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Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Submitted by: Gender and Disaster Australia

Q1. What experience have you had with Commonwealth disaster funding support?

Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus) is currently funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and their Children. This is a 4-year project ending 30 June 2025. It was originally to be funded by the then NRRRA (National Recovery and Resilience Agency) but as the NRRRA was transitioning to NEMA, it was considered a more stable option to fund it from DSS. The funding was in response to Recommendation 22.5 of the Royal Commission in to National Natural Disaster Arrangements which states:

Develop nationally consistent, pre-agreed recovery programs. Australian, state and territory governments should expedite the development of pre-agreed recovery programs, including those that address social needs, such as legal assistance, domestic violence, and also environmental recovery.

GADAus (then a Business Unit of Women's Health In the North (WHIN)) was funded to address domestic violence in disasters. This followed a decade's work as the Gender and Disaster (GAD) Pod. The GAD Pod was a collaboration between WHIN, Women's Health Goulburn North East and Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative.

Since 2012, and prior to the current funding, the GAD Pod has received and successfully acquitted six projects which were funded following submissions to the National Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme (NDRGS) and NEMP (National Emergency Management Projects) as outlined in the table below.

Earlier this year, GADAus unsuccessfully sought funding through the Disaster Ready funding round to update and extend the GAD Pod's National Gender and Disaster Guidelines (© GADAus). Although highly rated by Emergency Management Victoria, our national focus may have been problematic as state and local priorities were a focus for this round of funding, announced in June 2023. GADAus has been advised to resubmit when the next round of funding is announced later this year or early next year.

Our experience of commonwealth funding is that, while welcome, it is discrete and short-term and therefore does not provide ongoing organisational funding nor allow for long-term planning and the achievement of long-term goals.

Table: Commonwealth funding to the GAD Pod and GADAus





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2022-25	Federal Department of Social Services "" Gender and Disaster Recovery Initiative. Funded under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and their Children.	\$3.7 million
2017	NDRGS - 'Enhancing resilience and meeting the needs of marginalised groups in emergencies'.	\$135,721
2017	NDRGS - 'Long-term disaster resilience – identifying protective factors for men, women and volunteers.'	\$137,630
2015-16	Attorney-General's Department - National Emergency Management Project (NEMP) 'All on Board: Incorporation of National Gender and EM guidelines.	\$96,030
2015-16	NDRGS - 'Lessons in Disaster' Training	\$175,000
2014-2015	NDRGS - 'What about the men? Men's experiences of health and wellbeing during and after Black Saturday and implications for risk management'. (Year 2)	\$33,887
2012-2013	Department of Justice NDRGS "" 'What about the men? Men's experiences of health and wellbeing during and after Black Saturday and implications for risk management'. (Year 1)	\$77,000

Q2. How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

Disaster risk should be incorporated into each stage of the disaster cycle (Prevention/Preparedness/Response/Recovery), e.g. risks for men well after the immediate disaster can be mental ill-health, perpetration of family violence and suicide. Currently disaster funding focuses overwhelmingly on response/recovery. A focus on prevention/preparedness has enormous potential to reduce disaster risk for Australian women, men and LGBTIQ+ people. Gender determines disaster risk, experience and legacy. Attention to this could prevent the harms of male suicide and mental ill-health post-disasters, increased violence against women, and neglect of LGBTIQ+ people.

Increased prevalence of DV (and widespread relationship-breakdown) post-disasters is well evidenced. Prevention and early intervention to end excusing this violence will improve individuals' and communities' recovery for future generations and future disasters.

The Commonwealth could improve support to communities in disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities by:

- * Stating in all communications that gender is central to disaster
- * Explicitly using the term 'domestic/family violence' wherever communities are alerted to DRR by government-funded communications
- * Offering immediate funding (or personnel) for community leaders, e.g. practical IT/secretarial/administrative assistance
- * Funding councils to ensure evacuation/relief centres meet essential needs for those sheltering, e.g. National GEM Guidelines
- * Ensuring funding includes community-led social-recovery initiatives (not just individual medical/psychological)





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- * Allocating medical and alternative therapies to survivors through Medicare/grants (as after Black Saturday)
- * Working with states to include local women/men in reconstructing community infrastructure (physical and social). Arrangements with state-based occupational rehabilitation for gradual, supported return to work.
- * Funding initiatives to build social infrastructure (e.g. playgroups, community dining/clean-ups) for survivors
- * Educating Australians on the harms of stringent gendered expectations in disasters
- * Educating Australians on DRR:

Example 1: Community Service Announcements that direct people to evidence-based, local information and recommended actions. Establish a central, accessible, online repository, e.g. alongside NEMA's <https://nema.gov.au/data#/> which:

(1) has an improved database incorporating sex/gender-disaggregated data (and identified marginalised groups);

(2) uses data from NEMA and other sources to inform communities of disaster risk in their area;

(3) emphasises the harms for women, men and LGBTIQ+ people that accompany gendered expectations in disasters and reiterates that 'disaster is no excuse for family violence'

(4) lists existing community DRR resources, e.g. evidence-based good practices AND local directories (e.g. Compendium of Community-based Resilience Building Case Studies https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1250464/Disaster-Resilience-Initiative_Fact-Sheet.pdf)

(5) lists current DRR projects within communities (for replication), led by respected community organisations/groups/ individuals and funded annually by the Commonwealth based on evidence from the (now improved/expanded) NEMA site.

Example 2: Include new ABS Census questions to capture awareness of DRR actions that Australians have taken over the past 12 months. Responses could provide a wealth of information for the emergency management sector and DRR professionals.

Analysis could identify areas (down to 70 households) by DRR actions taken (or not), by gender, by age, by income, by SES, etc.

In addition, every Australian completing the ABS Census will be alerted to DRR awareness and action.

Address data could capture relocation post-disasters. A new question could ask if changed address was due to a disaster.

Q3. Please describe your understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes.

Funding for disasters occurs through a mix of contributions from each level of government (Federal, State and Local) and is supplemented by donations from the Australian public through a range of faith-based and secular non-profit organisations, e.g. Red Cross, Salvation Army, Anglicare, CatholicCare, etc.





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Funding is influenced by Royal Commissions and other Reviews and Inquiries usually established following each major disaster.

Problem associated: It can be difficult for people to know who is in charge of disaster recovery (most recently apparent in the Lismore floods) and where to apply for funding (both individually and organisationally). Lack of a consistent approach to disaster funding is apparent, as evidenced by the need for this Review.

In planned processes: Recent funding through the Commonwealth's Disaster Ready submission round involved a process where each state had a nominated body to rate submissions, and then they were sent on to the commonwealth for final decisions. In Victoria, this was Emergency Management Victoria.

In emergency situations: It appears that there is frequent contestation of whether the Commonwealth must be invited before it can act to assist Australians affected by natural hazards, extreme weather events and disasters. Although federal government officials have often stated they cannot act without a prior invitation from the relevant Premier, this is only customary, and Prime Ministers can immediately offer resources, emergency or military services and financial assistance. This has happened when the scale of a disaster is enormous, or multiple jurisdictions are involved, e.g. by PM Kevin Rudd with the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009, and PM Scott Morrison with the Black Summer bushfires of 2020.

Problem associated: This gives the perception of politicised responses to disasters, and is unhelpful to Australians suffering in disasters' aftermath and unable to get the help they need. Delays of days at the height of response and recovery in a disaster as media reporters question when the relevant Premier will invite Commonwealth assistance is incomprehensible for those suffering and for Australians watching on in disbelief of this delayed action. For example, in one disaster after another from Black Saturday in 2009 through to Black Summer in 2020 and the Lismore floods in 2022, people remained without proper housing for months or even years. In terms of immediate help, disaster survivors speak of politicians 'flying in' to complete devastation of whole communities and offering help, yet delivering very little in the medium- and long-term. The word 'resilience' is used as a way for governments to back away from responsibilities to Australian citizens. For example, after the Black Saturday bushfires, the Australian Army provided enormous practical help and moral support to devastated community members, but were recalled too early because of a dubious fear that people would develop a 'cargo mentality'. This left people unable to be resilient because, as individuals, they did not have essential public services like water connection, power, internet and the public clean-up and removal of rubbish from flood, cyclone or fire damage.

Q4. Are the funding roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events clear?

No. While the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) provides financial assistance to help cover the costs of disaster response, recovery, and rebuilding, it is negotiated after each disaster. For example, when the scale of a disaster overwhelms the capacity of a state or territory to respond adequately to people's needs, the split of funding between state and commonwealth is negotiated case by case, including Black Saturday (Vic, SA, 2009), Cyclone Yasi (Qld, 2011), Qld Floods (2011), Tas bushfires (2013), NSW bushfires (2013), WA bushfire (2014), SA bushfires (2014), Cyclone Debbie (Qld, NSW, 2017), Black Summer (Vic, NSW, 2020), and others.





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The implication is that suffering people may be at the whim of politicians who may be operating on agendas beyond responding to the disaster recovery and reconstruction.

Further, within local government the role of the Mayor may be eroded by other levels of government (or even the CEO role) superseding the role of elected Council in the aftermath of disasters.

Each disaster seems to bring its own set of ad hoc decision-making as chaotic circumstances over-ride the usual infrastructure in the name of urgency.

One of the weaknesses of the national disaster funding model is that although the Response sector has permanent funding, legislation and infrastructure, neither the Preparedness / Prevention / Mitigation sector, nor the Recovery and Resilience sector have the same status. For example, recovery officers engaged after major events are newly appointed for that event and sometime later are terminated. The next time, the functions have to start from scratch. There is a desperate need for these sectors to have permanent status with designated ongoing funding, legislation and infrastructure, equivalent to the Response sector. This permanent workforce should have minimum training which includes Gender and Disaster Australia's Lessons in Disaster to ensure an understanding of increased DV after disaster, increased men's suicide, and neglect of LGBTIQ+ people.

Q5. Is there any further information you would like to provide?

GADAus' current funding is four years to June 30, 2025. High turnover of government staff overseeing our grant is problematic, preventing efficient engagement and ongoing knowledge of the content, context, history and planning of our work.

Future funding beyond June 2025 will not be known until December 2024 or later, and there does not seem to be a way to achieve security in funding, staffing, and commitment to long-term outcomes. Yet such secure funding would assist the commonwealth in disaster risk reduction.

Ideal funding arrangements would allocate core ongoing funding to GADAus for essential functions and to provide base-sustainability.

Such an assured income stream that is ongoing is feasible, as there is bipartisan support for the prevention of violence against women, and for improved disaster funding arrangements.

It is also important for Australia, as a signatory to the Sendai DRR Framework, to have substantive, evidence-based achievements reporting on the 'gender' component. The Government's Mid-term Review in 2023 included an Annex about GADAus, and our work was presented in the main volume as evidence of gender progress on DRR. Core funding to GADAus would elevate and substantiate Australia's progress and commitment to the Sendai Framework for DRR.

In domestic terms, ongoing base funding through the Commonwealth Government to GADAus would see short-term outcomes achieved each year, documented in Activity Work Plan Reports. Further, it allows progress towards outcomes sought by government involving identified long-term cultural change. Such cultural change includes:

- o Increased individual and community resilience as identified harms from stringent gendered expectations in disasters are minimized (and ultimately, eliminated). These harms include increased family violence and male suicide





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- o Greater emergency management sector knowledge of gendered harms, how to reduce gendered expectations, and how to encourage help-seeking from first responders
- o Increased knowledge of specific disaster risks faced by women, men and LGBTIQ+ people
- o Increased awareness of DRR at individual and community levels
- o Knowledge of increased family violence after disasters and how to respond constructively – both from the emergency management sector and from community members
- o Higher rates of women and LGBTQA+ people engaged (safely) in emergency service organisations, thereby increasing capacity to cope with more frequent/intense weather events/disasters

Other:

- * Work with First Nations people to respect their knowledge of caring for country, and establish systems for seeking their (paid) advice. Allow First Nations people to direct and lead these projects, e.g. Victor Steffensen's work on cool burning, and pay them properly.
- * Work with local government and support the 'buy-back' of dangerous properties to allow individuals safer housing, prioritising single-parent households and older Australians in receipt of Commonwealth income-support.
- * Extend learnings from NEMA's Hazards Insurance Partnership (HIP) and consider ways for all properties to have a level of insurance, similar to basic health insurance. Incorporate an equity lens particularly for single-parent headed households in establishing insurance premiums.
- * Understand more about post-disaster-volunteering in communities, noting the vast, unrecognised contribution of women in long-term recovery and the costs to women, e.g. compromising careers and future security.

