

# Community Sector Disaster Capability Project

**Disaster risk reduction (DRR)** is the work we do before a hazard event (e.g. flood, fire, storm, earthquake etc) occurs, to reduce the impact.<sup>1</sup>

Place-based community services organisations provide essential support to their local communities, especially people experiencing vulnerability (including people with disability, low-income renters, people who are homeless, First Nations peoples, and those who are socially isolated). With their specialist skills, strong local knowledge, trust and connections, these services should have a key role in disaster management to ensure the wellbeing and safety of those most at risk. But recent events in NSW have shown that this role is often overlooked, particularly in the early stages when preventative action can be taken.

***Vulnerable groups are often the most impacted by disaster.<sup>2</sup> Place-based community services organisations support, and have strong connections to, these populations and understand their strengths, capabilities and vulnerabilities. An adequately supported, well-equipped and networked community sector has the potential to work with vulnerable communities, leveraging their experience and strengths, to reduce their exposure to disaster risks and impacts.***

## What is the Community Sector Disaster Capability Project?

NCOSS, in partnership with the LCSA and AbSec<sup>3</sup>, have been funded to deliver a project to promote and facilitate the role of local community services organisations in supporting communities, in particular vulnerable population groups, to reduce disaster risk.

Through the Project, local service organisations in three locations are being supported to strengthen connections with local disaster agencies and systems, and build capacity to reduce the impacts of disasters, particularly on vulnerable communities and community members. The Project will inform an integrated model for the social services sector in disaster management.

The Project aims to build a collaborative, networked approach so that local community organisations, and the communities they support, can bring their expert knowledge and connections into play and develop their capacity to identify, assess and mitigate risks as well as strengthen ongoing interactions with formal disaster management systems.

With guidance from community services organisations in the target locations, the Project will develop processes, activities and resources to strengthen organisational capacity and leverage local disaster management expertise to assist individuals, households and communities to reduce disaster risk, in particular for people who are vulnerable and clients of local services.

## Objectives

The Project will recruit local staff, hosted in an appropriate place-based organisation in the Hawkesbury, South Coast (Bega Valley, Eurobodalla and Snowy Monaro LGAs) and Northern Rivers (Ballina, Lismore and Richmond Valley LGAs). These local host organisations will work with the community services sector in each region to:

1. **Undertake activities and develop resources** to increase understanding of the strengths and disaster risks for local communities, especially people experiencing vulnerability.
2. **Strengthen organisational and community capacity and networking** to assess disaster risk for vulnerable population groups and work with these groups and other local partners to develop skills and reduce risks, enabling locally led and owned place-based disaster risk reduction.
3. **Promote ongoing collaboration to influence formal emergency management processes**, promoting inclusion of the community sector and the vulnerable populations they support in planning and preparatory risk reduction.

## How will the Project help?

- Increasing awareness of the nature and extent of disadvantage and vulnerability in the community, and the role of community service organisations in reducing disaster risk for relevant population groups and locations
- Equipping local community service organisations with tools, resources, training and access to expertise to support vulnerable population groups to reduce risk.
- Building ongoing relationships between the social services sector and government/non-government disaster management agencies, to further understanding and inclusion of the strengths and needs of vulnerable population groups in relevant processes from the outset, in particular risk reduction.

## Project timeframes and key activities

**March/April 2023:** Expression of Interest for place-based social services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to be host organisations in pilot locations. Engaging local host organisations.

**May - September 2023:** Mapping strengths and risks. Local engagement on experiences and learnings from recent disasters, and what needs to change locally

**October 2023 - March 2024:** Local capacity building activities, resources and tools, engagement and collaboration with Disaster Management sector

**April - June 2024:** Finalisation, evaluation, project report

## Get involved/More info:

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## Guiding Principles

- Meaningful, ongoing disaster risk reduction outcomes require coordinated and collaborative effort between the community, non-government and government initiatives.
- Centring community voice and strengths is integral to effective disaster risk reduction.
- Place-based community services organisations provide an integral linking role between communities - especially vulnerable populations - and government and non-local services. This is a critical tool for community disaster risk reduction.
- The capabilities of place-based community services organisations should be reinforced wherever possible.



<sup>1</sup> A disaster causes loss of human life and damage to property and livelihoods. Hazard events do not necessarily result in disasters. Ref Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Disaster risk reduction and resilience, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/topics/development-issues/building-resilience/drr/disaster-risk-reduction-and-resilience#what>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Inclusion webpage, <https://www.undrr.org/inclusion>.

<sup>3</sup> LCSA is Local Community Services Association and AbSec is NSW Child, Family & Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation.