



ACT pre-budget submission

Budget 2023- 2024

Monday 26 June 2023

About us

Established in 1914 and by [Royal Charter](#), Australian Red Cross is auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. We have a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of government and Australian society as a whole.

Australian Red Cross is one of 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) - the world's largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

The Movement is guided at all times and in all places by seven [Fundamental Principles](#): Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles sum up our ethics and are at the core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

We remain neutral, and don't take sides, including in politics; enabling us to maintain the trust of all and to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and everything we do is supported by thousands of volunteers, helping solve social issues in their own communities. All of our work is inspired and framed by the principle of Humanity: we seek always to act where there is humanitarian need.

Here in Australia, our core areas of expertise include Emergency Services, Migration, International Humanitarian Law, International Programs and Community Programs.

Overview as of 2022:



20,000+
members and volunteers
acting for humanity



131,000
Australians supported during
42 emergency activations



225,000+
social support hours delivered

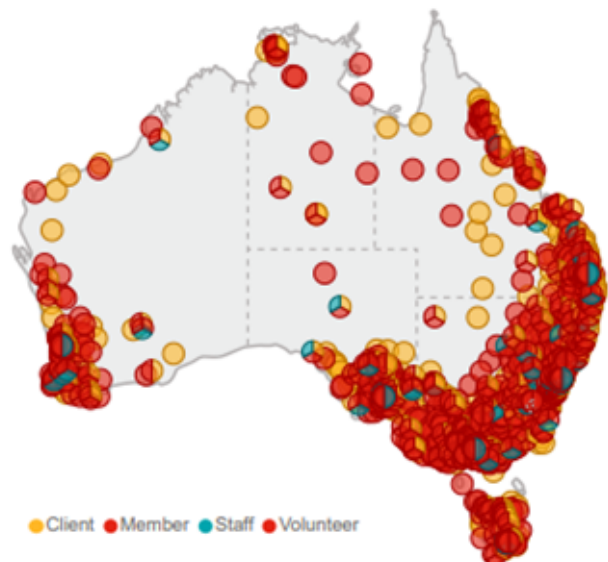


37,500+
people supported through
emergency relief payments



47,000+
People received support from
165 countries

Location of Red Cross people and clients



Letter from ACT Regional Manager

Dear Treasurer Andrew Barr,

Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission to the 2023-2024 ACT Budget, with particular focus on responding to increasing frequency and intensity of emergencies.

As an auxiliary to government and public authorities in the humanitarian field, Red Cross enjoys a strong and enduring relationship with the ACT Government and its relevant departments. There are numerous alignments between your government's strategic priorities and that of Red Cross in supporting ACT communities to thrive, now and into the future.

This budget comes at a pivotal time for communities across the territory. Disasters and emergencies are increasing in frequency and intensity, with significant consequences for everyone, and particularly those most at risk.

There is a great need for investment in community resilience across the country and indeed in the ACT.

As such, the following budget submission focuses on initiatives in emergency services which you can consider for the years ahead, including prioritising pre-disaster resilience, and investing in the psychosocial side of emergencies.

As Australia's leading humanitarian organisation, we are uniquely positioned to offer global to local experience and expertise to the ongoing development, refinement and implementation of policy.

We welcome a meeting with you to discuss critical humanitarian needs, in our shared and ongoing efforts to support communities before, during and after emergency events.

Yours sincerely,



Jessi Claudianos
Regional Manager Australian Capital Territory
Australian Red Cross

Supporting Australia in emergencies

For more than a century, Australian Red Cross has supported people to respond to, recover from and prepare for disasters and other emergencies.

In 2022 alone, we were activated for **42 disasters or emergencies**. We work alongside and are embedded in communities, responding to all major disasters and incorporating the lessons learnt into our work, and in our partnerships.

We also have staff, members and volunteers across Australia and hold a deep reserve of experience and evidence, as well as a long history of successful collaboration with governments across the country.

We are proud to have supported people in Australia in recent years through major disasters.

For example, over the last year we have provided long-term recovery and psychosocial support to more than **382,000 people before, during and after disasters** in evacuation and recovery centres as well as supporting people in community-led resilience activities.

We reached more than **88,000 people with helpful resources through community events** and trained more than **20,000 in skill-building** workshops like Communicating in Recovery, Working Dog Training, Redi-Communities and school-based workshops. Our **preparedness campaign reached more than 9 million people** with vital messaging on how to build personal and community resilience before disasters strike.

We draw from a global pool of knowledge as a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) made up of 192 national societies. This allows us to identify and implement best practice across all jurisdictions.

The Need

As disaster impacts increase, let's invest in community resilience.

Climate change is bringing more frequent and damaging disasters, which are expected to cost the Australian economy almost three times more in 2050 than in 2017 ([CSIRO Megatrends, 2022](#)).¹

Drawing on ABS data, together with Risk Frontier, Red Cross has identified 225 local government areas in Australia most at risk, including the unincorporated ACT.

According to the ACT Regional Climate Projections (NARClIM),² ACT is experiencing the effects of climate change with predictions that severe fire weather, severe storms and flash flooding will increase. While the frequency of severe natural hazards in ACT is low compared to other states/territories, the growing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population, development of new estates adjacent to high bushfire risk areas, increasing heatwave conditions, and an ageing population all contribute to an evolving risk environment in ACT.

In recent years Australian Red Cross has also witnessed an increase in the frequency of disasters and the compounding impacts. Disasters do not affect everyone equally, and at every level including in the ACT, Australia needs to prioritise an inclusive approach, so that marginalised people and those at risk can benefit in culturally safe, systematic, and meaningful ways.

¹ [CSIRO Megatrends](#)

² [NARClIM - Climate Choices \(act.gov.au\)](#)

The economic costs of disasters are significant, and only growing. In October 2021, the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience (ABRDR) [updated its previous estimates on the cost of natural disasters in Australia from \\$39 billion per year by 2050](#), to a significantly higher \$73 billion per year by 2060.

The current cost of disasters in Australia is approximately \$38 billion per year, 97% of which is spent after disaster (only 3% is spent before disasters). There is an opportunity to shift from reactive responsiveness to proactive resilience building. Our research, with the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience shows that every \$1 invested in resilience (before disaster) will save between \$3 and \$8 on recovery (after disaster).³ **According to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), for every dollar spent on disaster risk reduction, there is an estimated \$9.60 return on investment.**⁴

While less visible, the human costs of disasters are often equal to or greater than physical costs.⁵ Research shows impacts are felt by individual survivors for decades: for example, 21% of people affected by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires are still experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD, stress, or depression, more than a decade on.⁶

These human costs are often intangible, and less visible, such as increased mental health issues, family violence, alcohol consumption, chronic and non-communicable diseases and short-term unemployment. These continuing consequences have a significant impact on people and communities' resilience to future pressures, shocks and disasters.

As a result of a rapidly changing climate, extreme events are on the rise, but there is also a growing expectation to ensure communities are prepared, to provide coordinated relief services and information, as well as more agile relief and recovery response. In 2020, APRA (Australia Prudential Regulation Authority) recommended \$3.5 billion per year be spent on building resilience to climate driven disasters. Significant investment is essential to establish the foundation for community resilience.

Funding resilience will save lives and dollars and help people live more fulfilling and prosperous lives.

The Solution

Australian Red Cross can work with the ACT government to advise across all stages of an emergency.

Australian Red Cross is the only disaster agency that actively works at all stages of disaster (in resilience, response, and recovery) across Australia. We are embedded in most states and territories in the emergency management system alongside government and community actors, and are an auxiliary to public authorities in humanitarian field.

³ Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities. [The economic cost of the social impact of natural disasters](#) (March 2016).

⁴ <https://nema.gov.au/programs/disaster-ready-fund/round-one>

⁵ Australian Business Roundtable and Deloitte Access Economics, [Special report: Update to the economic costs of natural disasters in Australia](#), 2021.

⁶ University of Melbourne (2020), *10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report*, Melbourne, 10-years-Beyond-Bushfires-report.pdf (unimelb.edu.au)

Before a disaster

- We build, mobilise and support a trained volunteer workforce to respond to disasters, emergencies and collective trauma events.
- We help individuals and households prepare for disasters through personalised emergency household plans and school preparedness programs.
- We facilitate opportunities for community members to build and strengthen resilience.
- We provide technical advice, facilitation, education and training to community leaders and members to support them in leading their own long-term resilience journey – which feeds into better, quicker recovery.

During a disaster

- We enable the rapid coordination and mobilisation of our workforce to respond to the humanitarian and psychosocial needs in impacted communities.
- We provide psychosocial support. We typically support those with the most complex needs in evacuation centres, recovery centres and via community outreach.
- We register people impacted by a disaster through Register.Find.Reunite. (RFR), a critical registration and reunification tool to identify missing people and unite loved ones during an emergency.

After a disaster

- We provide psychosocial and wellbeing support to the most vulnerable.
- We prioritise support for the most disadvantaged and marginalised, in a culturally safe, systematic and meaningful way.
- We help community members navigate complex social service systems, linking them to support services such as welfare agencies, social workers, insurance companies, local health providers, or Lifeline for urgent and serious psychological support.
- We provide technical advice, facilitation, education and training to community leaders, members and local capacities to support them in leading their own long-term recovery.

About the stages of the disaster cycle

- **Supporting people to prepare**

Pre-disaster preparedness and resilience work is a critically under-resourced component of emergency management.

People are unprepared before disaster strikes as they might not know where to start, can't afford the measures required or are held back by inertia or trauma. Our Disaster Resilience Program uses research, best psychosocial practice, and a community led approach to guide people and communities down a path toward better resilience before disasters strike.

Exposure to the disruption, loss, and violence associated with disasters places significant psychological and social strain on families and communities. People experience and respond to disasters in vastly different ways. With the right support, most can overcome difficult experiences.

- **Supporting people in an emergency**

During disasters people face profound fear, loss and trauma. They often experience a sense of being overwhelmed, confusion, frustration and panic.

Disasters do not affect everyone equally, as we know vulnerable groups often experience the impacts of disasters more severely than those with greater access to resources and strong social capital. Trusted Red Cross staff and volunteers provide critical psychological first aid, and reunification support in relief/evacuation centres and through physical/telephone outreach immediately after a disaster.

Prioritising an inclusive approach that benefits the marginalised and at risk, in culturally safe, systematic and meaningful ways is vital. Some individuals or communities face barriers to developing their own resilience around adaptive capacities such as knowledge, security, wellbeing and connection.

These barriers are most common among people:

- when English is not someone's first language
- made vulnerable by migration
- impacted by the criminal justice system
- living with disability
- experiencing homelessness,
- who experience physical/mental health concerns
- who are digitally excluded, older people, and those who are financially disadvantaged
- from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who may be excluded from opportunities to strengthen their resilience.

- **Supporting people to recover**

People need support for years after a disaster, long after media coverage and public interest have moved on. Research shows that impacts are felt by individuals and communities affected by disasters for decades. Infrastructure losses after every disaster are highly visible. Far less obvious, but equally important, are the psychological and social impacts: 21% of people affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires are still experiencing PTSD and depression more than ten years later.⁷

Further, the long-term damage disasters do to peoples' wellbeing – quietly eroding their ability to lead fulfilling, prosperous lives, and to maintain jobs and relationships is profound. Evidence shows these human costs could be more than double the cost of repairing physical damage. These costs are borne by people and communities, but also directly by government and funded partners.

The need for support for years after a disaster, remains an issue not well recognised within the emergency management sector, or broader community – meaning key opportunities to minimise psychosocial impacts during activations can be missed. It also means policy/funding changes that can mitigate or address psychosocial harms arising from disasters are often not prioritised. Red Cross recovery programs provide this critical support – standing with communities until they've put their lives back together. We also advocate for policy and practice change to meet the psychosocial needs of impacted communities in the long-term.

⁷ University of Melbourne (2020), *10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report*, Melbourne, [10-years-Beyond-Bushfires-report.pdf](https://unimelb.edu.au/10-years-beyond-bushfires-report.pdf) (unimelb.edu.au)

Case study: Community Resilience Teams provide support networks and boost disaster resilience.

Red Cross is supporting the Community Resilience Teams initiative across many locations in New South Wales including Byrill Creek and Tumbulgum.

Many disaster impacted communities need to be self-sufficient for several weeks following an event due to the impact on roads and other infrastructure.

Red Cross volunteers and staff are working to ensure communities are as prepared as possible for such events.

It is estimated that **15,000 connections** have been made within these communities. As the project has demonstrated success in neighbouring towns, communities have begun approaching Red Cross to start CRTs in their local area. Projects vary in length following the guidance of communities themselves, usually lasting between one and three years.



Outcomes include:

- Communities taking localised, community-driven action to build resilience and recover from disaster
- People feeling empowered and in control of decision making as well as understanding the psychosocial impacts of disaster.

“Our CRT has brought community together, people who were once disconnected have now connected with the community.”

“There is opportunity to work with caravan park communities in the area.”

“There’s lots of interest for the emergency guide that was developed.”

“The Red Cross presence gave people a sense of support that they did not receive from other agencies or organisations.”

– CRT members, NSW

Opportunities for the Parliament of ACT to consider in the 2023 2024 budget and beyond include:

1. Ensure ACT is ready to respond to disasters, including the psychosocial impacts they have on communities.
2. Understand the frequency of disasters will only increase in coming years due to climate change, and that building appropriate levels of community preparedness and resilience across the territory will be vital.
3. Increase policy consideration of the importance of communities being prepared and resilient to disasters.
4. Recognise the impact emergencies have on people experiencing vulnerability, isolation, and marginalisation, and make appropriate considerations when revising emergency management approaches.
5. Improve volunteer retention noting current fatigue concerns relating to repeated disasters over the last three years, and invest to ensure a skilled, qualified and supported volunteer base across the state.
6. Recognise and support Australian Red Cross' role as auxiliary partner to government in emergency management.

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