

Disaster preparedness and response plan



**COORDINARE—
South Eastern
NSW PHN**

Nov 2022



Background

The South Eastern region of NSW experienced prolonged drought followed by the Black Summer bushfires and then the global COVID-19 pandemic and flooding. In response to these events, COORDINARE (the South Eastern NSW Primary Health Network) took on new responsibilities, ranging from supporting general practices and communities in their response and recovery from drought and bushfire, to helping coordinate the Commonwealth Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As Australia becomes increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events fuelled by climate change, it is imperative we have an effective and coordinated 'one system' health response to disasters and pandemics.

Why does COORDINARE have a Disaster Preparedness & Response Action Plan for the region?

The primary responsibility for responding to a disaster or pandemic rests with the government agencies who are the first responders to incidents within their jurisdictions. However, general practice, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and other primary care services must be recognised and supported as essential services to **ensure access to health care** during a natural disaster or a pandemic. A coordinated, integrated disaster management plan that includes all stakeholders is essential to achieving this. Primary Health Networks (PHNs) have a crucial role in national, state and local disaster planning and preparation arrangements as they provide essential coordination and support for GPs and other primary care providers.

The actions below are intended to achieve our objectives such as a coordinated health response and ensuring that primary care providers are included in the disaster management planning process, and that the community has access to primary care during an event. Other actions relate to supporting the resilience and recovery of the community before, during and after events. These actions were formulated after a formal review of COORDINARE's bushfire response, plus from ongoing consultation with our Clinical Councils and Community Advisory Committee.

Actions

Objective 1 - Ensure local and regional emergency management processes achieve a coordinated health response that support communities to prepare and respond.

Coordinated health response

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| 1.1 | Work with the two Regional Emergency Management Committees (REMCs) in South Eastern NSW to ensure an effective and coordinated health response to disasters and pandemics |
| 1.2 | Facilitate input of the primary health care voice into both REMCs through representation of a GP and a COORDINARE staff member on these committees |
| 1.3 | Partner with both Local Health Districts (LHDs) to work towards a one health system response to emergencies and disasters |
| 1.4 | Implement streamlined rapid commissioning procedures to ensure organisational agility to assess need and provide funding appropriately to communities in need (e.g. establishing pop-up mental health services, providing community rebuilding and recovery grants) |
| 1.5 | Liaise with other funding bodies to ensure improved coordination of distribution of funding related to response and recovery from disasters and pandemics. |

Objective 2 - Enhance and develop capabilities of primary care to prepare and respond to disasters in order to ensure the ongoing health and wellbeing of the community.

Preparedness

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| 2.1 | Work with general practices and ACCHOs to improve their preparedness and ability to respond by building knowledge and skill, for example via desktop emergency scenario planning as well as facilitating opportunities to share experiences |
| 2.2 | Champion and support the inclusion of general practitioners in relevant emergency management training in South Eastern NSW |
| 2.3 | Regularly update the skills register of practicing clinicians and other health professionals who can respond during an emergency, pandemic or disaster situation |
| 2.4 | Promote opportunities and facilitate, where appropriate, 'Communities of Practice' networks so that GPs can connect with their colleagues to better prepare for disasters. |
| 2.5 | Work with general practices and ACCHOs so that they can maintain medical services during an emergency (for example, facilitate access to My Health Record platform, ensure up-to-date emergency plans and Business Continuity Plans are in place) |
| 2.6 | Support practices and ACCHOs to work towards building and maintaining relationships with other nearby practices as well as developing ways of working together in the event of an emergency |
| 2.7 | Assist general practices and ACCHOs to identify and provide appropriate support to vulnerable people during emergencies and coordinate their efforts with LHD teams where appropriate and feasible |
| 2.8 | Work with Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) in the development of Emergency Evacuation as well as Outbreak Management Plans in order to ensure medical support is provided during disasters and pandemics |
| 2.9 | Continue to review and develop HealthPathways referral guidelines to support health professionals prepare and respond to emergencies or disasters. |

Objective 3 - Strengthen and build local and regional partnerships for planning, communications and effectively responding to disasters that reduce distress and incidence of adverse health issues within the community.

Strong relationships

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| 3.1 | Ensure COORDINARE's website has relevant up-to-date information that provides members of the public and service providers with critical information to support their disaster and recovery response, including which practices are open during the emergency |
| 3.2 | Being a conduit for effective communication between GPs and ACCHOs during emergencies with Local Health Districts and other emergency service operations |
| 3.3 | Implement staff and stakeholder wellbeing measures, ensuring staff internal and external are aware of mental health and other support available |

Objective 4 - Continuously learn from and improve our disaster preparedness and responses.

Continuous Learning

- 4.1 Undertake a post event review, capturing the learnings from debriefs with internal staff and external stakeholders

Objective 5 - Take action to reduce or prevent the likelihood or effects of a pandemic or rapid spread of infectious disease where possible.

Prevention

- 5.1 Coordinate Commonwealth vaccination programs amongst primary care providers and RACFs across South Eastern NSW
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- 5.2 Motivate both the population and the health workforce to contribute to the prevention of increased transmission of infectious disease through the promotion and development of infection control strategies

