

14 June 2022

Social and Environmental Policy Team
National Recovery and Resilience Agency
121 Marcus Clarke St
Canberra, ACT 2601

Via email: nationalactionplan@recovery.gov.au

Dear Social and Environmental Policy Team,

Second National Action Plan under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework

Anglicare Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Second National Action Plan (the Action Plan) under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (the Framework).

We make this submission on behalf of our members, and the families and communities who use their services. The Anglicare Australia Network consists of social and health service organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church in Australia, that share a belief in the value and the potential of every person, and the principles of justice, hope and compassion. Community sector organisations are essential ‘shock absorbers’ for communities affected by disasters and extreme weather events. We are particularly important in assisting those who are the least able to cope, move away from or recover from disasters.

The Anglicare Australia Network has a local presence across the country, and has played a critical role in disaster recovery efforts over three centuries. Many of our members are partners in state and territory emergency action plans, and our Network has helped people rebuild their lives after extreme weather and disasters. We do this not only through services such as emergency relief, housing and homelessness services, mental health and financial counselling – but as trusted members of the affected communities, working in partnership with them and other organisations on the ground.

Re-frame understandings of disaster to include prolonged disasters, instead of just one-off catastrophic events

We support the decision to re-frame what constitutes a disaster, and move away from the term “natural disaster” and its implication of inevitability. The Discussion Paper provides the examples of recent catastrophic events, including the Black Summer bushfires and the recent floods. While these have indeed had catastrophic and long-lasting impacts on communities, we note they are not the only types of disasters that should be considered by the Framework and Action Plan.

Extreme heat events kill more people than any other type of disaster, but because their impacts can be prolonged and across large geographic areas, they often get less attention than one-off events like floods or bushfires. Droughts affect the mental health and wellbeing of local communities, as well as rates of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. But they are a 'slow-burn,' with impacts, including mental health impacts, being felt across years. The Framework and Action Plan should cover these more prolonged types of disasters, that will be increasingly common as our climate changes.

Recognise the community sector as a partner in disaster risk and recovery

Community service organisations are central to the delivery of effective local emergency relief and recovery. They help make sure communities stay strong and connected when they are facing disasters and emergencies. They can swiftly mobilise resources, expertise, and essential services in response to disasters. Indeed, they are often among the first responders, because they are based in local communities, and their staff and volunteers are members of the community. For example, Anglicare North Coast is a small agency that was vital to the flood response, with staff and volunteers from the local community staffing evacuation centres, providing food and essentials, and helping with applications for financial relief.

Emergency management planning should be undertaken in partnership with local community service organisations. Yet the community sector continues to be overlooked in climate and emergency responses. Rarely are we given a seat at the table, on equal footing with local government and the emergency management sector. The Action Plan should clearly recognise and articulate the role of the community sector, as an equal partner in disaster resilience and recovery.

Partnering with the community sector in a time of emergency is easier when the structures and relationships between the sector and government already exist. Trust is critical in a time of emergency. For example, the National Emergency Relief Coordination Group is a standing group of agencies, including Anglicare Australia, and convened by Department of Social Services. It met several times at short notice to discuss advice to the former Minister about the impact of the Queensland and northern NSW floods on emergency relief and other services. Because it was already in place before the floods occurred, and the relationship with the Minister had been built over time, it was able to swiftly convene to provide immediate and valuable intelligence and advice about the situation in the disaster regions.

Provide adequate and flexible funding to enable community service organisation to reduce disaster risk and support recovery

The need for social support during and following large scale emergencies is widely recognised and can continue well into the recovery period. For example, the trauma and upheaval of Victoria's Black Saturday bushfires led to an increase in demand for services addressing mental health issues, risky alcohol consumption and family violence.ⁱ Anglicare Australia Network members have reported increases in mental illness, family breakdown and community conflict in the years since the Black Summer bushfires.

But much of the work undertaken by Anglicare Australia Network members in response to emergencies is unfunded, or on top of their existing services. While they may eventually receive additional funding for support they have provided to their communities in need, it can take weeks or months to confirm and receive. Flexible contingency funds are needed to help community service organisations respond to local community need, and ensure they are able to swiftly pivot to helping people impacted by emergencies.

Reporting requirements must also be commensurate with the funding. Anglicare Australian Network members noted that monthly reporting in the wake of the 2019-20 bushfires became onerous and attracted administrative costs, that was counter-productive to the purpose of the funding.

Prioritise a housing response and resilience plan

Housing availability is a major issue following emergencies. For example, about 2800 houses have been assessed as uninhabitable in the Lismore and Northern Rivers regions following the floods earlier this year.ⁱⁱ Our Rental Affordability Snapshot, conducted in April this year, found that there were only three private rental properties in the region affordable for a household living on income support payments, and just seven for a household living on minimum wage.ⁱⁱⁱ This leaves thousands more families with no affordable rental options in the region.

Anglicare Australia Network members reported recently that some people are without permanent or adequate housing more than two years after the Black Summer Bushfires. Temporary housing arrangements came to an end long-ago, but with rental availability at record lows, they have no option but to remain in caravans or sheds. The demand for construction and trades has also driven rebuilding costs up well beyond what many houses were insured for.

It's estimated more than a million properties could be at risk of flood damage in the coming decade.^{iv} Around one in every 25 Australian properties will face insurance premiums that will effectively become unaffordable by 2030.^v A plan for building more affordable, climate resilient homes must be a priority in the Action Plan, including more social housing in disaster prone areas.

Making existing housing more resilient to disasters and the changing climate would also reduce the health risks of heatwaves, floods, fires and bushfire smoke. Australians deserve to have a healthy home, that doesn't put their health at risk, and is affordable. Upgrading a home from a 2-star to 5-star energy rating can result in a 54 percent reduction in energy use,^{vi} lower energy bills, keep homes cooler and improve ventilation. Replacing wooden fences with brick and flood gates can improve resilience to floods. Government can make households more resilient to the changing climate and the impacts of disasters by investing in a program of upgrades and retrofits for low-income households.

The First Action Plan recognised the benefits of rooftop solar, to empower households to take control of their energy and increase resilience in the face of disasters that impact on the reliability of energy services.

But right now, renters are losing out on these benefits. In 2018, 29 percent of owner-occupied dwellings had rooftop solar installations, compared to 4 percent of rental dwellings.^{vii} With renters generally responsible for paying energy and water bills themselves, there is little incentive for landlords to invest in solar panels when they won't benefit from the bill savings or suffer from the health impacts themselves. The Second Action Plan should consider ways to extend the benefits of renewable energy to people in rental housing.

Conclusion

Anglicare Australia thanks the National Recovery and Resilience Agency for the opportunity to provide input to this consultation, via this submission and the various forums and roundtables that have been convened.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discussion these recommendations with you, or provide more detailed information about the work of our Network members in helping vulnerable communities adapt to climate changes and reduce the risks of emergencies and disasters.

Yours sincerely



Kasy Chambers
Executive Director

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- ⁱ Deloitte Access Economics (2016) [The economic cost of the social impact of natural disasters](#)
- ⁱⁱ AHURI (2022) [Floods and the future for housing insurance](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Anglicare Australia (2022) [Rental Affordability Snapshot: Regional Reports](#)
- ^{iv} Climate Valuation (2022) [Flood risk threatens Australian property value](#)
- ^v Ibid
- ^{vi} Alternative Technology Association (2012) [2.5 Billion Reasons to Invest in Energy Efficiency, Modelling the impact of improving the energy efficiency of Victoria's homes on the Victorian Energy Concessions Budget.](#)
- ^{vii} Tilbury (2018) [The final frontiers of rooftop solar: opportunities for energy entrepreneurs.](#) p. 7.