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| Vulnerable People in Emergencies PolicyVersion 4.0 |
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The Emergency Management Branch, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing have prepared this document.

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This is a managed document and replaces the Department of Health and Human Services *Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy* (February 2018).

For identification of amendments, each page contains a release number and a page number.

Changes will only be issued as a complete replacement document.

Recipients should remove superseded versions from circulation.

| Version | Document name | Issue Date | Action / Changes  |
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| 1.0 | Vulnerable people in bushfire risk areas policy 2011-12 | May 2011 | First published in 2011, as part of the Victorian Government’s implementation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Report recommendations. |
| 1.1 | Vulnerable people in emergencies policy | November 2012 | Updated the document to reflect ‘all hazards, all emergencies’ approach, EMMV and the Vulnerable Persons Register |
| 2.0 | Vulnerable people in emergencies policy | May 2015 | Updated the document to reflect machinery of government changes. |
| 3.0 | Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy | February 2018 | Reformatted the document to be in an accessible format, aligned with departmental requirements. |
| 4.0 | Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy | February 2025  | Reformatted the document with the current departmental policy template, updated references to the ‘Department of Health and Human Services’ with the ‘Department of Families, Fairness and Housing’ and the ‘Department of Health’ and updated details in Appendix 2 - Resource.  |

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# Context

## 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (the VBRC) was established on 16 February 2009 to investigate the causes and responses to the bushfires that impacted parts of Victoria in late January and February 2009.

The *VBRC Final Report* was released in July 2010, and made 67 recommendations, including **Recommendation 3**:

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| The State establish mechanisms for helping municipal councils to undertake local planning that tailors bushfire safety options to the needs of individual communities. In doing this planning, **councils should:**

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| 3.1 | urgently develop for communities at risk of bushfire local plans that contain contingency options such as evacuation and shelter |
| 3.2 | document in municipal emergency management plans and other relevant plans facilities where vulnerable people are likely to be situated - for example, aged care facilities, hospitals, schools and childcare centres |
| 3.3 | compile and maintain a list of vulnerable residents who need tailored advice of a recommendation to evacuate |
| 3.4 | provide this list to local police and anyone else with pre-arranged responsibility for helping vulnerable residents evacuate.  |

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The Victorian Government accepted all 67 VBRC Final Report recommendations.

The former Department of Health and the Department of Human Services (subsequently replaced by the Department of Health and Human Services and now the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) were designated as co-lead agencies for responding to Recommendation 3 - specifically 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

Victoria Police was responsible for developing a comprehensive approach to evacuation under Recommendation 5 of the VBRC Final Report.

The Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor was responsible for monitoring progress against recommendations from the VBRC Final Report.

## 2010-11 Victorian Flood Review

Recommendation 67 of the 2010-11 *Review of the Victorian Floods Warnings and Response* suggested that the definition of a ‘vulnerable person’ and associated policy(ies) be applicable across ‘all hazards’.

# Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to improve the safety of vulnerable people in emergencies, through supporting:

* emergency planning with and for vulnerable people;
* developing local lists of facilities where vulnerable people may be located; and
* developing local lists of vulnerable people (**Vulnerable Persons Registers**) who may need consideration (tailored advice of a recommendation to evacuate) in an emergency and make these lists available to those with responsibility for helping vulnerable residents evacuate.

# Principles

## Supporting local emergency planning and preparation

The policy outlines an approach that supports municipal councils to assist communities and local people to plan and prepare for emergencies. Harnessing local knowledge and supporting local activities is essential for effective planning and response to emergencies.

## Integrating emergency planning with service delivery

Integrating emergency management planning with service delivery is fundamental to enhancing client outcomes and safety. The policy utilises the existing relationships of funded agencies who provide care and welfare services to identify vulnerable people and to support their personal emergency planning. Over time these processes should be embedded in practice.

## Encouraging personal and community preparation and resilience

The policy supports shared responsibility and community resilience, recognising the significant role of local people and communities in caring for and helping their family, friends and neighbours.

While Vulnerable Persons Registers will be established, personal and community resilience must be encouraged and expectations about potential provision of assistance or evacuation managed.

Evacuation of vulnerable individuals within the community cannot be guaranteed in emergencies and any assistance in an emergency or evacuation will be dependent on the capacity and ability of emergency services organisations to safely provide it.

# Scope

The policy covers the key activities of:

* planning for vulnerable people in emergencies;
* vulnerable persons registers; and
* identification of facilities housing vulnerable people.

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| For the purposes of the policy, a **vulnerable person[[1]](#footnote-2)** is defined as someone living in the community who is:* frail, and/or physically or cognitively impaired; and
* unable to comprehend warnings and directions, and/or respond in an emergency situation.
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The term ‘vulnerable’ can be defined broadly in relation to emergencies. The activities and processes set out in the policy and the supporting materials target a clearly defined group within the community and do not seek to address all ‘at risk communities and people.’

The activities outlined in and facilitated by the policy are integrated with a range of activities relating to prevention, preparation, response and recovery that target people who may be vulnerable for a variety of reasons and to a variety of hazards.

**Figure 1. Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy Scope**



The policy applies to the 64 rural, regional and urban fringe municipal councils wholly or partly located within the historical CFA districts. A full list of councils in scope for this policy is provided in Appendix 1.

The policy builds on the bushfire specific approach of previous policies, including the *Vulnerable People in Bushfire Risk Areas Policy 2011-12* (which is superseded by this policy). It promotes general emergency planning with vulnerable people, which would be beneficial for a range of hazards and emergencies but does not outline hazard specific approaches.

The policy will also enable information contained in Vulnerable Persons Registers to be used by Victoria Police and other authorised emergency management organisations for consideration in planning for and responding to a range of emergencies, where tailored advice of a recommendation to evacuate may be required. It is acknowledged that some hazards, such as bushfire, may require additional targeted personal emergency planning.

# Planning for vulnerable people in emergencies

The policy promotes and encourages personal and community emergency planning for vulnerable people in emergencies - as they are likely to require more time or assistance to respond safely to emergencies.

This is promoted through a number of channels, including:

* **Public communications** - encouraging personal emergency planning and community resilience for vulnerable people as part of broader whole of government education and awareness strategies.
* **Supporting vulnerable people (receiving services) with emergency planning**
* **Supporting vulnerable people (not receiving services) with emergency planning.**

## Role of funded agencies in planning for vulnerable people in emergencies

Agencies funded to provide personal care, support and case management services to people living in the community have a key role in relation to the safety and welfare of clients. The policy utilises the existing relationships and agency role in supporting clients to improve their safety and resilience through promoting personal emergency planning.

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| For the purposes of the policy, **funded agencies** refers to:* those agencies who provide personal care, support and/or case management services either in home or community settings, to clients living in the community[[2]](#footnote-3). This includes health or community care services such as home and community care, personal care or disability day programs.

Note: This includes municipal councils providing funded services covered by the policy. |

The policy applies to agencies providing relevant services who are funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health and it can also be applied by Commonwealth funded agencies and other providers. Agencies funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Department of Health are required to participate through funding agreements, where applicable.

Funded agencies have a responsibility toencourage and, where necessary, support clients (who meet the definition of a vulnerable person) to undertake personal emergency planning.

These agencies know, assess, and provide assistance and care to vulnerable people through their services and can have a significant role in helping support emergency preparation and resilience, including facilitating people to identify and develop their own personal and community support networks.

There are a range of emergency planning materials available, including materials specifically targeting people with vulnerabilities. Key documents that can be used to plan are referenced in **Appendix 2**.

Where there is recognised bushfire risk, specific bushfire planning should be undertaken in addition to basic personal emergency planning.

Funded agencies are not expected to be a part of a client’s plan for emergency response or evacuation – where this is outside of current agency practices. Management of evacuation is the responsibility of Victoria Police.

Through the process of supporting emergency planning funded agencies are asked to screen for Vulnerable Persons Registers.

## Role of the Australian Red Cross in planning for vulnerable people in emergencies

When individuals not receiving services are identified as potentially at-risk, the Australian Red Cross will provide emergency planning support.

If the Australian Red Cross identifies that these people are unable to develop plans themselves, they will refer them to Council for screening for inclusion on the Vulnerable Persons Register.

# Vulnerable Persons Registers

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| For the purposes of this policy, a **vulnerable person[[3]](#footnote-4)** is someone at-risk in emergencies, who may be identified through an assessment for inclusion on a Vulnerable Persons Register if they also:* cannot identify personal or community support networks to help them in an emergency.
 |

Local Vulnerable Persons Registers (commonly referred to as VPRs) have been developed by designated councils to store local information about consenting, identified vulnerable people, which will be directly entered by funded agencies and locally overseen by municipal councils.

The Vulnerable Persons Registers are cloud-based and directly accessible to authorised representatives from Victoria Police (without having to contact the council or funded agency) to aid emergency planning and response, including potential evacuation.

Local administration of Vulnerable Persons Registers by councils involves:

* **Screening for Vulnerable Persons Registers** - to identify vulnerable persons who additionally cannot identify personal or community support networks to help them in an emergency to be included on a Vulnerable Persons Register.
* **Entering and maintaining information in Vulnerable Persons Registers** for consenting, identified people, which is available to those with responsibility for emergency response and evacuations.

## Role of funded agencies in screening for Vulnerable Persons Registers

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| Funded agencies[[4]](#footnote-5) are asked to consider and screen clients to **identify people who should be listed on a Vulnerable Persons Register** because they:* meet the definition of a vulnerable person; and
* cannot identify personal or community support networks to help them in an emergency.
 |

The *Guidance to Support Managing Vulnerable Persons Registers and ‘At-Risk’ Local Facility* provides further detail in relation to Vulnerable Persons Register screening.

To list an identified vulnerable person on a Vulnerable Persons Register, funded agencies need to:

* Obtain informed consent from identified people to go on the Vulnerable Persons Register - to enable information to be entered on Vulnerable Persons Registers, which will be accessible for planning for and responding to emergencies, agencies will need to gain informed consent from identified people. This is voluntary and a template consent form has been developed to assist agencies.
* Enter and maintain information on Vulnerable Persons Registers - funded agencies will be responsible for entering and maintaining information about identified vulnerable persons on the Vulnerable Persons Register. This information will need to be kept up to date.

Vulnerable Persons Registers may be used by Victoria Police and other authorised emergency management organisations for consideration in planning activities (including exercises and training) and for responding to a range of emergencies where there is the capacity and resources to safely provide assistance.

## Role of councils in coordinating local implementation of Vulnerable Persons Registers

Under the policy, municipal councils have a role in coordinating local Vulnerable Persons Registers, which can be viewed through the web-based emergency management system *Crisisworks*. This coordination will include basic system administration and local oversight of Vulnerable Persons Registers, which will support local planning.

Funded agencies will be responsible for entering and maintaining information about identified people. Vulnerable Persons Registers will be accessible to authorised Victoria Police representatives, for consideration in planning and exercising, and for responding to emergencies.

# Identification of facilities for vulnerable people

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| For the purposes of the policy, **facilities** refers to:* buildings where vulnerable people are likely to be situated, including aged care facilities, hospitals, schools, specialist disability accommodation and childcare centres. This includes:
	+ - facilities funded or regulated by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Department of Health, and the Department of Education
		- Commonwealth funded residential aged care facilities and specialist disability accommodation
		- other locally identified facilities likely to have vulnerable people situated in them.
 |

In addition to local lists of vulnerable people living in the community, the policy also requires development of a list of local facilities where vulnerable people are likely to be situated, which needs to be available to those with responsibility for evacuation.

## Role of councils in developing and maintaining a list of local facilities where vulnerable people are likely to be situated

Municipal councils are required to develop and maintain a list of facilities where vulnerable people are likely to be situated – including aged care facilities, hospitals, schools, specialist disability accommodation and childcare centres.

This includes:

* facilities funded or regulated by the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing, the Department of Health and the Department of Education
* Commonwealth funded residential aged care facilities and specialist disability accommodation.

Municipal Councils should also consider and identify other local facilities or amenities that may have vulnerable people situated in them. This will differ dependent on location, but would include sites where vulnerable people frequently meet or gather and/or commonly reside.

Consideration may therefore be given to facilities or amenities such as Senior Citizens Centres, or retirement villages, rooming houses and caravan parks where there are long-term residents who are vulnerable (not a primarily tourism-based caravan park)[[5]](#footnote-6). Informal, ad hoc or temporary gatherings of vulnerable people in the community are not required to be included.

A template for the facilities list is available and should be used to compile this list. Facilities lists are to be included in, or available through, Municipal emergency management plans and must be accessible to Victoria Police for the purposes of planning, exercising and in the event of an emergency.

Funded facilities are expected to have emergency management plans in place for people residing, staying or situated within facilities. The role of an operator of a facility does not equal a requirement to undertake individual emergency planning activities or to screen people for Vulnerable Persons Registers.

# Appendix 1

## List of Councils (Local Government) in scope of the policy

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| Alpine Shire CouncilArarat Rural City CouncilBallarat City CouncilBanyule City CouncilBass Coast Shire CouncilBaw Baw Shire CouncilBuloke Shire CouncilCampaspe Shire CouncilCardinia Shire CouncilCasey City CouncilCentral Goldfields Shire CouncilBenalla Rural City CouncilColac-Otway Shire CouncilCorangamite Shire CouncilEast Gippsland Shire CouncilFrankston City CouncilGannawarra Shire CouncilGlenelg Shire CouncilGolden Plains Shire CouncilGreater Bendigo City CouncilGreater Dandenong City CouncilGreater Geelong City CouncilGreater Shepparton City CouncilHepburn Shire CouncilHindmarsh Shire CouncilHorsham Rural City CouncilHume City CouncilIndigo Shire CouncilKingston City CouncilKnox City CouncilLatrobe City CouncilLoddon Shire Council | Macedon Ranges Shire CouncilManningham City CouncilMansfield Shire CouncilMaroondah City CouncilMelton City CouncilMildura Rural City CouncilMitchell Shire CouncilMoira Shire CouncilMoorabool Shire CouncilMornington Peninsula Shire CouncilMoyne Shire CouncilMount Alexander Shire CouncilMurrindindi Shire CouncilNillumbik Shire CouncilNorthern Grampians Shire CouncilPyrenees Shire CouncilBorough of QueenscliffSouth Gippsland Shire CouncilSouthern Grampians Shire CouncilStrathbogie Shire CouncilSurf Coast Shire CouncilSwan Hill Rural City CouncilTowong Shire CouncilWangaratta Rural City CouncilWarrnambool City CouncilWellington Shire CouncilWest Wimmera Shire CouncilWhittlesea City CouncilWodonga City CouncilWyndham City CouncilYarra Ranges Shire CouncilYarriambiack Shire Council |

# Appendix 2

## Resources relevant to the policy

Department of Health

### Relevant guides and guidance

#### Guidance to Support Managing Vulnerable Persons Registers and ‘At-Risk’ Local Facility Lists

[The *Guidance to Support Managing Vulnerable Persons Registers and ‘At-Risk’ Local Facility Lists*](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/guidance-support-managing-vulnerable-persons-registers-and-risk-local-facility-lists-word) should be read in conjunction with the policy, and provide further support and guidance for implementation, including in relation to screening and identification and the use of Vulnerable Persons Registers <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-management>.

#### Emergency preparedness reference guide

[[*Preparing*](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Preparing%20for%20Emergencies%20Reference%20Guide.docx) *for emergencies: A reference guide for the social services sector*](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/Preparing%20for%20Emergencies%20-%20A%20reference%20guide%20for%20the%20social%20services%20sector.docx) is a resource for service providers in the social services sector to assist them to plan for and respond to emergencies <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management>.

### Emergency planning resources

#### General emergency planning

The [Australian Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org.au/emergency-resources) has developed a range of resources to assist emergency preparation, including materials targeting seniors and people with a disability <https://www.redcross.org.au/emergency-resources>.

[Emergency preparedness information flyers in multiple languages](https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/help-for-agencies) can be found on Australian Red Cross’s [Resources for agencies webpage](https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/help-for-agencies) <https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/help-for-agencies>

[An Easy English Rediplan](https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters) is available from Australian Red Cross Resources to help you <https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters>.

[Collaborating 4 Inclusion](file:///C%3A/Users/vicva9Z/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/139SOVDQ/Collaborating%204%20Inclusion) developed a Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) toolkit and workbook to help people with disability to tailor emergency preparedness to their individual support needs <https://collaborating4inclusion.org>.

[I’m Okay](file:///C%3A/Users/aspi3004/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/H6SZ57EQ/I%E2%80%99m%20Okay)has emergency readiness resources for people with disabilities. *Please note these have been developed in New South Wales* <https://imokay.org.au>.

The CFA [*Leaving Early Bushfire Survival Planning Template*](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/your-bushfire-plan) can be downloaded from the [CFA website](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/redcrossplan) < https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/your-bushfire-plan>

#### Storms and floods

The Victoria State Emergency webpage on the VicSES website provides information on storms and [Flood Emergencies](https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/emergencies/flood?p_l_back_url=%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DFlood%2Bsafe&p_l_back_url_title=Search) <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/emergencies/flood >.

#### Heatwave

For a variety of information about [extreme heat and heatwave including the heat health warnings](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/extreme-heat-and-heatwaves), heat health planning and preparedness resources and factsheets, and heat health communication resources, visit <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/extreme-heat-and-heatwaves>

1. This applies to clients of funded agencies and people not receiving services. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In the 64 municipal councils covered by the policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Refer to the definition of a vulnerable person on page 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Note: This includes municipal councils providing funded services covered by the policy [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Residents of non-funded facilities may still require personal emergency planning support and may be considered for the Vulnerable Persons Register. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)