

Summary Report

NDIS Review: Fires, Floods and COVID-19

What are the problems?

Discussion paper by Elly Desmarchelier

The problems identified in the discussion paper are:

1. **Absence of disability representation and consultation in the governance of disaster management in Australia**
2. **Lack of individual disaster planning**
3. **Continuity of supports during disasters**
4. **Unsustainable workload of advocacy services**
5. **Inadequate safeguards**

DANA's engagements on this focus area included online forums, surveys and written feedback.

Surveys

Problems most impacting advocates and people with disability

Problems	Advocates	People with Disability
People with disability are not represented or consulted during disasters	68.12%	72.97
Supports are not consistent or hard to get during disasters	60.87%	62.16%
No support to plan for disasters	53.62%	67.57%
Not enough access to accurate, timely and accessible information	48.55%	51.35%
Hard to access advocacy support during disasters	48.55%	56.76%
Restrictive practices being used during disasters with no support or advice	35.51%	21.62%
Other- tell us what you think: (issues have been incorporated below)	21.74%	21.62%

Solutions identified by advocates and people with disability

Solutions	Advocates	People with Disability
Being able to use NDIS funds in more flexible ways when disasters are happening	76.81%	78.38%

Funding advocacy organisations to provide specific disaster support	71.74%	64.86%
Having access to specific resources and plans that talk about how disability supports might change during a disaster	62.32%	59.46%
More support for the NDIA to make sure workforce is available during disasters	50.72%	51.35%
Making a specific government body to manage the impact of disasters on people with disability	42.75%	48.65%
More NDIS support to make sure people with disability can make their own emergency plans	41.30%	54.05%
Other- tell us what you think: (solutions have been incorporated below)	15.94%	16.22%

What we heard

Problems most impacting advocates and people with disability

Advocates confirmed many of the findings of the original discussion paper and added specific examples:

- Lack of information and education exacerbated the level of anxiety and confusion for people with disability, particularly for young people with disability, people in closed settings, people with cognitive and intellectual disability and those who do not communicate verbally.
- Lack of accessible information placed the burden on disability advocacy organisations to translate and disseminate accessible information through phone lines, nightly livestreams, website resources and public announcements.
- Many people with disability did not know what to do or where to go for help to get the supports they need. Advocacy organisations reported that they received increased inquiries with many inquiries about losing services, access to services, provider practices, and NDIS plans.
- Advocacy organisations performed their own welfare checks, and attended closed settings to ensure people with disability were getting the help they needed, including RAT and PCR Tests and PPE.
- Advocacy organisations advocated for specific groups of people with disability, such as people with psychosocial disability and people experiencing homelessness and poverty around access to hospital, PPE, testing, vaccinations and accommodation.
- Advocacy organisations spent time educating government on the importance and methods of accessible and clear communication for people with disability.
- Providers instructed their employees to perform shopping on behalf of clients using their bank cards requiring a high level of trust, breaches of banking terms and further isolating individuals.

“Our lives are valued less than our able-bodied counterparts- we are triaged as lower priority in disasters because of outdated notions and prejudices.” - Person with disability, survey response

“In general getting emergency funding available for helping get you safe and secure is really hard to get fast and to the actual level needed. But this is really what everyone needs in a disaster.” - Person with disability, survey response

What are the solutions?

Advocates confirmed much of the finding of the original discussion paper and added specific examples:

- 1. Establish a Disability Disaster Management Centre (DDMC)**
 - 2. Invest in person-centred emergency planning**
 - 3. Flexible use of NDIS funds during disasters**
 - 4. NDIA to develop a Workforce Disaster Surge Plan**
 - 5. Specific disaster funding stream for advocacy organisations**
 - 6. Strengthening safeguards**
- Governments should commit to at least 5 years of supports post-emergency and disaster.
 - Specific services and supports need to address the common intersections with disability, including bed-bound or house-bound, poverty, homelessness, CALD communities, First Nations, and regional and rural communities.
 - NDIS Plans should incorporate specific emergency and disaster funding line items to fund capacity-building, preparedness, and equipment that minimise risks to health and safety.
 - Educate planners and LACs on how plans and funding can be used for emergency and disaster preparedness, planning and supports.
 - Advocacy organisations need to be properly resourced for capacity-building, information translation and dissemination, welfare checks and increased safeguards.
 - Provide information to disability advocacy organisations ahead of publication to allow for time to translate information into accessible formats.

Additional solutions

Invest in education and training for all staff delivering emergency and disaster services

Fund and implement education and awareness training for all services associated with disaster and emergency planning around the needs and requirements of people with disability.

Support and coordinate with advocacy organisations about accessible information and communications for all people with disability during emergencies and disasters

Adequately fund, support and coordinate with disability advocacy organisations around creating and disseminating clear, inclusive and accessible communications. Information accessibility funding needs to ensure coverage of specific impact groups, such as CALD, closed settings, First Nations, and those without access to digital devices.

People outside of the NDIS should receive financial support

People with disability outside of the NDIS need to have access to funds for planning, preparedness, services and support for emergencies and disasters, for example, via Centrelink.

Changes to proposed solutions

Investment in research to test proposed solutions

Investment in research and data analysis is needed to test the solutions proposed in the discussion paper so there is a body of knowledge demonstrating which solutions will work. Research should cover a wide range of studies across different countries, cultures, and types of disasters of different scales. Research should be coordinated by the NDDA and NEMA, in partnership with DROs and the NDIA.

Meaningful participation and planning at the State government level

Much of the planning coordination of emergencies and disasters happens at a state level. Any federal strategy needs to fit within different levels of government and the wider context of public sector policy making and services. State-level planning and response must be a focus prior to implementing a federal strategy, such as the DDMC.

A Workforce Disaster Surge Plan should be led by State bodies instead of the NDIA

NDIA lacks expertise and linkages and understandings of state and LGA/community level context and State government disaster response and recovery organisations (in partnership with NEMA) should embed this planning and integrate this with other disaster response efforts.

Detailed mechanism for a specific disaster funding stream for advocacy organisations

This proposal needs to detail the mechanism for funding and include a commitment by the Commonwealth to match state funding of disaster surge capability for disability organisations dollar for dollar. There needs to be adequate resourcing for disability advocacy by local community organisations and link, coordinate and integrate with other disaster services planning.

“Just think of people with disability. It's as simple as that. That people with disability are just part of the equation” - Dominique Vittori, Advocate, Speak Out Association of Tasmania, online forum

“I think the disability disaster management centre would give people with disability a seat at the table, which our organisations just don't have that at the moment. It's very ad hoc.” - Victoria Advocate, online forum

“[For NDIS Plans] it would seem that a line item and, perhaps, it is about a number of hours allocated to that would be very helpful. But certainly another big thing is the ability to use funding to purchase equipment that can help people prepare.” - Queensland Advocate, online forum

Our solutions

Advocacy funding – information, proactive work, disaster response and coordination (for people with disability), NDIS plan reviews and changes, liaison with providers

Establish a specific funding stream that resources advocacy organisations for emergency and disaster support and services, including capacity-building and training initiatives (DIDRR and PCEP), creating and disseminating accessible information, increased case volumes, and provider capacity-building. The Federal Government should coordinate with states and commit to matching state funding of disaster surge capability for disability organisations dollar for dollar.

Flexible NDIS Funding, including for preventative work

Incorporate emergency and disaster planning, supports and services into NDIS plans to be used in flexible ways on an ongoing basis. Create mechanisms to release emergency funding and timely review of plans during emergencies and disasters. Educate planners and LACs to promote and inform participants about this funding, and properly resource and train the NDIA to make timely and consistent decisions about this funding.

Create a body to coordinate, investigate, and consult to ensure fully accessible and inclusive community services, including disaster and emergency

Emergency centres and services, including their staff, need to be inclusive for all people with disability and consider the needs of specific impact groups. Every level of planning should be informed by consultation with people with disability. The proposed DDMC, established within the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), would be able to perform this national coordination function to work closely with states and facilitate consultation as quickly as possible as an event is unfolding.