

Australian Red Cross  
**Emergency  
Services**

the  
power of  
humanity



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**Emergency  
Services**

Cover Image: Australian Red Cross / Rodney Dekker

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# Introduction

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Natural hazards are a reality of life for all Australians. We live in a country of extremes where natural hazards, occurring with increasing regularity, are well ingrained in the country's psyche. In an increasingly global and highly technical world we must also remember that we are vulnerable to hazards in addition to those posed to us by nature. Transport and industrial accidents, epidemics, criminal and terrorist attacks are all real possibilities that threaten life, wellbeing and livelihood. Disasters, of all kinds, have wide-ranging, varied and complicated impacts that individuals, families and communities must cope with, often for many years.

Red Cross has been supporting Australians in a variety of ways since 1914. We were recognised as Australia's first disaster response organisation having provided relief and recovery support in response to the 1918 influenza pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

This document provides an overview of the role and services Red Cross provides before, during and after emergencies in Australia.

Red Cross also provides support to communities overseas after disasters in the region. For more information on our International Program please visit [www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)



Australian Red Cross / Nicholas Gouldhurst

# The Australian Red Cross approach

As a humanitarian organisation, the Red Cross mandate during and after emergencies is to care for and support the wellbeing of those affected by disasters. The Red Cross emergency services program aims to support individuals and communities to cope with and manage the **psychosocial** impacts of emergencies. Red Cross' approach is based upon the application of five psychosocial principles of promoting *safety, calm, connection, self-efficacy and hope*<sup>2</sup> before, during and after emergencies.

Australian Red Cross provides support to people who may be affected by a range of events that include natural hazard risks, technological risks, and **collective trauma events**. Our volunteers and staff work in a variety of places such as in evacuation centres, or in homes through **outreach**, in places of business or in public spaces.

As an auxiliary to public authorities in the humanitarian field, Red Cross contributes to a wide spectrum of emergency management planning and activity, and invests significant organisational resources to support its activities.

The aim of the program is to assist individuals, households, and communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies across Australia. This is achieved through the mobilisation of up to 4,500 volunteers, the support of 70 staff members, our experience of previous emergencies both nationally and internationally, and through strategic partnerships, such as with the Australian Psychological Society and Save the Children.

The foundation of Red Cross' work before, during and after emergencies are our psychosocial programs. Activities within these programs include psychosocial support, psychological first aid, family reunification, psychoeducation, support for our personnel and **psychosocial capacity building**.



Australian Red Cross / Dave Hancock

<sup>2</sup> Hobfoll S. E, Watson P, Bell C. C, Bryant R. A, Brymer M. J, Friedman M. J, et al. *Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence*. Psychiatry. 2007;70:283–315

# Before a disaster

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Red Cross has been engaged in emergency preparedness activities since 2007. Our preparedness work focuses on helping people prepare to manage the short, medium and long term disruptions to their lives caused by disasters. In doing so, Red Cross aims to support individuals and communities to be better prepared to reduce the psychosocial impacts of emergencies. This is done via the delivery of useful and practical education and training packages, the distribution of information resources, and contribution to policy, planning and practice at the local, state and national levels through the provision of advocacy and advice (see pages 14 to 16). Red Cross also conducts disaster preparedness campaigns.

## Emergency RediPlan

Red Cross' award-winning and internationally recognised flagship program is Emergency RediPlan. It is a national, non-hazard-specific community engagement program through which Red Cross aims to build the resilience of households and neighbourhoods. Emergency RediPlan is designed to assist individuals and households create their own personalised emergency plan and prepare themselves for the longer term psychosocial impacts of an emergency.

Emergency RediPlan consists of a mobile phone application, planning templates, activity sheets, booklets, face-to-face information sessions and facilitated household and community planning sessions. In addition, Red Cross also offers training to service providers and carers who work with people more at risk to the impacts of emergencies, such as the frail, aged or those who are socially isolated. This is so that people of all ages and abilities are given the opportunity to take action to prepare themselves.

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### The RediPlan program is based on four simple steps:

- 1 ▶ Get in the know
  - 2 ▶ Get connected
  - 3 ▶ Get organised
  - 4 ▶ Get packing
- 

As with all Red Cross preparedness activities, RediPlan resources have been designed to assist people to prepare for any type of disaster, rather than focusing on any one, specific hazard.

All Red Cross preparedness activities have been designed to complement the work of other emergency services agencies and to collaborate with communities and service providers.

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### Get prepared mobile app

Get Prepared is a mobile application that helps people connect with key support people, accomplish simple tasks to make themselves and their loved ones safer, and protect the things that matter most to them. Get Prepared is an easy way for people to access the information and tools they need to complete an emergency plan.

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# During a disaster

In Australia, federal, state/territory and local governments all have a responsibility to maintain emergency arrangements and to assist in organising, supporting and coordinating the government and community response to disasters. While arrangements differ across the states and territories, Australian Red Cross has a role in these plans to support the psychosocial wellbeing of people affected by disasters.

During a disaster, Red Cross' psychosocial programs are activated to ensure people's basic and psychosocial needs are met. Red Cross coordinates trained volunteers to provide these relief services in line with state emergency management arrangements.

Nationally, Red Cross' psychosocial programming includes two key components that are activated in response to emergencies. These are psychological first aid and the family reunification service Register.Find.Reunite.

## Psychological first aid

Emergencies cause people considerable distress and loss, disrupt people's lives and have long-term emotional and social impacts. Most people will recover well with the support of family and friends. However, some people may experience long term psychosocial problems. Early psychosocial support for people can assist to minimise distress, connect people with services and identify those who may need further support.

Psychological first aid (PFA) is a psychosocial support activity that helps people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event. It aims to reduce initial distress, meet current needs, promote flexible coping and encourage adjustment. It includes basic principles of support to promote natural recovery. This involves helping people to feel safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful; giving access to physical, emotional and social support; and assisting people to feel able to help themselves.

Red Cross Emergency Services volunteers are trained to provide PFA to people affected by disasters in Australia. Volunteers provide PFA in a variety of locations depending on the emergency, these may include in evacuation centres, through outreach, in places of work and at public events.

## Register.Find.Reunite.

Being separated from family and friends is one of the most stressful things a person may experience during an emergency. Research conducted in the aftermath of the Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009 found that separation from families has a long term mental health impact. Register.Find.Reunite. is a voluntary registration and enquiry service that provides basic details on the whereabouts of people affected by an emergency so they can be reunited with their family, friends and loved ones. This web-based filing and retrieval system may also provide basic details to approved authorities who are supporting the emergency response and recovery.

Register.Find.Reunite. reduces the burden for emergency management authorities in coping with the complexity of collating displaced persons registrations in the field and managing large numbers of enquiries. It also increases the flexibility for emergency management authorities to remotely collate and analyse the records of people impacted by disasters.

In addition, Register.Find.Reunite. can improve the transition of an event from response to recovery activities, with the availability of reports to approved recovery agencies. This function assists by minimising both the number

of times people are required to provide their basic name and address details, as well as the amount of time people need to be engaged with support services.

Register.Find.Reunite. is a service operated and managed by Red Cross on behalf of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

#### **Additional state/territory services**

In addition to the national psychosocial programs, some states and territories provide specialist services.

In Queensland and the Northern Territory, Red Cross manages evacuation centres. This includes capacity building exercises with local and state governments in other states. Best practice guidelines drawing upon the SPHERE Standards for Humanitarian response guide the work of Red Cross in managing shelters during emergencies.

In Victoria, Red Cross also provides support during and after non-major emergencies. This includes providing assistance to individuals and families who are affected by house fires or other individualised emergencies.

The Telecross REDi program in South Australia involves calling vulnerable and isolated people during extreme weather events. Red Cross volunteers call pre-registered clients to check on their wellbeing.

For more information about these services, contact Red Cross in the relevant state or territory. See back page for details.



Australian Red Cross / Amelia Wong

# After a disaster

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The impacts of a disaster, both to people's psychosocial wellbeing and the physical impacts on their communities, have long lasting implications. Recovering from a disaster is a complex process that may take months, even years to overcome.

In the weeks to months after a disaster, when the impacts are still being understood, the goal of Red Cross' programs is to provide a psychosocial safety net, to link and make people aware of services. In the months and years following a disaster, Red Cross seeks to help people navigate the recovery system, and equip people to draw upon their own and other resources to drive their own recovery.

The Red Cross recovery program promotes community led recovery, and supports community leaders and members to manage their own recovery. It is based upon the Australian National Disaster Recovery Principles, and draws upon the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

Australian Red Cross has over a decade of experience of providing recovery programs following a number of disasters including the East Coast Fires in Tasmania (2007), Black Saturday Bushfires (2009), Queensland and Victorian Floods (2011), Cyclone Yasi (2011), Margaret River Fires (2011), Dunalley Fires (2013), Blue Mountains Bushfires (2013), Sampson Flat Bushfires (2015), Cyclone Debbie (2017), South-West Fires (2018), and most recently, the East Coast Drought.

Red Cross' recovery programs work closely with local services and broader community planning partners. As a result of this community led approach, exact details of any recovery program are impossible to predict although from experience recovery activities required are likely to include:

- Providing training and education for community leaders and local agencies to further develop their capacity
- Providing psychosocial support, through outreach, to residents in their homes, businesses and places of temporary residence
- Facilitating and providing psychosocial support at community events
- Facilitating disaster recovery support groups in partnership with the Australian Psychological Society
- Supporting medium-to long-term recovery planning by advocating for community needs
- Linking community leaders to mentors from other communities with similar experience.

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Recovery is long term, complex and often changing. Impacts last years to decades, not weeks to months.

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# Technical advice and capacity building

Red Cross has a long history of working with communities before, during and after disasters in Australia and as such has experienced staff and volunteers and a wide network of technical experts. Red Cross recognises that communities must be the lead in building their own resilience and in driving recovery after disaster. For this reason, Red Cross seeks to support the development of local capacities through technical advice, education and training.

## Technical advice

Red Cross has skilled and experienced personnel in providing advice to government and non government personnel in various psychosocial and emergency management areas of focus. These include disaster resilience, evacuation centre management, family reunification services, aspects of recovery management, including assessment and planning, communicating in recovery, memorials management, appeal management, and collective trauma events.

Red Cross also facilitates the **Australian Disaster Recovery Network**. The Network aims to link leaders of new disaster affected communities with leaders from previously affected communities to enable them to undertake a mentoring process, provide advice and support.

## Capacity building

Red Cross has a number of education and training courses available to communities and organisations working with communities before, during and after disasters. Courses vary in mode of delivery and are tailored to meet the needs of participants.

Training sessions cover a range of topics relating to emergencies including household preparedness, preparedness for community service organisations, evacuation centre management, self care, stress management and community recovery. In addition, Red Cross offers training in Psychological First Aid and Communicating in Recovery.

## Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

Australian Red Cross delivers programs on behalf of the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. This includes input into technical manuals, the Australian Journal for Emergency Management, delivering the Volunteer Leadership course, Education for Young People, and hosting professional development events.



Australian Red Cross / Rodney Dekker

# Research, partnerships and advocacy

Red Cross recognises that the work that it does on the ground has to be supported by partnerships with not for profits and the corporate sector, robust policy, and the best available evidence.

## Research

Red Cross is a member of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre and a foundation partner in the University of Melbourne's Beyond Bushfires project. Beyond Bushfires has examined the health and wellbeing trajectories of people affected by the Black Saturday Bushfires in Victoria. This included leading world first research into the impacts of separation and reunification of families, and the contribution to a range of other internationally published and highly regarded research.

## Partnerships

Being a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Australian Red Cross has access to global emergency management expertise, including Red Cross':

- Global Disaster Preparedness Centre,
- Climate Change Reference Centre and
- Psychosocial Reference Centre.

In addition, Australian Red Cross has partnerships with Save the Children, Australian Psychology Society, as well as corporate support partnerships with Insurance Australia Group, BHP Foundation and Jaguar Landrover.

## Advocacy

Red Cross' experience in recovery, manifesting in its preparedness work also focuses strongly on advocacy to the Australian Governments of all levels for an increase in investment in disaster resilience. Red Cross is a member of the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Community Safety which has influenced government policy through the production of advocacy reports on disaster mitigation funding and the development of a National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.

[Red Cross is a member of a consortium with the Australasian Fire Authorities Council and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre to improve disaster resilience through the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.](#)



Australian Red Cross / Tim Lefthouse



Australian Red Cross / Aysha Leo

# The role of volunteers

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Voluntary service is one of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross Movement. As such, the Red Cross emergency services program is built upon the foundation of volunteers who enable the organisation to deliver services.

Over 4,500 volunteers around Australia are trained to assist and support Red Cross' work in emergencies. This dedicated pool of volunteers allows Red Cross to provide support to communities across Australia in preparing for, responding to and recovering after disasters.

For more information about volunteering with Emergency Services, contact Red Cross in your state or territory. See back page for details.

# Glossary

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## **Collective trauma events**

A collective trauma event is an event, irrespective of the hazard, which results in a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds between people and impairs the prevailing sense of community. Such events may impact things we previously took for granted about public locations, routines and values.

Not all disasters are collective trauma events. To meet the definition above, collective trauma events must have an impact on the broader community and challenge people's typical understanding of the way the 'world works'.<sup>3</sup>

## **Outreach**

Red Cross has been undertaking outreach after emergency events since 2006. Outreach assists people who may not have access to services and support by visiting them in their homes, businesses and places of temporary residence. Outreach has traditionally been conducted in the relief and recovery phases, immediately after an emergency event as well as in the weeks, months and years following.

Long-term recovery outreach may be conducted in partnership with another agency or the local council, or may be requested by a community recovery committee or community group.

Psychoeducation helps people understand the experiences and process they are going through. It can be provided by skilled internal staff, trained volunteers and expert external providers.

## **Psychosocial**

Psychosocial refers to the psychological (thoughts, cognitions, emotions) and the social (relationships, family, values) aspects of people's lives.<sup>4</sup>

### **Psychosocial capacity building**

Psychosocial capacity building is any intervention provided by professional and nonprofessional people, both local and from the outside of a community and is designed to help individuals, families, social groups, and communities prepare for or recover from a disaster.<sup>5</sup> A psychosocial capacity building approach is multi-systemic, relevant and appropriate to the community culture and is empowerment and resiliency-oriented. Psychosocial capacity building seeks to be sustainable over time and builds on the foundation of local capacities and resources.

## **Psychosocial support**

Psychosocial support refers to the actions that address the psychosocial needs of individuals and communities, taking into consideration psychological, social and cultural aspects of wellbeing. Psychosocial support can be both preventive and curative. It is preventive when it decreases the risk of developing mental health problems. It is curative when it helps individuals and communities to overcome and deal with psychosocial problems that may have arisen due to distress and other effects of crises.<sup>6</sup>

3 Australian Red Cross, 2018, Best practice guidelines: Supporting Communities Before, During and After Collective Trauma Events  
4 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, 2011, Psychosocial interventions: A handbook.  
5 Miller JL, 2012, Psychosocial capacity building in response to disasters. Columbia University Press, New York. 6 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, 2011, Psychosocial interventions: A handbook.

# Fundamental Principles

In all activities, our volunteers, members and staff are guided by the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

## Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all people.

## Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides

in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



Australian Red Cross / Susan Cullinan

[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

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