



Australian Government

National Emergency  
Management Agency

# Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

**Response ID:** IRCDF\_1332\_89

**Consent option:** Publish with name

**Submitted by:** Australian Breastfeeding Association

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

In 2022, the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) received \$684,800 via the Australian Government's Protecting Australian Communities - Local Stream Grant program to fund the Community Protection for Infants and Young Children in Bushfire Emergencies Project (ABA Bushfire Project).

The ABA Bushfire Project is based in Eurobodalla Shire on the NSW South Coast. The project will increase community resilience to disasters by facilitating better planning and preparedness to meet the needs of very young children and their caregivers in emergencies.

The project aims to:

- \* develop an evidence base for planning for infants and young children in emergencies
- \* increase community resilience to bushfires by ensuring the needs of infants and young children are met
- \* support organisations and individuals to develop emergency plans for infants and young children
- \* develop resources to support parents and emergency responders.

Forming the first part of ABA's Bushfire Project, the Babies and Young Children in Black Summer Bushfires (BiBS Study) surveyed and interviewed 256 parents of children age 0 to 4 years at the time of the Black Summer Bushfires, and 63 emergency responders. The BiBS study has identified the challenges faced by parents of very young children, and what can be done to improve emergency response. The resulting report (available at [aba.asn.au/bushfire-resources](http://aba.asn.au/bushfire-resources)) makes 16 recommendations to improve emergency response. ABA will be implementing the findings in Eurobodalla Shire.

ABA's experience with the Commonwealth Disaster Funding to date has been very good. ABA was keenly aware of the gap in emergency planning and response for families with babies and toddlers but did not have the resources to act to meet this need or assist other organisations to do so. Commonwealth funding has enabled ABA to undertake this vital work. However, although the need for supporting families with very young children is global, the ABA Bushfire Project is concentrated on one LGA. For the investment in the Bushfire Project to be maximised, further funds will be needed to build on what the Bushfire Project has achieved so that families across Australia can benefit. We are hoping that such funding opportunities will be made available.





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

It is clear from the findings of the BiBS study that funding needs to consider the way disasters impact vulnerable populations and the ways in which disaster risk can be reduced. Appropriate funding along with clear delineation of roles is needed, but it is also imperative that relevant organisations work together, not in silos. Funding also needs to be provided for these organisations to run disaster simulation events, so that any gaps or deficiencies are ironed out prior to an actual disaster occurring.

From the BiBS study, we recommend that existing emergency policies, planning and guidance should be evaluated with a 'young child lens' to identify gaps and allow adjustments to be made to ensure the needs of very young children and their parents and/or caregivers are appropriately met. Individuals with expertise in the needs of very young children should be involved in evaluations and planning adjustment.

Policies and planning for the needs of very young children in emergencies should be integrated across relevant government and non-government organisations so that they can efficiently work together to protect very young children.

We can already see that, in order for the investment in ABA's Bushfire Project to be maximised, further funds will be needed to build on what the Bushfire Project has achieved so far so that families across Australia can benefit. We would suggest that the Commonwealth consider providing funding opportunities specifically designed to build upon work achieved through earlier funding granted.

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

ABA had not applied for Commonwealth Disaster Funding prior to applying for the Protecting Australian Communities - Local Stream Grant. We have relatively little knowledge of the Commonwealth Disaster funding processes, and it was only by happenstance that we became aware of the grant that we successfully applied for.

The submission date for the grant being early in January made it extremely challenging to apply for because of holidays and shutdowns of organisations.

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

The roles and responsibilities of Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local Government are not very clear to us. The ABA was very well placed to apply for and execute the grant for which we were successful, however emergency funding arrangements remain opaque.

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

The BiBS Study revealed that caring for infants and young children had a profound effect on caregivers' bushfire experiences. Preparing to evacuate was more complex and logistically challenging. Lack of evacuation plans and difficulties packing essentials resulted in delayed evacuations and insufficient resources to care for children. Mothers often found themselves alone with multiple small children and elderly family members during evacuations, while partners stayed behind to protect property.

Families that attended large evacuation centres faced challenges keeping their children safe due to overcrowding, the presence of strangers and animals, and because there were limited resources for caring for children. Emergency responders also reported significant safety concerns for children in





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evacuation centres. Mothers prioritised their children's wellbeing over their own and often did not eat or drink properly. This was particularly concerning for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Two of the five pregnant women interviewed had fainted while queuing for food and assistance.

We are happy to provide further information based on our responses if desired. Please contact:

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