and to have good relationships and to Care - for our children. So it actually really matters, the Psychosocial impacts. So I'll hand over to Tymur, who's going to talk about what the panel actually offers to community.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:17:54**Yeah, thanks, Susie. So DFFH has a useful resource. Well, I hope it's useful called the Psychosocial Services Panel. So we're here for councils, government departments or agencies to call on for support before, during or after an emergency.
So the panel includes experienced psychologists and specialist practitioners who've worked with emergency impacted communities. Our expertise spans everything from working with children and families to supporting school communities after critical incidents.
To delivering workforce training, we offer a wide range of services like psychological first aid training, community debriefing and personal support during emergencies. So really the panel is here to help ensure that people and communities have access to the kind of support.
That can make a real difference in navigating the emotional and social impacts of emergencies.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:18:59**
Yeah, OK, very interesting. Are there some people or groups who are particularly vulnerable when affected by an emergency?

 **Suse Burke 1:19:07**There's a useful way of thinking about who is going to be vulnerable. It's what a person takes to the event, what happens to them during the event, and then what happens for them or to them after the event. So if you think about what you take to the event, if a person is a member of a marginal group, that's something that they take to the.
Group that's likely to make them more vulnerable. If they've had a prior experience of a disaster that they didn't cope well with, or that they had difficulties with their mental health afterwards, or if they're coming to the event and they already have some mental health challenges, that can also be a risk factor.
If a person has an avoidant or a blaming coping style, that's also something that they take to the event that puts them into a vulnerable category. And if they've got other lots of other stresses that are happening or lots of family issues, like you might have a mother who's cared for and going to a nursing home, that's taking up a lot.
Of your mind or other stuff might be going on with family. That's again something you take to the event that might make you more vulnerable. And another one that I think's really useful to keep an eye on is a low perception of social support. We know that actually the perception of our social support is actually the most valuable form of social support. If we perceive that we've got good social support, that's even better than actually accessing it, it's this perception of social support. So people who perceive that their social support is low going into an event are also at risk. And then the things that happen during the event, well, there's the obvious things like if there's lots of losses that you've incurred personally, if you've lost family members or serious.
Injury, of course. But also if you've experienced horrific scenes, particularly involving children, that can also be a thing that would put somebody into a higher risk for being vulnerable. And then the things that after the event that happened, the obvious ones would be if you've got a lot of ongoing disruption, if you've had to relocate, if you've got unstable housing.
If you're lacking access to support Services and things like that, but Angela mentioned the importance of keeping our eye on children and looking out for them. One of the things that we know for children is that if their parents are particularly upset or they're overhearing lots of distressing talk. That can also be a predictor of them being more vulnerable. And actually I forgot one of my favourite ones about what happens during the event that we know a lot about is that if a child thought that they were going to during an event, they've got an eightfold increased risk of going on to develop post traumatic stress disorder than a child.
Who didn't think they were going to die during the event, and it's also a much higher risk if young children thought that a parent was going to die during an event as well. So those are some of the Ways in which you could be thinking about is this particular person or this particular group of people going to be more vulnerable?

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:21:56**
All right. Thank you, Susie. Tymur.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:21:59**Yeah, I was going to provide a specific example around my work with refugees and asylum seekers. So first, it's critical to acknowledge that refugees who've resettled in a new country have resilience in in buckets.
But having said that, when a major emergency hits, they can still face a unique set of challenges that can put them at additional risk. So language can be a huge barrier. Emergency warnings and public health messages, especially when delivered quickly or through official channels.
Might not be available in the languages that refugees understand, and if someone can't access emergency information, well, that can put them at additional risk. There's also the issue of trust. Many refugees come from places where government or military authority wasn't safe, including.
Their directions to evacuate or relocate. So when an emergency happens and they're told to evacuate or go to a government run shelter, they may hesitate or feel unsure. That fear can slow down responses and therefore increase danger and then.
Then there's the psychological toll. Refugees have often experienced significant trauma and upheaval before arriving in the host country. So a Bush fire or a major flood, even just the threat of it, can retrigger that trauma. That can make it even harder to stay calm, make decisions, and.
recover afterwards. So all of this means we need to be really intentional about how we include refugee communities in emergency planning. That includes making sure information is clear, multilingual, that's culturally safe and trauma informed, and we work closely with community leaders who are
trusted and can help communicate these messages effectively.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:23:59**Yeah, that's fascinating for both of you there in terms of just the multifaceted complexities, both as individuals and groups as they face these emergencies. So and highlights the complexity for agencies to meet those needs. So thank you.
How do we, as agencies in that context, better prepare communities for these events?

 **Suse Burke 1:24:23**
Well, there's a lot of talk about situational preparedness, you know, preparing your household, having your plan, et cetera. Psychologists also love to talk about the psychological preparedness, which is how you anticipate what it's going to be like in an emergency, like to the specifics of what's it going to smell like? What's it going to sound like? What am I going to be feeling like? So to really be vividly imagining and sometimes that might involve talking to other people who've been in in a disaster scenario, because the more you can anticipate it, then you're better then at being able to identify. So that's the next step. Identify how in my body and in my mind will I know when I'm getting stressed, when my arousal.
All goes up. So that's when your stress goes up. So it might be knowing that my heart will probably start to beat. I'll get sweaty under my arms. I might get flushed. I might get a dry mouth. I might be shaking and trembling. And when this happens, oh, and I might be thinking things like I don't know what to do. I can't remember anything. This is terrible when I feel myself feeling these things.
Or I hear myself having these thoughts going on in my head. That's an indicator that I'm getting stressed. And so then the next thing, once you recognize, oh, I'm stressed, is to manage it M, which is manage. So be to be thinking ahead of times, what will I do when my arousal goes up, when I start to get stressed, to calm myself down and so to have a few.
And two of the easiest ones, you know, focusing on slowing down your out breath to calm and stabilize yourself and also to be having some helpful self-talk like I can cope one step at a time. I've got a good plan. We'll get through this. I can do this. You know, that sort of soothing self-talk. So anticipate.
Identify and manage are the three things that we get people to do in terms of psychologically preparing for what it would be like to be in an emergency.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:26:13**All right. Thank you, Susie. And Tymur.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:26:16**Yeah, I was gonna talk about, I guess, some of the experiences of Working with survivors of family violence. So preparedness in this context Needs to include two things, Ways to build capacity.
And ensure safety before disaster strikes, because emergencies often exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. And you know, many people in the in the virtual room are familiar with this. But research shows that family violence tends to increase during and after disasters in Australia.

After Events like Bush fires or floods, some women reported new or increased family violence. So we know survivors who feel unable to plan for disasters because of the control of an abusive partner or because of fear are at a greater risk.
When emergencies strike. So we need to make sure that people who work in specialist family and domestic violence Services are part of disaster planning teams. Their insights will help us identify how violence might increase during or after emergencies and what kind of barriers.
Is.
Survivors already face and which populations within that category might be at additional risk. We also need to include survivors, where safe and feasible, into our emergency planning processes. Their lived experience can identify risks that us professionals might not be aware of.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:27:53**Wonderful. Thank you both. And if we could now, Susie, could you go down into a bit more detail about the considerations in real time during and immediately after an emergency event?

 **Suse Burke 1:28:05**
Yes. So we would call this the response phase. And usually what happens is we go into emergency mode during this phase when we've got a lot of adrenaline, lots of energy and acute stress can be quite a typical experience. So that might be, you know, we feel stressed, we feel in shock, we feel numb.
We might have an upset stomach, we might not be sleeping well, and so this is fairly typical and it subsides over time. But one of the useful things that research has shown us is that there are several things that people need to help them to calm down during this phase. They need to have their safety restored.
A sense of calm, restored hope, a restoration of hope and optimism, a restoration of control, and also a sense of efficacy. So efficacy is the word that psychologists use to mean the belief that we have, that we know what to do, we know how to do it, and we can do it. We are able to do it.
So that's those are the principles of psychological first aid. So I'll throw back to Tymur to talk about that a bit more.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:29:11**Yeah, thanks, Susie. So psychological first aid is essentially the mental health equivalent of physical first aid. So it's an approach that we use to support people, as Susie mentioned, in the immediate aftermath of a crisis or emergency. So the aim of psychological.
First aid is to reduce initial distress and to help people feel safe, calm, supported and connected. It's not about diagnosing or treating mental health conditions. It's about helping people to stabilize emotionally.
Recognize their own strengths and connect with the support they might need to move forward. The approach is powerful because it's simple, so we often describe it in terms of look, listen and link. So first we look, we observe what's going on.
We identify who might need assistance. Then we listen. We give people space to talk if they want to, and we really pay attention to what they're saying, but also, you know, what they're not saying. And then finally, we link. We connect them with practical services, social support.
or other resources that can help them cope and recover. So psychological first aid is widely used around the world by emergency responders, community leaders, even trained volunteers. It's evidence informed and endorsed by organizations like the World Health Organization and Red Cross.

 **Suse Burke 1:30:46**
And Nora, one of the other things that's we're thinking about here is that it's not only the that are in this adrenaline mode, but also the you, all of us who are on this panel, you know who and this forum who are the people that are helping with the recovery and really made that point as well that in Shepparton every.

Everybody who was working was actually personally affected in in one way or another, and so there can be a lot of vicarious distress. Your own anxieties and fears can be amplified by hearing over and over stories, and there can be a reluctance sometimes to look after your own needs because there's so many other people to look after.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:31:09**Yeah.

 **Suse Burke 1:31:26**So it's really important as and was pointing out for teams that that you're working with to be looking out for each other, asking for help when you need it, taking breaks, even if the break is just to go to the loo and have a drink of water and to drop your anchor. Dropping anchor is a is a technique that psychologists.
Often teach people about getting into the present moment, just noticing 5 things that you can see and four things you can hear and three things you can feel and two things you can smell and taste and coming back to doing in the moment to give you a break from being sort of jerked around by all of the thoughts and feelings that you've got. So a little mini break.

It can be very useful, but also remembering the importance of your own social support and you know, connecting with your Team - and checking in how everyone's going, but also having what we would call stress reducing conversations with family and friends where you get a chance to just talk about the things that are a big stress for you and have somebody else with you, but also to be connected with people who've got nothing to do with the emergency, who don't live in your energy at all, who might have just had a new baby on the other side of the world, to just to be connected with things that are not all consumed by the current emergency that's going on. Those can all be good strategies for the workers, also the helpers to also be looking after themselves.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:32:29**Yeah, yeah. Oh, really excellent point, Susie. And you did make a particularly pivotal one in in the conflation between the public and the private as we move into a more complex environment with emergencies, particularly in the regions where you can't.
You can't separate yourself from your own personal experience as a resident versus an emergency worker and vice versa. So more complex times ahead, certainly. And this is just such great content, such rich information and just shows how critical.
The panel is as a resource for all of us moving forward. Two more questions and then we'll move to the Q&A. So could you give us a general overview, which you've touched on already by what you mean by Psychosocial recovery?

 **Suse Burke 1:33:33**Well, OK. So well, the good news is that the vast majority recover well with their own resources or with the help of family and friends. And you know, the numbers tend to be about 80% of people. So you know, we have this graph of typical trajectory and typical trajectory is in your functioning, but you know in the weeks and months that follow a recovery, a reduction in arousal, there were some smaller numbers of people who have a chronic pattern of you know, poor functioning that that stay chronic and those are the ones that we might worry would be at risk of going on to develop things like post traumatic stress disorder and depression and other.
Other anxiety disorders further down the track, and there's a group of people who sometimes have a delayed response, so they'll seem to be doing fine. And then some months down the track, or maybe even a year later, all of a sudden they're functioning dips and they're not coping so well. So we always keep a lookout for them. And then there's this.
Wonderful groups that seem to bounce up into a more resilient mode of operation in the aftermath of disaster and stay at this superior level of functioning. And we call them the, what do we call them, the resilient group. So yes, but recovery is the norm.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:34:51**Yes, Tymur.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:34:51**I think when, yeah, yeah, I think I like to, uh, use a metaphor when thinking about, uh, Psychosocial recovery. Um, puzzles are central to this metaphor, which is fitting because my family and I, I assume like many, um, families, uh did many puzzles while we're in lockdown. And so, you know, without knowing, we go through life building a grand puzzle. As we move in the flow of life, we add pieces to our puzzle and sometimes to the puzzle of others and they the same on to us. These pieces build a picture of our individual and our collective existence. But sometimes an event comes along that lifts that puzzle and smashes it into 1000 pieces.
That experience can completely dislodge and dislocate us when the relationships and the rhythms of our life are smashed and for a moment we are completely lost. We look at what we were building, what we were building with others, and it's completely unrecognizable somehow, and this is what it means to be human. We find a way to start rebuilding that puzzle piece by piece, sometimes by ourselves, sometimes with family and friends, sometimes with the help of professionals.
The picture in the puzzle we build might not look the same, and sometimes that will sadden us, but we just keep building. Humans have a way of doing this piece by piece. To me, Psychosocial recovery is the individual, relational, familial and community rebuilding piece by piece that happens after a disaster.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:36:50**That's really beautiful. Thank you, Tymur. And the very last question, if there is one thing from your presentation that the audience can take away to put into their Emergency Management plan, what would that be?

 **Suse Burke 1:37:12**Uh, yes. Mine would be to remember that the out-breath is your friend, your out-breath. We don't worry about in-breaths. They always take. But to remember that if you slow down your out-breath, that is going to be very regulating, very calming. So write it into your plans. That's part of your management.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:37:18**Mhm.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:37:30**This isn't so much something to put in the plan. I think this is more for the planners. I like many people in the room. I worked in an agency when I took on an Emergency Management portfolio or responsibilities.

 **Suse Burke 1:37:30**OK.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:37:46**And I was so afraid that if I was called upon in an emergency, I wouldn't be able to live up to the responsibilities that were placed upon me. And it felt very alone. But I think what I understand now is that in reality, we're not alone. I wasn't alone and neither are you. So pardon the cliche, but we're all in this together and I think Angela's presentation really spoke to that and I wrote down something that was on one of her slides that life is the highest priority. So if you're sitting there with any angst around the That You have. There's no need to sit in that angst. You know, make a call, send that e-mail, reach out to someone. I'm absolutely confident you'll find people that are willing to lean in and to support you in any way required so you can do your job confidently and competently.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:38:49**Oh, Susie and Tymur, what a discussion. We could speak for Hours on this. Thank you both so much for sharing your time and expertise and your insights. It's been so valuable for everyone. If for our audience, if you're interested in hearing more about recovery and the lived experience of community and practitioners.
Strongly encourage you to listen to the DFFH Road to Resilience podcast that's now available on SoundCloud. It's a great resource for continuing this conversation and we now are at the Q&A part of the Forum and we will invite Andrea Spiteri back to join Susie and Tymur to participate in the Q&A segment.
Of our forum. Last chance to post some questions. If you haven't already, please pop them in the Q&A chat now and any questions we don't get answered today will be collated with responses and sent out to you all shortly after the forum.
So have we got Andrea?

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:39:49**Should do. Hello.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:39:51**OK, so moving straight into it. Timekeeper is nudging. So we have our first question posted. Can I see, I'll actually I'll leave that one.
Um.
No.
One moment please.
This is for Andrea from Ian in Odyssey, Vic. What is the role of local government in the establishment of relief coordination?

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:40:31**Thank you, Ian. And I know just from trawling the Q&A myself that a couple of our colleagues, council colleagues and MAV colleague have actually jumped in and provided a couple of answers as well. So which are perfect. So under the state Emergency Management plan councils.
Are responsible for coordination of relief and coordination of recovery at the Municipal tier, so that means that they are busy planning with a whole range of agencies.
Within their municipality to be able to then coordinate together to make sure that people get the appropriate relief Services they need. That could be Psychosocial services, that could be food and water, that could be them opening an emergency relief Centre to be able to provide these Services to communities.
And provide them with some shelter in that Centre as well and then into recovery obviously being the level of government that's closest to communities that have a critical role in coordinating right across recovery. So not just Social Recovery but also economic.
Natural and built recovery, but obviously doing that in conjunction with the Victorian government departments and agencies and a wide range of local sort of stakeholders as well. So hopefully that answers your question there, Ian.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:42:00**Wonderful. Thanks, Andrea. Next question that I have here from Kim Malamachi. Councils will be required to report on a range of relief services. Is there an opportunity to have a more holistic situation reporting mechanism to achieve this?

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:42:20**Yeah, thanks Kim and hello, I haven't seen you for a while. So even though we have a template for reporting psychosocial services, I know many, many councils and organisations establish and provide their own situation report.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:42:24**Mhm.

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:42:40**Please feel free to take the fields from the template, the data that is required by us, pop it into your normal situation report somewhere, and if we can receive a copy of that situation report and it means you don't have two separate reports during the middle of an emergency, we'd be more than happy to receive it that way. So thanks, Kim.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:43:01**Great. Thanks, Andrea. And then a question from Daniela Fayla. Will the reporting template link to the EM Impact Portal dashboard be newly created? Is that the question will the reporting link?
Uh, there's a bit of a typo in there. Can you? Yeah, yeah, great.

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:43:20**The EM impact. Yeah, that's OK. I can answer that one, Nora. So EM, so Emergency Recovery Victoria have just released, it's just gone live, a portal called EM Hyphen Impact.
Which will capture all of the impact sort of data for emergencies across the state in future. So it's very exciting to have this portal released and they're busy training the users of that portal at the moment.
So many some of you might be data providers or data users of that portal. We're all being trained currently and so what we will do for this season anyway is we will take the information that we receive through our template or other situation reports on psychosocial support.
And we will put that into the EM impact portal. But obviously as this portal develops over time, we'll look for opportunities to work with Emergency Recovery Victoria to see whether there are ways that that data can be.
Dragged in. I'm not an IT person, so that's my layperson's version of the IT world, being able to source information and be able to pop it through into the system.
So hopefully that partially answers it at the moment. We'll have to see. It's quite new.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:44:46**Perfect. Thanks, Andrea. And this is for Tymur and Susie. From your perspective, what is the single biggest opportunity you see in how agencies currently providing psychosocial support during emergencies could enhance their approaches to improve community outcomes?

 **Tymur Hussein 1:45:07**Do you want to go, Susie, or do you want me to respond to that one?

 **Suse Burke 1:45:08**You can jump in.

 **Tymur Hussein 1:45:11**Yeah, for me, I think it's about the nature of the partnerships and relationships that that we establish, you know, prior to emergencies. So Ange again spoke about.
You know the importance of those relationships and partnerships. So for me it's thinking about, you know, our existing partnerships and relationships. How can we re-envision those so when an emergency hits?

 **Tymur Hussein 1:45:47**Our Psychosocial supports work for the, you know, people that we serve, but also thinking about the entities and organizations that historically we haven't worked with or we don't have a relationship with. I think it's really critical that we reach out to them and establish those partnerships and those connections. So when an emergency does hit, our Psychosocial supports are purposeful, integrated, are meaningful and are responsive. So yeah, think about your existing relationships and you might be able to rethink those and think about creating new and meaningful partnerships. So when an emergency hits, we are able to meet the Needs of the community.

 **Suse Burke 1:46:40**And Tymur, as you were talking about partnerships, I was thinking about social support because we know that the more connected the community groups are, then the more resilient they are to being able to bounce back in the aftermath, so partnerships is like social support in a way. You know, an agency connects with a whole lot of different groups, you know, and a community house has a whole lot of groups that they know are led by particular individuals that bring together groups. So the more there's a familiarity with who is running those groups.
And you've got access to all of the members of that group and that's their social support network. So you're penetrating and building those connections so that everybody is linked to everybody else before an event happens, so that they're more able to be reconnected in the aftermath.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:47:41**Perfect. That's excellent. Thank you. OK, hang on. I'm just, oh my goodness, teams, teams. So we have another question here. Can you see the questions? Oh, yeah, got them. Andrea, how can the sector move beyond seasonal preparedness to year round emergency resilience planning within the context of a constantly changing climate.

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:48:09**Yes, fantastic question. And I mean even just looking at this high risk weather season, it's starting today and we expect it to run for six months. So we're no longer just in just summer or just a particular season now. We really are stretching it out in terms of weather.
All year round, I know that there are likely to be a lot of people on this forum today who experienced the storms in June 2021, well and truly outside a normal high risk weather season.
And the sector itself is even starting to talk about risk weather seasons, just in an acknowledgement that the weather itself is changing so quickly. Then Tim mentioned today about the other types of emergencies and all you need to do is have a look in the state Emergency Management plan to see how many different types of emergencies there can be.
At any time of the year. So while it is important for us to focus our efforts on some of those known risks in Victoria, like Bush fire risk that are a bit more seasonal, it's really important that you're not just looking at your Emergency Management plan and preparedness just at one time of the year.
Certainly we're focusing you with this forum and the timing of this forum on the the the coming sort of spring and summer. But I think it's fair to say that with all these types of emergencies that can happen at any time and a very changeable climate now that this should be something that's regularly on your agenda.
Regularly on your board's agenda and really having those discussions, planning your preparedness and your activities all year round, especially when there are things that change for your organization, could be organizational change, it could be new senior leadership that come in.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:49:58**Mm.

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:50:01**Really important to make sure that everyone's up to date as much as possible. So I think that's really a call to action that I was also hearing from the Emergency Management Commissioner today to be thinking about in future.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:50:14**Yeah, great. Thanks, Andrea. And we might stay with you. And if you could actually expand on what adaptive planning looks like in practice for Emergency Management and how can smaller organizations embed that into their operations?

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:50:28**Yeah, I think, I think something that's really important here is that, you know, there are lots of different crises, situations, circumstances that happen on a day-to-day basis and being able to practice some of your responses, being able to think through to your responses.
To some, some of the smaller emergencies, it could be a cyber incident, it could be an issue with a couple of clients, it could be a range of things and just sort of think about, OK, what does that mean in terms of our Emergency Management planning? So it's not just those very big emergencies that may or may not happen in a year.
It's about how you are continually growing your capability and your knowledge about what can impact your organization, but also the points that were made before both by Tamara and Susie about the connections that you have amongst the sector with the department and others as well, so that you're.
You're thinking about these sorts of things all the time. You're accessing some of the research and information that's coming your way. Access the resources on our website. So shameless plug here to go back to our webpage, have a look at those resources that are on there and be really embedding Emergency Management as everyone's business.
This.
In your organization, don't leave it just to someone who might have the title to pull your planning together, but really embed that be. Understand your roles and responsibilities and how you will work with councils, with government agencies and with communities during an emergency, and certainly if you do get a chance to participate in an exercise.
Or you're invited to be on a planning committee and you can do that. That would be a fantastic opportunity as well.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:52:16**Fantastic. Thank you, Andrea. And then back to Susie and Tymur. What role can peer networks and community leaders play in delivering psychosocial supports and how can agencies link into them?

 **Tymur Hussein 1:52:30**I think, I think they're fundamental because the trust is where the relationships are. Like I think of an example. So my background is I'm Egyptian and I received a referral for an Egyptian family and they contacted me and said well.
Were really ambivalent about seeing you until I found out who your mother was. So, you know, weren't really concerned about my qualifications. It was about who I was in the community and you know, you know whose son I was, you know, I was. So I think peer networks and community leaders, that's you know their fundamental, their central, that's where the trust lies, that's where the relationship is. So and really if I think about agencies, you know we are the facilitators, we are we are the stage and it's really and especially our peer network and community leaders that are the key actors around psychosocial support. So it's imperative that as agencies we link with those networks and support and support them.

 **Suse Burke 1:53:45**Yeah, I've got a couple of examples to add to that as well. I agree with you, Tymur. So I live in Jarra country around Castlemaine and during COVID a group started up called the West End Resilience Group and it was just a group of locals who lived in the West End of Castlemaine and they had regular forums and they got to know all of the people in the local neighbourhood and have become a a very tight social supportive network for helping anybody when there is a disaster. And another woman that I spoke to the other day was affected by the flood.
In during COVID, she had COVID. Her family was couldn't get back to her home and CFA knocked on her door at 11:30 at the night and said if the levy breaks, I'm gonna, I'm gonna ring the CFA bells. And she's thinking, and then what? And then he leaves and it's the middle of the night and she's sick and her family's not there and she's thinking, well, I don't know what's gonna.
What happened then? And so since they formed a group with all of the people who will be impacted if the levy breaks so that they know each other, they can exchange numbers with each other. They've been working with the local council to see if they can understand, well, what does happen when the bell rings the CFA shed because the levy bankers and so the strength of that group because they're all working as hard as they can because this is their lives. They're very motivated to to meet and knock doors and exchange numbers and get together and look after each other because this is their life and their community. So there's a lot of willingness and motivation and preparedness as well as recovery asset.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:55:24**Oh, fantastic. Thank you both. I'm going to swing to Andrea to synopsise this.

 **Andrea Spiteri (DFFH) 1:55:30**No worries. I was just thinking that one of the things that I've always done since being in Emergency Management is always remember that we're not, we're not our organization. We are who we are at home as well. So we all have networks and communities that we connect with. We all have information.
Information as well and all of the responder agencies and everyone we work with are all part of these communities. So really coming together, not just around our roles and responsibilities, but also as people and who we know, what we know, how we're connected is just as important to ensure that we're successful.
Successful in this in this business I guess so and particularly in relief and recovery when we're you know focused most on communities that are most impacted as well. So I just really encourage everyone to reach out. There's been some fantastic comments that have been made today in the chat.
It's been a really fantastic session, but please, if you go away and you have any other questions, reach out to your regional colleagues, reach out to us in the emergency across the Emergency Management branch in the department. We really like to keep this conversation going because those connections through to communities and to community groups in particular are so vital for all of us.
So thanks very much, Nora, for throwing to me for that last comment.

 **Nora O'Connor (DFFH) 1:56:53**No problem. Thank you all. And on that note, that brings this year's Forum to a close. Thank you to a few quick thank yous. If you could just hold on to the staff across the communications team, the EM branch who've just worked so incredibly hard to deliver this Forum today, our presenters for their valuable insights, the Auslan interpreters and live captioner, thank you to everyone for attending and on behalf of the Emergency Management sector, we hope we have provided you with tools to prepare for the high risk weather season ahead. We'd love your feedback. As I said earlier, please complete the short survey by using the QR code or the link posted in the Q&A chat.
And just to finish off, I just wanted to quote Colin Powell. He one of his big things as a leader was about the embodiment of trust in everything we do. If we can be trustworthy, we can climb mountains and the ties that bind us are stronger than the stresses that separate us.
And Helen Keller, a disability advocate and political activist to finish off completely alone. We can do so little, but together we can do so much. I wish everyone a safe spring and summer. See you next year.

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