



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Submitted by: The Salvation Army Australia

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

1.1 The Salvation Army has had experience administering Commonwealth disaster relief and recovery funding, including the Drought Communities Support Initiative and in the wake of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires.

1.2 Salvation Army staff may also assist community members to complete disaster relief grant application forms.

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

2.1 The Salvation Army notes the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and CSIRO have made recommendations to support national coordination and better decision-making, including creating platforms, technologies and systems to collect and share information, data and knowledge about climate and disaster risks.

2.2 In addition to these, Commonwealth funding could be used to conduct comprehensive risk assessments and develop disaster management plans at local, regional, and national levels. This includes identifying vulnerable areas, assessing potential hazards, and formulating strategies to mitigate risks and enhance resilience.

2.3 Funding could then support communities to implement these risk mitigation strategies, for example the projects supported by the jointly funded Queensland Resilience and Risk Reduction Funding. It is particularly important that funding is accessible to households and communities that face additional barriers to preparing for, coping with and recovering from disaster events. This includes low income households and communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people and migrants.

2.4 Commonwealth funding could also be used to establish and enhance early warning systems that provide timely and accurate information about potential disasters. This could include investments in technology, monitoring equipment, communication networks, and public awareness campaigns to ensure that communities receive early alerts and can take necessary actions such as timely evacuations.

2.5 Funding could support community-based programs aimed at increasing disaster preparedness and resilience. This could involve training programs, workshops, and educational campaigns to raise





awareness about disaster risks, promote evacuation plans, and encourage community participation in preparedness activities.

2.6 Commonwealth funding could support capacity-building initiatives that enhance the knowledge and skills of community members, emergency responders, and local authorities in disaster risk reduction and response. This could involve training programs, workshops, and exercises to improve preparedness, response coordination, and recovery efforts.

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

3.1 The Commonwealth disaster funding processes are designed to provide financial assistance to communities affected by natural disasters in Australia. These processes are governed by the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

3.2 When a significant natural disaster occurs, the NDRRA can be activated by the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments. This activates the financial assistance measures and support mechanisms for the affected communities.

3.3 The NDRRA establishes several categories of assistance that define the types of activities and expenditure eligible for funding. These categories include state and local government assistance, essential public assets restoration, personal hardship and distress assistance, and more.

3.4 Each category of assistance has specific eligibility criteria and guidelines for submitting claims. The affected state or territory government, in consultation with the Commonwealth, assesses the eligibility of projects and activities for funding. This process involves considering factors such as the level of impact, the urgency of need, and the alignment with recovery objectives.

3.5 The NDRRA sets out cost-sharing arrangements between the Commonwealth and state or territory governments. The proportion of funding provided by each party depends on the category of assistance and is agreed upon prior to the disaster event. The funding may cover a portion of eligible expenditure incurred by the state or territory government.

3.6 Once eligibility is established, claims are submitted by the state or territory government to the Commonwealth for payment. The claims are assessed based on the agreed criteria, and approved funding is provided to the state or territory government to cover the eligible costs incurred in the recovery process.

3.7 Though it is not an issue unique to disaster relief payments, The Salvation Army continues to hear that the forms that people impacted by disaster events are required to fill in can be overly complex and not sufficiently trauma informed. The Salvation Army has also heard stories of people having received grants, only to have these funds taken back as eligibility at the time was determined on the basis of residing in an affected Local Government Area (LGA), rather than whether a person had been impacted by the disaster event. The Salvation Army acknowledges the current work being undertaken by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) regarding the development of a national "Tell Us Once" program.



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

4.1 The general public often does not differentiate between the responsibilities and support provided by different tiers of government. In the event of a disaster, the support itself is what is important; not necessarily where it is coming from. Coordinating and understanding the different funding sources, processes and eligibility criteria can be overwhelming, particularly after having experienced a traumatic event. Simplicity, clarity and a trauma-informed approach to funding during disaster events are essential in supporting communities to respond and recover.

4.2 Specific arrangements and delineation of responsibilities can vary depending on the nature and scale of the disaster, as well as the agreed arrangements between the Commonwealth and the respective state or territory governments. State and territory governments can also respond with different levels of assistance to disaster events that cross state or territory borders, such as the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and 2022 flooding events. This can make it difficult for individuals and communities affected by disasters to navigate the available support.

4.3 Effective communication and information sharing about available funding and support services are crucial for ensuring that affected community members are aware of the assistance they may be eligible for. However, communication gaps or insufficient outreach efforts can hinder understanding and awareness of the funding roles and available resources. To address these challenges, it is important for governments and relevant agencies to improve transparency, simplify application processes, provide clear and accessible information, and enhance community engagement and support mechanisms.

4.4 Our experience is that co-location and collaboration between support services in evacuation, relief and recovery centres eases some of the burden on people impacted by disasters. This means that they do not need to know which organisations to seek out for help and can access the support they need at a centralised location. Services include Commonwealth and state government community service agencies, emotional support (such as those provided by disaster chaplains), and professional mental health support, and emergency relief and financial counselling services. The ability to speak in person to representatives from Commonwealth and state governments, as well as access to information at a 'one stop shop' website, would have greatly alleviated the confusion we encountered in the community about what government supports were available and which they were eligible for. This benefit would extend to mobile recovery centres, which could include staff from Services Australia and its state counterpart/s.

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

Nil.

