

Open letter to all parties and candidates contesting the Federal Election in 2022

Leave no Australian behind in disasters and emergencies

31 March 2022

Australians with disability experienced first-hand significant impacts and disproportionate risks to their safety and wellbeing during the recent 2022 floods in South East Queensland and New South Wales. This is alongside the multiple disaster events of bushfires, droughts, cyclones, and the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot continue to underestimate the significant and long-term effects of these events for people with disability and carers.

It is time to take action and invest in a national approach for the future. We need to ensure that Australians with disability are included and represented across all levels of policy, practice and research.

It is time to invest in building individual, sector and community capacity; co-designed with people with disability. It is critical that this happens in partnership with industry, emergency and disaster management, and government. Collaborative and inclusive research must be used to guide decisions and actions to ensure safety, health and wellbeing for all Australians with disability when disasters strike.

Australia is a signatory to the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030](#) with an obligation to find ways to ensure everyone is well prepared for disasters triggered by natural hazards. International and national reports continue to shine a spotlight on the gaps and impacts for people with disability and make recommendations about future actions to deliver change. The 2019 [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) made [findings and recommendations](#) under [article 11](#) Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies, under [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD), including nationally consistent emergency management standards and mechanisms for engagement for persons with disability. In 2020 and 2021, the [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) (Disability Royal Commission) inquired into the effects of emergency planning and response, and delivered its summary in March 2021 which acknowledged that people with disability are at much greater risk of neglect during emergencies and the Australian Government accepted most [recommendations in its report](#).

We acknowledge recent work by states, territories and the Commonwealth that has delivered a range of jurisdictional based action research, resources and programs, co-designed and co-delivered by people with disability. Importantly, we acknowledge:

- the Australian Government's launch of [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031](#) that includes Health and Wellbeing Policy Priority 4 – to ensure disaster preparedness, risk management plans and public emergency responses are inclusive of people with disability, and support their physical and mental health, and wellbeing.
- the [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's](#) new [NDIS Practice Standards](#) have been developed to strengthen guidance to registered NDIS providers on complying with their obligations to ensure the health, wellbeing and safety of the NDIS participants they support during COVID-19, or future emergencies or disasters.

While these are positive steps in the right direction, people with disability continue to experience risks, neglect and serious negative impacts during disasters and emergencies, including COVID-19. This has resulted in loss of services, supports, medical needs and basic needs as well as physical and psychological injuries.

We are seeking urgent and immediate action, investment, and commitment to a national approach to improve the safety and wellbeing of Australians with disability before during and after a disaster or emergency so we ensure – *we leave no Australian behind*.

National research supports these actions. We know the rules, we have co-designed resources, approaches and programs. We have broad research findings including a recent research paper outlining [6 issues and 5 recommendations for action](#) has been put forward by disability advocates in partnership with University of Sydney.

We now need action, resourcing and investment.

We call on all parties and candidates to commit to:

1. The **development of a National Plan and Roadmap** to deliver on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Preparedness, Resilience and Recovery that includes:
 - a. Establishment of a National Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Reference Group;
 - b. Build nationally consistent standards for
 - i. Emergency management arrangements across all levels of government
 - ii. Service provider capacity building across disability and community services
 - iii. Policy guidance around shared and defined responsibilities in a disaster
2. Investment for multi-sector targeted responses underpinned by collaborative and inclusive research that includes:
 - a. **For people with disability**
 - a) information, services, resources and supports by and for people with disability to develop their leadership and own individual emergency disaster plans including household-based plans that address complexities faced by children and young people with disability and their families and caregivers
 - b) policy changes that ensure people with disability are included in emergency management decision-making, representation at all levels and investment in capacity building.
 - b. **For sector provider capability**
 - a) to build capacity of disability and community services sector to comply with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards' *Practice Standards*, increasing the preparedness of people with disability through individual emergency planning and ensure they can deliver continuity of services and supports; research on the impact of service provider contributions to disaster risk reduction with the people they support
 - c. **For Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 and the emergency and disaster sector**
 - a) implementation and actions to deliver on *Australia's Disability Strategy's* Health and Wellbeing Policy Priority 4 to deliver collaborative and inclusive local, state and national disability emergency action planning across all stakeholders and provide support to the emergency and disaster management sector to deliver inclusion, and
 - b) co-designing with people with disability the development of effective data and measurement tools, review, evaluation and development of subsequent [Emergency Management Targeted Action Plan](#) under *Australia's Disability Strategy*.

We all have a role to play and actions we can take. We need a national approach, leadership and investment. We need to work together.

We call on all parties and candidates at the 2022 Federal Election to commit to these actions that will better prioritise the 1 in 6 Australians with disability in the event of disaster or emergency.

Let's make sure we leave no Australian behind.

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Signatories to the open letter

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2021 Queensland Australian of the Year and doctor with a disability

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