

Queensland Neighbourhood Centres

Strategy for Monsoon Resilience

December 2020 - 2023



Australian Government



Queensland
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Shared experiences and knowledge among these organisations raised the collective understanding of the role that Neighbourhood Centres play in supporting monsoon-affected communities and the challenges that arise in this context.

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Foreword


Queensland is the most natural disaster affected state in Australia. Whilst Queenslanders have always responded to cyclones, floods, bushfires and drought, it is clear the frequency of these events is occurring at a more rapid rate over the past 20 years. Local communities have needed to acknowledge that responding to natural disasters needs to be a part of their yearly planning in order to build economic, social and individual resilience.

Whilst it is reported that many major non-profit organisations respond to natural disasters in Queensland, the response of local Neighbourhood and Community Centres is often overlooked. These Neighbourhood Centres have been operating in local areas for more than 40 years, conducting Community Development with their communities and orchestrating citizen-led solutions for the challenges that they face. Their local knowledge and relationships mean they are well suited to prepare for, and respond to, disaster affected communities whether it be an acute event like a cyclone or flood, or a chronic event such as a drought or pandemic. As they are already located in disaster affected communities, they are often the first to respond with Emergency Relief for Queenslanders who have lost everything.

The Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) evolved from Neighbourhood Centre community development networks in the early 1980's. As the key leadership body for around 140 Neighbourhood Centres across the state, the QFCA has recognised the incredible value of these Centres in responding to community issues. Over many years, the QFCA has been aware of the incredible role Neighbourhood Centres are playing in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters with very few financial resources. Whilst these disasters may vary in form, the process and methodology Neighbourhood Centres use demonstrates consistent effectiveness in local communities.

In 2019, the QFCA sought to more effectively capture, communicate and enhance the work of Neighbourhood and Community Centres in regard to natural disasters. It began by recognising the work of Neighbourhood Centres in the Far North and North Queensland regions impacted by monsoons. Taking a developmental approach with the Centres themselves, the QFCA embarked on capturing the local knowledge of Centres responding to monsoons, researching the methods used by Centres and seeking innovative ways to enhance the work of Centres in a coordinated manner.

The most prominent natural disasters that Neighbourhood Centres respond to are the result of the Monsoon trough activity in North Queensland. The past 15 years have seen frequent severe cyclones cross the coast causing widespread destruction and flooding. For instance, Neighbourhood Centres in Tully and Ingham were already on the ground preparing for Cyclone



Larry in 2006, followed over the years by Centres in Innisfail and Airlie Beach responding to Cyclones Yasi (2011) and Debbie (2017).

Cyclones transforming into tropical lows also have a tremendous impact on Queensland with North and North Western Queensland being impacted by major flooding in 2019.

Many of these Neighbourhood Centres responding to major monsoon activity have experienced a number of these major events and are therefore seasoned to prepare communities for cyclones, storms and monsoonal flooding. They are incredibly resourceful when supply chains are cut to external services and are embedding in long term recovery efforts in the years following. This strategy aims to capture and enhance the experience of these amazing Neighbourhood Centre networks.

The **Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Monsoon Resilience Strategy** is guided by local community needs and priorities. The strategy has been developed with local Neighbourhood Centres rather than for them. It is built on Neighbourhood Centre knowledge of local communities and captures their process and work when responding to monsoon affected communities.

A key feature of Neighbourhood Centre work is the partnerships they form on a local and wider community level. This strategy creates opportunities to strengthen support for Centres from local, state and federal Governments as well as other non-profit organisations and key stakeholders working in Monsoon affected areas. The implementation of the **Queensland Neighbourhood Centre Monsoon Resilience Strategy** will require resourcing the sector to enhance the capacity of these Centres to respond to monsoon affected communities. The value inherent in local place-based Neighbourhood Centres and their grass roots work needs to be properly recognised as an incredibly vital contribution to the human services sector and local communities, particularly those located in the Northern areas of Queensland.

Tomas Passeggi
President
QFCA



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'Cyclone Ita in 2014' (Photo by Kaz Price)

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

The Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) secured funding through the FNQ and NQ Monsoon Trough 2019 Category C: Community Development Fund to promote social cohesion and community integration in response to monsoon through the work of Neighbourhood Centres (NCs). The Queensland Neighbourhood Centre Strategy for Monsoon Resilience focuses on monsoon-affected communities in Far North and North Queensland.

The structure and language of the Strategy have been designed to reflect the three-fold purpose of the Strategy:

(i) it is a tool, which supports Neighbourhood Centres to further their capacity to support their local communities through monsoon.

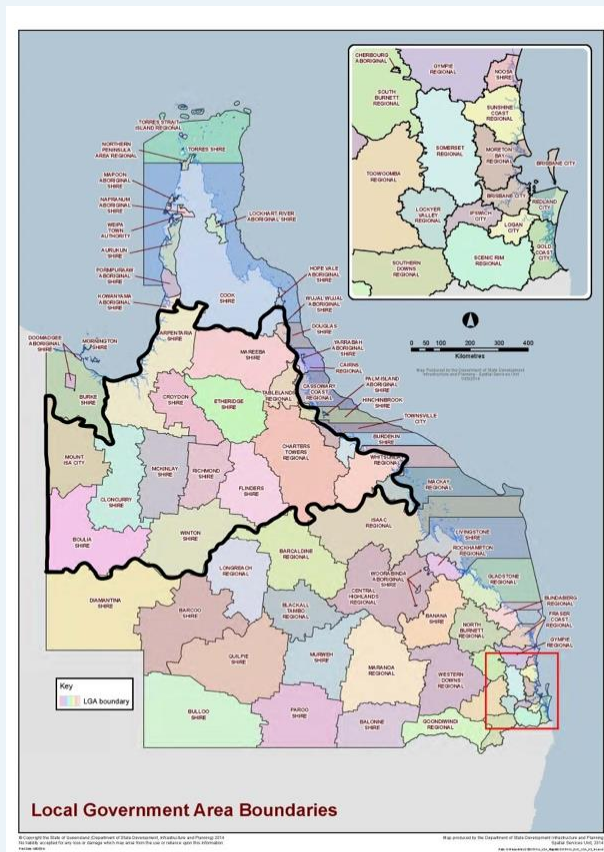
(ii) it is a research document, which advocates for Neighbourhood Centre's work in the monsoon resilience space, and

(iii) it is a pathway, to identify keyways in which the QFCA can support the Neighbourhood Centre network throughout the state.

The Strategy can be used to facilitate conversations with local organisations, the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG), Local, State and Federal Governments and any other relevant stakeholders in disaster resilience strengthening and community disaster planning.

A note on naming: Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland operate under various names, including Community Centres and Community Hubs. In some areas, Local Governments employ Community Development Officers or equivalent positions to deliver the same, or similar, function of a Neighbourhood Centre. For the purpose of this Strategy, the term 'Neighbourhood Centre' refers to organisations with similar core objectives.

Figure 1: Map of Neighbourhood and Community Centres involved in the development of the Strategy.



1.2 Monsoons in Queensland

Queensland is a state experienced in extreme weather events. In northern parts of the state, this includes a monsoon season, typically lasting from December to March each year (Australian Bureau of Meteorology, 2020). Although monsoon forms a natural part of the northern Queensland climate, the effects of climate change have resulted in increasingly severe and erratic weather patterns (Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, 2018). Monsoon-affected areas of Queensland are expected to see more extreme, sudden rainfall events and fewer, but higher severity tropical storms and cyclones in the coming years (Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, 2018). This comes with an increased need for community disaster preparedness and resilience for these extreme weather events. In the past two decades, northern Queensland has seen 17 tropical cyclones; tropical cyclones Larry, Yasi, and Debbie were particularly severe and destructive (Quaill, Barker & West, 2019).



The impacts of these events were even more pronounced in vulnerable populations. Although there is much discussion about integrating Indigenous land care practices into disaster resilience planning, research rarely centres the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or discusses the specific impacts of natural disaster on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Spurway, 2018). Homeless populations are uniquely vulnerable to natural disaster, yet the loss of the types of shelter that people experiencing homelessness may use are rarely considered in disaster planning or recovery (Every, Richardson, & Osborn, 2019). This locks people experiencing homelessness out of many of the resources provided to assist with recovery (Every et al., 2019).

People with physical disabilities are at a significantly increased risk of dying during natural disasters, with disabled survivors of Larry, Yasi, and Debbie reporting to have had little planning or support which was specific to their needs (Quaill et al., 2019). Older populations also report that the existing disaster preparedness approaches in their communities often failed to consider their physical, cognitive, and financial limitations during severe weather events (Astill & Miller, 2018). Language barriers, social isolation and limited experience in previous local natural disasters can also increase the vulnerability of refugee and migrant populations to these events (Teo, Goonetilleke, Deilami, Ahankoob, & Lawie, 2019). A common theme across these vulnerable groups is that members of these groups are often left out of discussions on disaster resilience, leaving their needs unrecognised and unmet.



Neighbourhood Centres are already engaged with vulnerable members of their community, helping to build upon their existing strengths to increase their resilience and capacity. The challenge is to help Neighbourhood Centres leverage these skills and connections to improve community response to natural disasters related to monsoon. Strategies are required not just to increase disaster preparedness and hazard reduction but to build disaster resilience across the community. Disaster resilience includes:

- addressing acute risk
- increasing community engagement
- growing local leadership
- strengthening social supports
- building connections across organisations
- reducing resource inequities, and

- providing opportunities for all members of the community to have a voice in identifying and addressing their unique needs to prepare for, respond to and recovery from disasters (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008).



Disaster resilience prepares communities to not-only survive natural disasters like floods and cyclones, but also-adapt and 'bounce forward' from them (Martin & Sunley, 2015).

Neighbourhood Centres are uniquely positioned to respond to disasters using effective and inclusive citizen-led community development approaches. Studies have found that disaster preparedness efforts are most successful when they are face-to-face, community-specific and relational (Ryan, Johnston, Taylor, & McAndrew, 2020). As leaders in place-based, relational support Neighbourhood Centres play an important role in building community resilience across multiple sectors, including disaster response. Neighbourhood Centres are already engaged in the work of helping to leverage the strengths of vulnerable community groups and are therefore well-placed to work alongside these groups to enhance the capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme weather events related to monsoons.

However, while this work is well-established, there is limited research documenting the specific ways Neighbourhood Centres work to build community resilience to the increasing impact of monsoons. Queensland Neighbourhood Centre Strategy for Monsoon Resilience aims to address this-gap by capturing the strengths and capacity of Neighbourhood Centres in monsoon-affected areas of Queensland. Using participatory action research, the Strategy tells the stories of resilience-building initiatives and opportunities from a Neighbourhood Centres' perspective, and builds an evidence base for strength-based strategies that can be leveraged by all Neighbourhood Centres to increase the disaster resilience of their communities.

1.3 Neighbourhood Centres

Neighbourhood Centres have been operating in many western countries since their beginnings as Settlement Houses in the 1880s. The movement of Settlement Houses spread to the United States in the 1890s, playing a pivotal role in the establishment of the modern social work movement. Neighbourhood Centres (or Neighbourhood Houses) began flourishing in Australia during the early 1970s under the Whitlam Government's Australian Assistance Plan alongside Community Development initiatives.

As community owned and operated organisations, Neighbourhood Centres spread throughout Queensland in the 1980s. Today there are an estimated 138 Neighbourhood Centres in the state. The Queensland Government currently funds 124 Neighbourhood Centres which provide friendly, localised access to child, family and community services. Core funding provides capacity for Neighbourhood Centres to operate and enable access to additional funding from other government and non-government sources for identified opportunities and needs.

Neighbourhood Centres are at the heart of local communities, and they are as diverse as the communities they are part of. Yet while the size, governance and funding models of Neighbourhood Centres can vary greatly, there are some core characteristics underpin everything that Neighbourhood Centres do.



Neighbourhood and Community Centres:

- each has their own identity, unique to the communities in which they are located.
- are accessible to all members of the community and embrace diversity and inclusion.
- participate in regional planning and development, forming partnerships for collective impact that improve community outcomes and engage the wider community in solutions.
- assist connection to community services and supports.
- support individuals to realise their potential and participate in community life.
- deliver, auspice and incubate community projects that address local challenges and opportunities.
- work with their communities to identify, design and resource local gaps and emerging needs.
- enable citizen-led change to build community capacity, resilience, and social capital
- partner with other stakeholders for a collective impact approach to achieving social priorities.

- enable the vision of the Queensland Government by increasing the social and economic participation of people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities and strengthening the social and economic wellbeing of communities to help them thrive.

Fostering Resilience

A unique characteristic of Neighbourhood Centres is their whole-of-life approach: no matter what stage of life or situation a community member is facing, Neighbourhood Centres are there for their communities. Neighbourhood Centres work with their communities to address loneliness, isolation and ill-health. Together they build a sense of safety, purpose and belonging. Their early intervention and prevention strategies reduce the need for more intensive, high-cost services.

Neighbourhood Centres are often the first port of call for people experiencing hardship. They offer information, support and emergency relief, along with capacity building activities to grow independence and resilience. Participants may arrive in crisis and, through support and opportunity, emerge as a volunteer or key contributor to their community.

Neighbourhood Centres are also a critical resource in the response to localised emergency events due to their uniquely flexible model. Their ability to rapidly mobilise and adapt supports to meet immediate needs often places them as the human service sector's 'first responder' following social, economic or environmental change in communities such as natural disaster and economic down.

Embedded in Communities

Neighbourhood Centres employ innovative approaches to reaching and engaging people and offer a soft-entry, open-door, accessible gateway to support. Neighbourhood Centres build and maintain relationships and community connections. They may facilitate reconciliation activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and programs that promote inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.



While Neighbourhood Centres are usually based from a physical building, the work of Centres happens in a wide range of different spaces and locations across communities. This may include active outreach activities, events and meetings.

Local Governance

Reflecting their community-led focus, the majority of Neighbourhood Centres maintain a community owned and managed model, with volunteer committees made up of local representatives. Volunteer Committee and Board members provide professional guidance in governance, risk management and compliance.



Funded Neighbourhood Centres comply with the Human Services Quality Standards. These are based on the following principles:

- **Respecting human rights** - services are planned and delivered in a manner that respects and has regard for the individual's human rights, in keeping with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- **Social Inclusion** - services are planned and delivered to promote opportunities for people to be included in their communities
- **Participation** - people using services are included in decision-making about the service they receive
- **Choice** – within available resources, people using services have the opportunity to make choices about the services, and where and how they receive them.

The majority of Neighbourhood Centres are registered not-for-profit organisations and often are legal entities in their own right. They may be registered as Incorporated organisations, Company Limited by Guarantee or auspiced by another legal entity such as a local Council.

Local Resourcing

In-kind community contribution is a significant part of the success of Neighbourhood Centres, with often extensive volunteer hours subsidising the running costs of Centres and program delivery. Neighbourhood Centre staff and volunteers are thus highly resourceful. They are often skilled networkers and collaborators able to leverage local assets, skills and support for rapid response to local needs or to overcome resource constraints.

Neighbourhood Centres often rely on a diverse mix of funding initiatives. This may include: recurrent and non-recurrent funding from different levels of government; grants; philanthropic funds; corporate sponsorship; and membership fees. Many Centres also generate revenue through initiatives such as social enterprises, fundraising and facilities hire.



Townsville after Cyclone Oma in 2019



2. Methodology

2.1 Framework

The methodology used for developing the Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Monsoon Resilience was Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR emphasises collaboration with the participants throughout the process of inquiry and values the participants as co-researchers. Reflecting the principles of community development, PAR recognises community stakeholders as knowledge holders and supports citizen-led initiatives and actions. In the research for this Strategy, Neighbourhood Centre representatives (the participants) were engaged in all stages of developing strategies that they perceived to be essential to furthering their capacity in supporting monsoon-affected communities. Relevant stakeholders, including non-profit organisations and local government, were also engaged in the research to gain broader perspectives on the role of Neighbourhood Centres in monsoons.

2.2 Research Questions

The research questions that guided the development of the Strategy were:

1. What is the role and value of Neighbourhood Centres in the context of monsoons?
2. What are the experiences of Neighbourhood Centres in supporting monsoon-affected communities?
3. What strategies would Neighbourhood Centres like to put in place to enhance their capacity in supporting monsoon-affected communities?

2.3 Method

The development of the Strategy is grounded in participatory action research principles, placing the participating Neighbourhood Centres (the participants) at the core of appreciate inquiry and decision-making. The research began with a scoping review to identify literature and government publications on the core roles of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland in supporting monsoon-affected communities. *The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, *Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience* and *Queensland State Disaster Management Plan* were prominent resources in this process.

Following the scoping review, identified Neighbourhood Centres (the participants) in Northern Queensland were invited to collaboratively develop the Strategy with QFCA. Using scoping conversation and an online survey (see Appendix A), participants were asked to share

knowledge and understanding of the role of Neighbourhood Centres in supporting monsoon-affected communities.

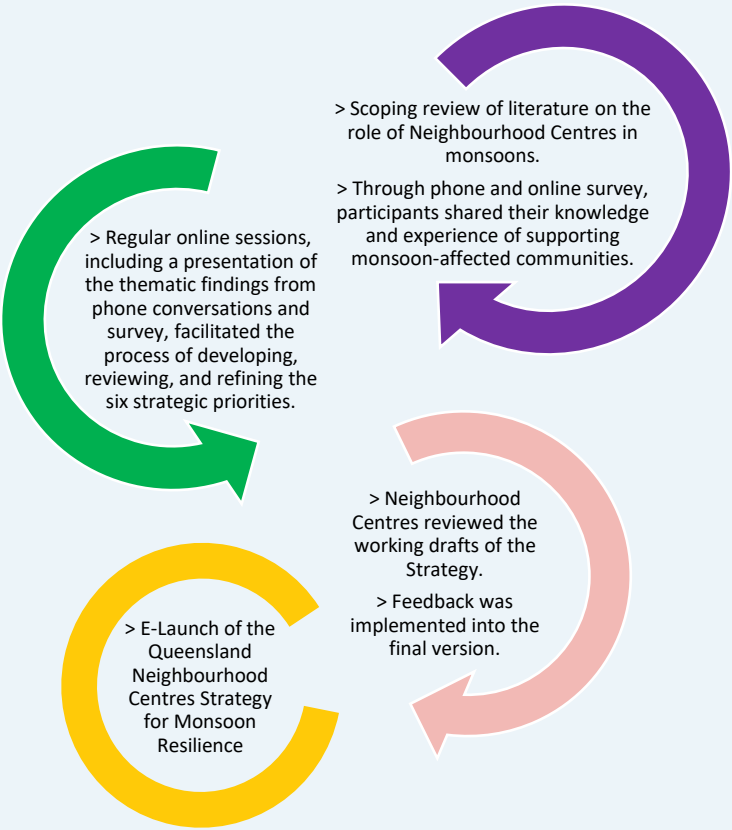
Next, thematic insights that emerged from the scoping conversation and online survey were presented to participants as part of an online workshop that formed the first brainstorming session of strategies that will support and enhance Neighbourhood Centres role in monsoon-affected communities. A summary of the thematic insights was emailed to participants who were unable to attend the online workshop.

Regular online sessions facilitated the process of developing, reviewing, and refining strategies that reflect the varied needs and priorities of the participating Neighbourhood Centres in their role in supporting monsoon-affected communities. Participants also guided the language of the identified strategic priorities and the supporting evidence-based discussion.

Subsequently, working drafts of the Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Monsoon Resilience were continuously reviewed by participating Neighbourhood Centres. Their feedback and suggestions were further discussed and implemented in the final version.

The e-Launch of the Strategy was presented in collaboration with Neighbourhood Centre representations who shared their reflections and insights on the identified strategies.

Figure 2. A Collaborative Process of Developing the Strategy.





'Cyclone Ita in 2014' (Photo by Kaz Price)

3. Strategy for Monsoon Resilience

The following six strategies aim to enhance Neighbourhood Centres' capacity in the supporting monsoon-affected communities.



Communicate the role and capacity of Neighbourhood Centre in supporting monsoon-affected communities.

A



Increase monsoon preparedness through having conversations and sharing locally relevant information with community members about the risks of and how to prepare for monsoons.

B



Raise awareness about the most-affected population during monsoons being the vulnerable individuals; and the value of Neighbourhood Centres being able to refer identified individual to some local Council's 'Vulnerable People Register'. Additionally, to build the resilience of the vulnerable population through strengthening their connection to a support network.

C



Continually identify opportunities to communicate and collaborate with local organisations, Local Disaster Management Group and local Council on supporting monsoon-affected communities; and for Neighbourhood Centres to be linked into their referral database.

D



Advocate for Neighbourhood Centres to be included in disaster planning by raising awareness with the Local Disaster Management Group and the Government about their capacity and available resources to support monsoon-affected communities.

E



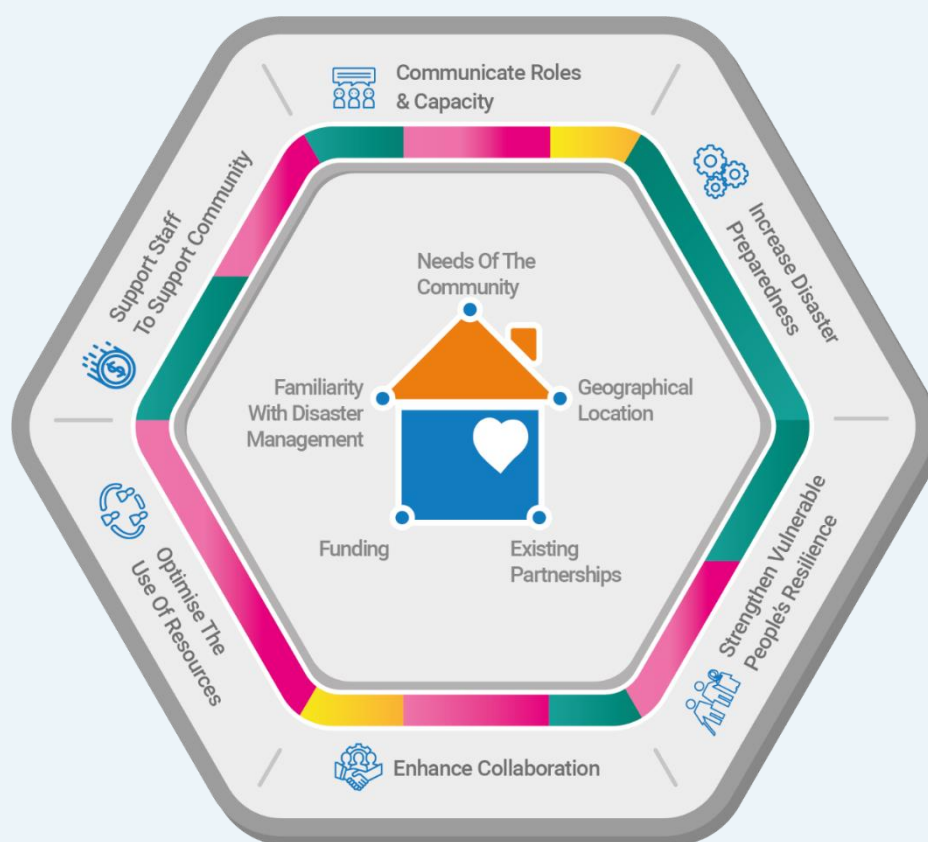
Acquire adequate funding for (i) supporting staff number and wages, and (ii) upskilling staff in disaster management, to enhance Neighbourhood Centres' capacity in working with local networks to support monsoon-affected communities.

F

3.1 Relevance and Implementation of the Strategy

Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland have developed six strategic priorities to amplify their capacity in supporting monsoon-affected communities. These strategic priorities reflect the different needs and opportunities that Neighbourhood Centres have identified in their organisation and local communities. As the make-up and capacity of every Neighbourhood Centre is unique, each would implement these strategies according to their priorities while recognising that support from the community and government is also needed.

Figure 3. Factors Impacting the Development and Implementation of the Six Strategic Priorities.




Notes on Figure 3.

The house in the Centre with its five points represent the factors that shape the participating Neighbourhood Centres' identification of strategies for enhancing monsoon resilience. How each Centre will prioritise and implement the six strategies are also influenced by these factors.

The six boxes that make up the hexagon represent the six strategies that Neighbourhood Centres have developed. The colour bars within each box represent the stage(s) of disaster management that particular strategy was developed for:

Green = Preparation
Pink = Response
Yellow = Recovery



The relevance and implementation of the six strategic priorities will vary for each Neighbourhood Centre depending on:

- needs of the community;
- funding;
- geographical location;
- familiarity with disaster events and management; and
- pre-existing partnerships with Local Disaster Management Group and local organisations.

Neighbourhood Centres are the place-based access point to support services for local communities. A Centre's core operations are shaped and guided by local **community needs**. Its **geographical location** influences the interests, needs and strengths of the community. The comparative remoteness of a community impacts the demography, living conditions, and access to basic needs and services.

Funding plays a significant role in a Neighbourhood Centre's capacity to meet the needs and demands of their community. It affects the number of staff, the types of services that the Centre can deliver, the type and quantity of material aid that can be made available to the community during a disaster like monsoons, and much more.

The level of a Neighbourhood Centre's **familiarity with disaster management** is impacted by several factors. These include whether the community has experienced a monsoon or other disasters; whether disaster management is part of the local Neighbourhood Centre's core operation or business continuity plan; and the role of other local organisations in monsoon response.

Another element to consider is the Neighbourhood Centres' relationship with other local organisations and the Local Disaster Management Group. The longevity of a Neighbourhood Centre can play a role in the strength of **pre-existing local partnerships**, but as revealed in the online consultations, is not the only determinant. Some Neighbourhood Centres are established for several decades but only have limited local partnerships, and this can be for a number of reasons. Other Neighbourhood Centres may only be in their 'teenage years' but have already built strong partnerships. Sometimes the occurrence of a monsoon or other disasters, such as the 2019 Townsville Flooding, can also 'jumpstart' the collaborative relationships in disaster management.

The combination of these factors will influence the needs and opportunities identified by a Neighbourhood Centre in the development of monsoon resilience strategies. As such, the implementation of these strategies will vary in accordance with these factors.



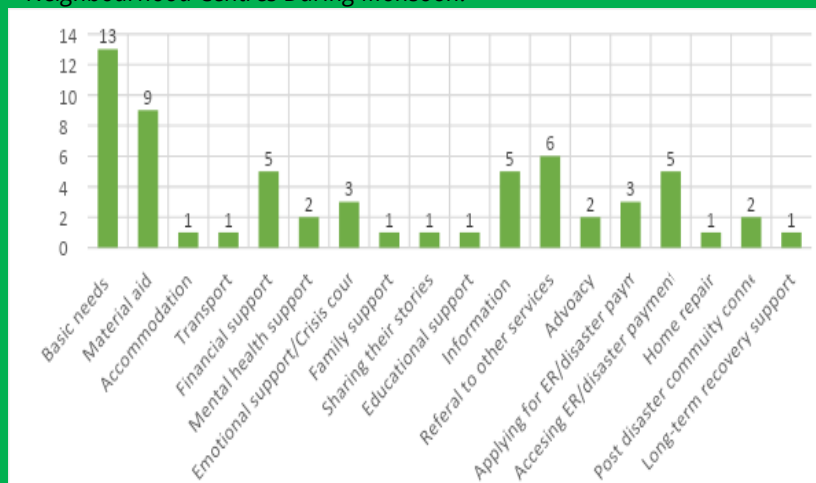
Communicate the role and capacity of Neighbourhood Centre in supporting monsoon-affected communities.

3.2 Strategy A: Communicate Roles and Capacity

Neighbourhood Centres are at the heart of local communities, supporting and orchestrating citizen-led solutions for the challenges that they face, including crises like monsoons. As Neighbourhood Centres are not officially identified as first responders to disasters like monsoons, their work in this space is often overlooked. With their local knowledge and relationships, they have been supporting the monsoon-affected communities, particularly in the preparation and long-term recovery process.

The Participant Survey was a tool for capturing and understanding Neighbourhood Centres' experience in supporting monsoon-affected communities. Fourteen Neighbourhood Centres participated in the survey. One of the survey questions explored the main reasons why community members accessed Neighbourhood Centres during and after a monsoon. As evident in Figure 4, the primary need of the community is to access **basic needs** such as food, water, clothing, care packages, and shelter when the Neighbourhood Centre is declared a place of refuge or evacuation. Obtaining **material aid** was identified as the second reason for accessing Neighbourhood Centres. Material aid included electricity to charge mobile phones and personal devices, computer and internet access for lodging an application for emergency relief and disaster payments, essential furniture such as beds and tables, and personal protective equipment for cleaning up after the monsoon. The third highest support need was **service referral**. Affected community members visited Neighbourhood Centres to find out about the support services that are available to them. Neighbourhood Centres helped to identify the most appropriate support service and provide the referral required.

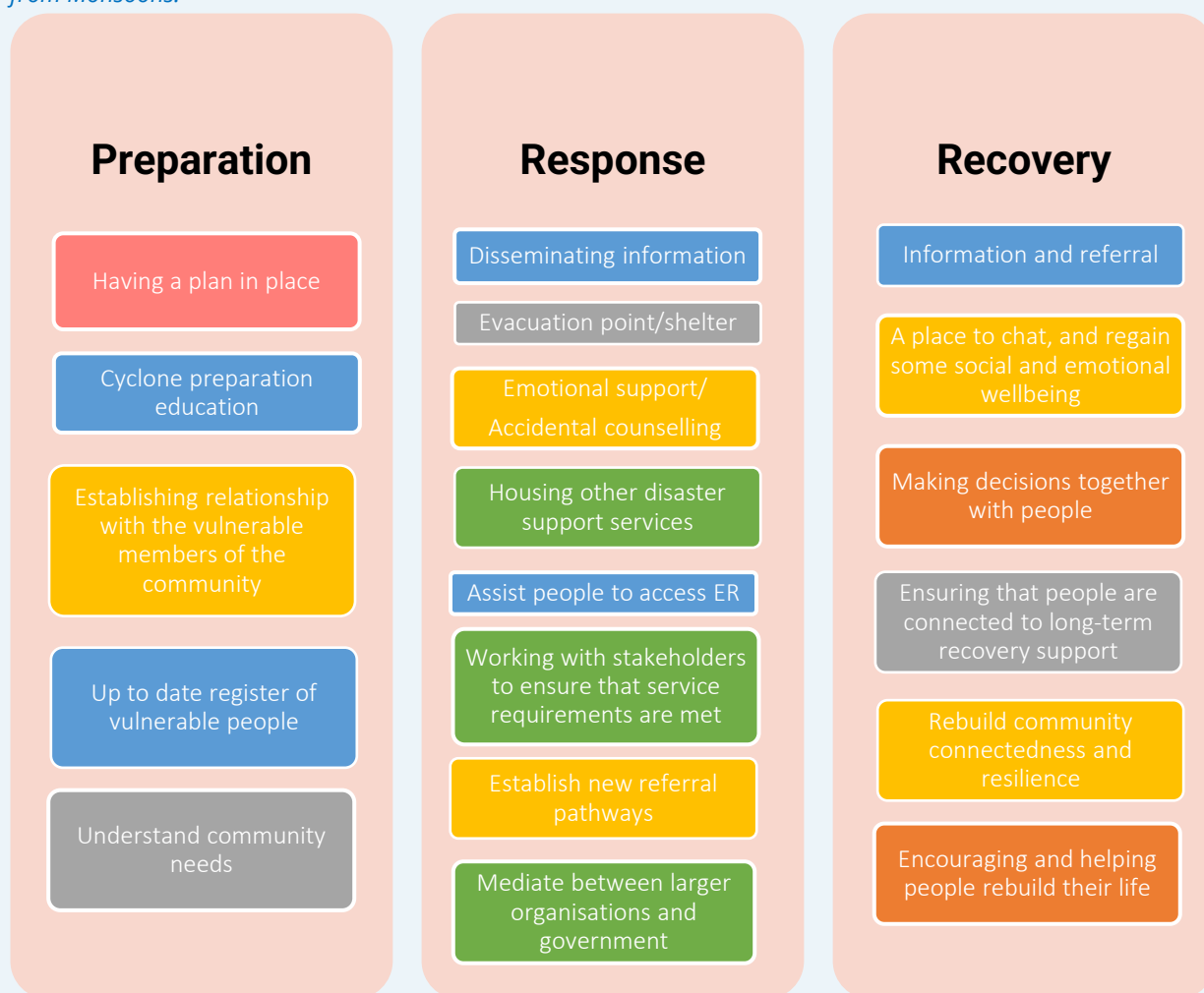
Figure 4. The Main Reasons That Community Members Access Neighbourhood Centres During Monsoon.



3.2.1 What is the role of Neighbourhood Centres

Neighbourhood Centres are a fundamental place of support for the local community in preparation for, response to, and recovery from a monsoon. Results from the *QFCA Neighbourhood Centre Survey 2020* indicated that 51.1% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland offer emergency/disaster preparedness and recovery, and 69.1% of Centres offer some form of emergency relief. In addition, Figure 5 below provides an overview of the roles that Neighbourhood Centres play in supporting their community at each stage of monsoons.

Figure 5. The Role of Neighbourhood Centres in Supporting Communities to Prepare for, Respond to and Recovery from Monsoons.



Preparation

Reflecting the preparedness principles outlined in Queensland Preparedness, Response and Recovery Disaster Management Guidelines, Neighbourhood Centres help local communities prepare for monsoons through education, engagement and planning.



Education

Many Neighbourhood Centres run 'cyclone preparedness' sessions in the lead up to monsoon season. These sessions aim to educate the community about:

- the risk of the disaster
- how to develop an emergency and 'what if' plan, and
- the range of supports available in the community.

They also help to disseminate monsoon-preparedness information provided by the Local Disaster Management Group to the community.

SHARING A STORY

"[We] partnered with local Council Disaster Management Coordinator to provide information sessions for the community. The sessions provided tips on preparing an emergency kit and evacuation plan, preparing homes and cars for cyclones, tuning into warnings, connecting with neighbours, pet and business emergency plans. Each attendee also received a resource pack containing emergency information numbers, brochures on preparing for cyclones, storm tides and cyclone shelters, 'get-ready' guides, local evacuation map and plastic document wallet. The information sessions received good feedback from the community."

– Neighbourhood Centre, North Queensland.

Neighbourhood Centres that provide service to vulnerable populations such as the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community and the elderly also make additional efforts to provide accessible preparedness information. A Neighbourhood Centre in Townsville, for example, works with the Local Disaster Management Group and local multicultural support services to develop monsoon preparedness information in hard copy print and easy-to-understand format.

Building engagement and community connections

Fostering community connections is a core part of Neighbourhood Centres' day-to-day commitment because they recognise that strong support networks are the building blocks for individual and community resilience. Disaster resilience is no different. Neighbourhood Centres build community connections by creating social opportunities for residents to connect with others. These opportunities can be both formal and informal. Needs or population-based programs and activities, such as the 'Be Connected' program for seniors, reflect formal opportunities where participation requires accessing Neighbourhood Centres. Activities that are available to everyone and take place within the community are informal opportunities for connecting with other community members – for example, a community barbeque or festival.

SHARING A STORY

"We are a small community, so we know when a new family has just moved in. For example, because we are connected with the kindergarten next door; and they recommend families who have newly moved into the town and enrolled their children to connect in with us. We then try to help that family make connections with others in the community."

- Neighbourhood Centre, Regional Queensland

Community disaster planning

Neighbourhood Centres believe that having a robust community disaster plan is a critical element of increasing the preparedness for monsoons. An effective community disaster plan will reflect the needs of the community and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Developing an effective community disaster plan requires a collaborative approach where knowledge and expertise are shared. With a strong connection to the community, Neighbourhood Centres can offer valuable knowledge about the needs of the community and the available resources to the planning process. Experienced in community engagement, Neighbourhood Centres have insights on how to connect with different populations within the community. Consultations throughout the development of the Strategy revealed that community disaster planning is taking place in some districts, through the Neighbourhood Centres Network Meetings. During these Network Meetings, Neighbourhood Centres can come together and discuss the needs and resources they have identified within their community, to develop plans that outline the best measures to take in preparation for and response to monsoons.

Response

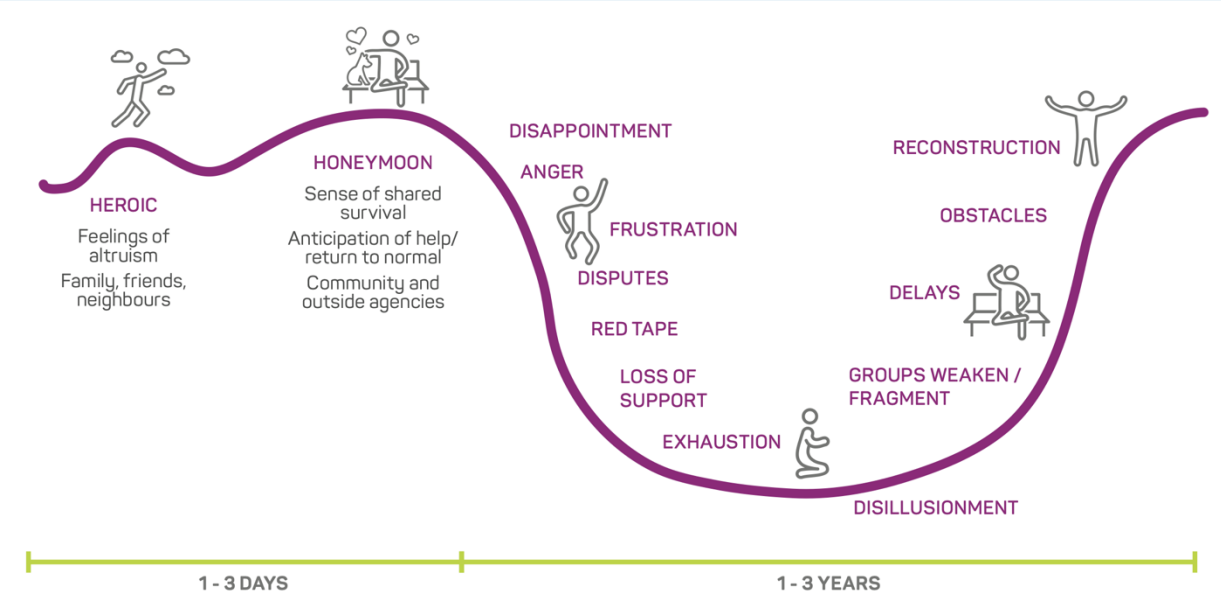
The first responders of monsoon response are the Local Disaster Management Group and State Emergency Services. In this context, the primary role of Neighbourhood Centres is to support the first responders in addressing the immediate risks to community members and providing emergency relief. Neighbourhood Centres often assist in safety checks, contacting the vulnerable population within their community, and providing emergency relief. Surveying conducted by QFCA in June 2020 revealed that Neighbourhood Centres in North and Far North Queensland that were involved in the development of the Strategy, distributed 1985 kgs of food aid, \$15603 in bill payments, \$12771 in food vouchers, \$1280 in gift cards, \$2633 in fuel and \$145 in public transport, per month as part of emergency relief.

A Neighbourhood Centre in regional Queensland shared that *“We went out to the properties to check on people”*. Another mentioned that *“During the 2010 flooding, our staff got into their cars to deliver water to people that were stranded.”* The emergency relief involved provision of non-perishable food items, food boxes, fuel vouchers, and assistance with crisis accommodation.



Another important role that Neighbourhood Centres play in times of monsoon is providing emotional support to community members. This is a core part of centre’s day-to-day work, and it becomes particularly important during times of disaster. As shown in Figure 5 below, it is common for emotional reactions to change and evolve as individuals move through the stages of response and recovery. As a support hub with a ‘no-wrong-door’ approach, Neighbourhood Centres are a place where community members can go for a listening ear, information and advice on accessing the support needed any stages of a disaster. *“We sit down and have a cup of tea, and go from there”*, a Neighbourhood Centre in regional Queensland described. Another Centre emphasised the value of Neighbourhood Centres as a place-based hub that *“support the community’s resilience by maintaining a presence”*.

Figure 5. Different Phases of Emotional Reactions in Response to Disasters (Illustration is created by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, adapted from Cohen and Ahearn 1980 and DeWolfe 2000).



SHARING A STORY

"After the monsoon floods, our Centre was a place that residents could come and get assistance to apply for the differing levels of funding available; they could get food relief if required, and the availability of clothing and bedding from our Op Shop."

- Neighbourhood Centre, North Queensland

CASE STUDY

The Charleville Neighbourhood Centre partnered with Queensland and government agencies, local business', and national disaster recovery organisations to become a 'one stop shop' for people recovering from floods in western Queensland. The Department of Communities Community Response Recovery Team, the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, Centrelink, and the Red Cross coordinated efforts from the Charleville Neighbourhood Centre to provide multiple forms of flood assistance from a single location. Leveraging their existing connections into the local community and speaking with local press to get the word out helped the community know what help was available from their local Neighbourhood Centre.

- Van de Wetering (2008)

Recovery

Having played an essential role in facilitating the long-term recovery of disasters like monsoons, Neighbourhood Centres shared that it takes about 18 to 24 months for communities to recover, and longer if it has been affected by other disasters prior. This on-the-ground data is supported by research by the World Health Organisation (see Figure 6), which indicates that most people will still be recovering from the psychosocial impacts of any disaster 12 months after the event. Psychosocial impacts refer to "how a disaster affects people's emotional, spiritual, financial, cultural, psychological and social needs as part of a community" (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2018).

Consultations throughout the development of the Strategy highlighted that communities turn to and rely upon their Neighbourhood Centres for ongoing support once the immediate response from state emergency services ends. Neighbourhood Centres also often house Community Recovery Partners that deliver psychosocial support, such as the Australian Red Cross, GIVIT, Queensland Health, Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society and Lifeline.

Figure 6. Summary of World Health Organisation's Predictions of the Prevalence of Psychosocial Problems after an Emergency (Table created by Department of Human Services, 2009, adapted by can Ommeren 2006).

Psychosocial problem	Before emergency—12-month prevalence	After emergency—12-month prevalence
Severe mental disorder (e.g. psychosis, severe depression, severe disabling anxiety disorder)	2–3%	3–4%
Mild or moderate mental disorder (e.g. mild and moderate depression or anxiety)	10%	20% (reduces to 15% with natural recovery)
Moderate or severe psychological/social distress (no formal disorder but severe distress)	No estimate	Large percentage (reduces due to natural recovery)
Mild psychological/social distress	No estimate	Small percentage (increases over time)

SHARING A STORY

"We have and are still housing other disaster services, including the Queensland Health Disaster Recovery Team, Women's Centres and Townsville Council Team Townville, two years after the event."

- Neighbourhood Centre, North Queensland

Monsoons, like all disasters, impact people differently and each person's recovery process is also unique. Research has shown pre-existing vulnerabilities can impact people's capacity to respond to monsoon and is also likely to affect their recovery (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2018). Neighbourhood centres are there to support some of the most vulnerable segments of a community.

These often are:

- the ageing population
- transient population
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Changing patterns of employment

After the response period, the Neighbourhood Centres are the ones there to help affected community members to "get back on their feet" and "rebuild their lives" weeks, months and sometimes years after the event. Neighbourhood Centres in North Queensland shared that there are residents who are still experiencing housing and financial difficulties from the 2019 Townsville Monsoon Trough event.



3.2.2 Distinguishing the role of Neighbourhood Centres

Queensland has a four-tiered disaster management structure (see Figure 7 below) that outlines the roles of response and coordination when there is a disaster. During monsoons, it is the responsibility of the local government and respective Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) to coordinate responses at the community level. As outlined by the disaster management structure, the primary function of community organisations like Neighbourhood Centres during a disaster is to support the directions given by the LDMG. Nonetheless, centres often act as a natural gathering place for the community at times of disaster.

Figure 7. Queensland Disaster Management Structure (created by Queensland State Disaster Management Plan, 2018).

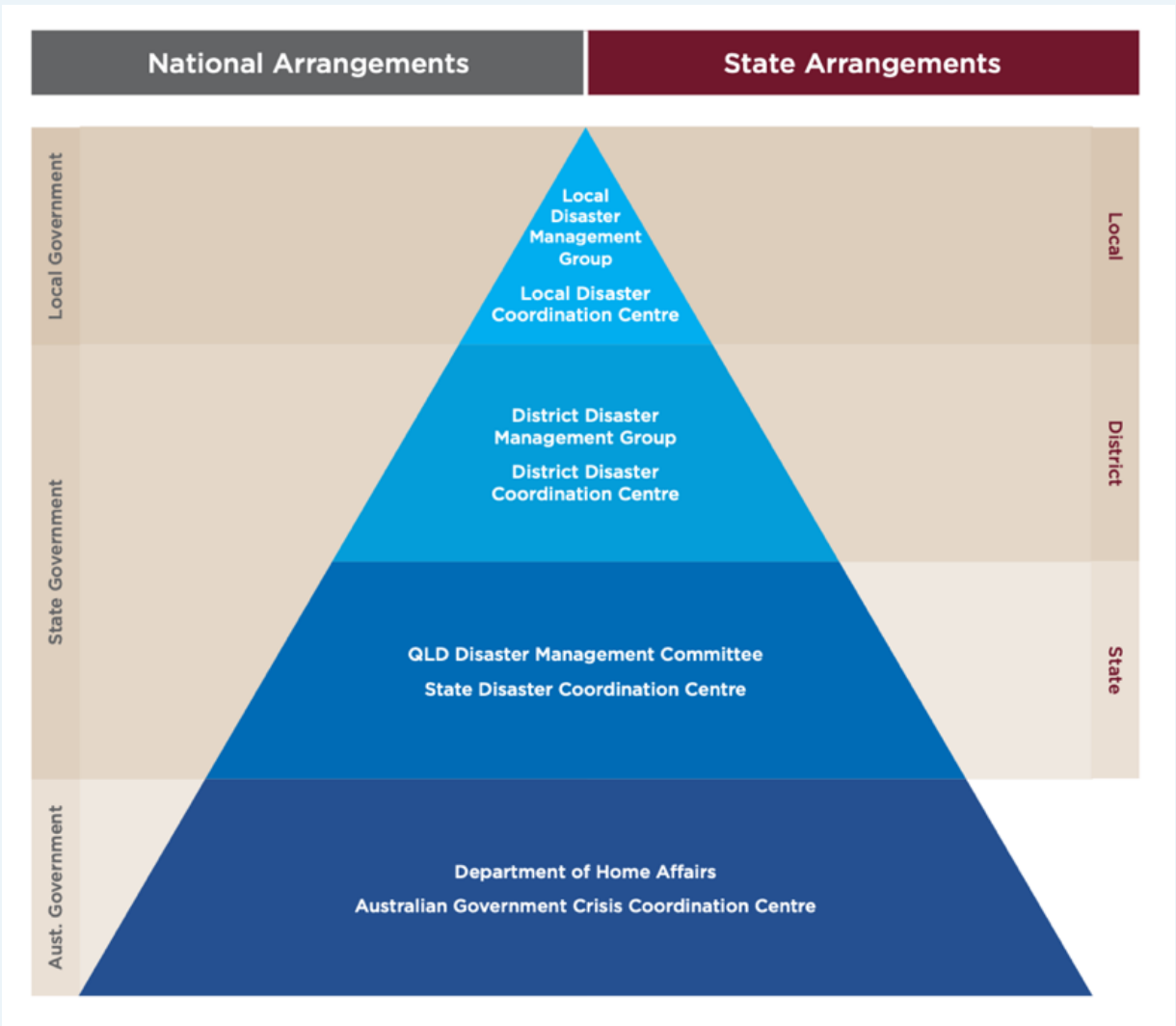
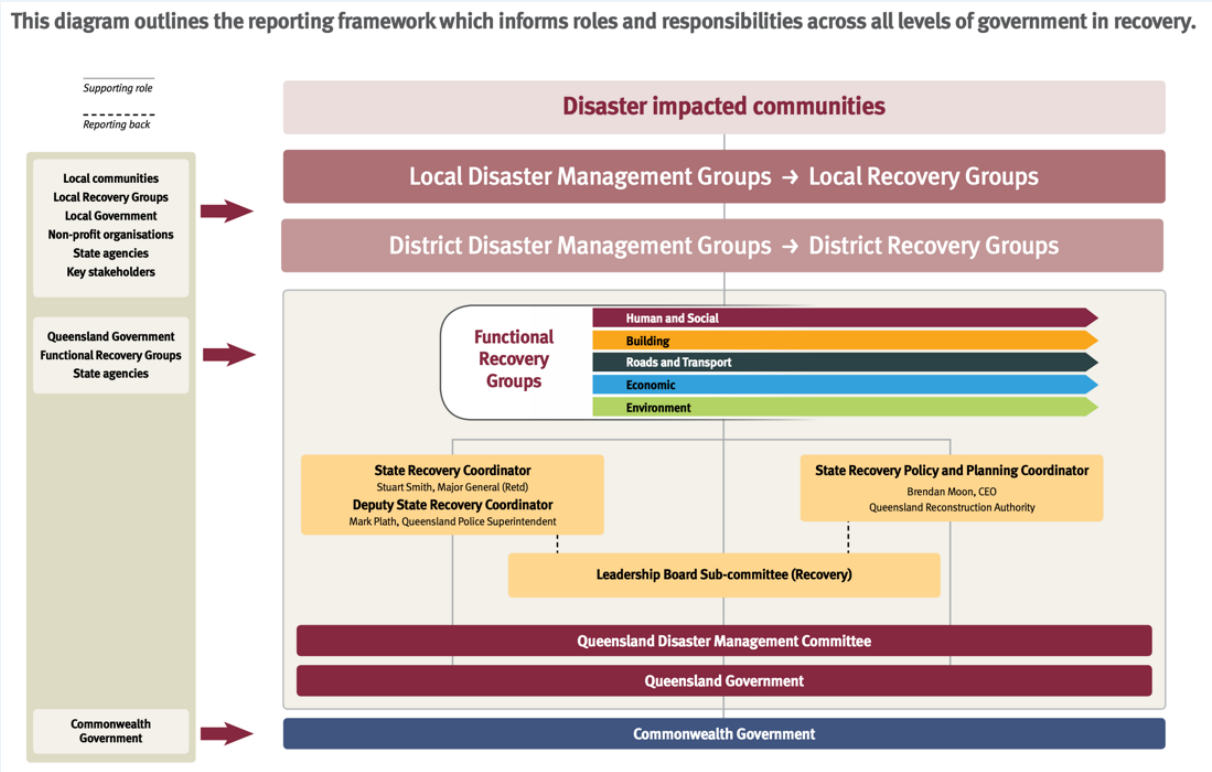


Figure 8: Roles and Responsibilities across All Levels of Government in Disaster Recovery (created by Queensland State Disaster Management Plan, 2018).





Increase monsoon preparedness through having conversations and sharing locally relevant information with community members about the risks of and how to prepare for monsoons.

3.3 Strategy B: Increase Disaster Preparedness


3.3.1. What disaster preparedness means for Neighbourhood Centres

Having conversations with community members about the risk of and how to prepare for monsoons aligns with the first goal of the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2017). It states that “The Queensland government, local government, communities, businesses and individuals better understand the risks of disasters in Queensland proactively prepare for disaster impacts and have the resources to drive their response and recovery.” Neighbourhood Centres recognise that increasing their community’s resilience to monsoons involves a greater focus on preparedness. Disaster preparedness means *“having an understanding of existing capabilities, gaps and partnership that provide the overall picture of [the] requirements as a community to prepare for a natural disaster”*, one Neighbourhood Centre stated.

The Neighbourhood Centres who were part of this research have identified that increased conversations about preparedness need to take place at the organisational, individual and community level.

At the Organisational Level

As an organisation, Neighbourhood Centres have come to appreciate the value of having a robust business continuity plan in preparing for disasters, including monsoons. A business continuity plan contains a risk management plan, business impact analysis, and incident response and recovery plan, to help the business get back to operation after a crisis. It helps a business to identify and plan for the potential risks and impacts, and devise strategies that support the survival of the business (Queensland Government, 2020) Neighbourhood Centres that have experienced monsoons and other crisis emphasised the usefulness for its staff having a clear plan of actions that are rehearsed and tested to follow when a disaster like a monsoon occurs. A robust business continuity plan helps Neighbourhood Centres to maintain, or return to, their operation as quickly as possible to provide support to their local community.



In Victoria, where bushfires are a common occurrence, Neighbourhood Centres together with Emergency Services and State Government Departments, have created a shared resource called “Don’t panic! An emergency management planning kit for neighbourhood houses” (Strengthening Participation and Resilience in Communities, 2014). This toolkit outlines the steps a Neighbourhood Centre can take to be prepared. A robust business continuity plan helps Neighbourhood Centres to maintain, or return to, their operation as quickly as possible to provide support to their local community.

At the Individual Level

Effective preparation for monsoons needs to involve everyone so that every person can prepare according to their individual needs. The Queensland Government and local Council have consistently communicated this message along with the provision of disaster preparation information packages and education. Neighbourhood Centres believe that education on monsoon preparation will be more effective when tailored to the local community and include conversations with community members.

Drawing on the citizen-led and empowerment principles that they operate from, Neighbourhood Centres suggested during the consultations that community members need to be supported with the knowledge necessary to develop individual plans and preparation kits for monsoons. The suggestion reflects research that highlight the necessity for community members to be provided with adequate resources for disaster preparation. The Australia Institute of Disaster Resilience (2018) states “Empowering individuals and communities to be more disaster resilient involves more than just providing them with information. It requires the availability and accessibility of transparent, accurate and trusted sources of information in various forms, and the provision of tools to help communities understand and act on the material provided”.

Every community member needs access to information about the risks of monsoons and how to prepare for the event. Neighbourhood Centres emphasised that the information needs to be locally relevant and available in formats that are accessible to all groups of the community. As discussed earlier, comprehensive and up-to-date disaster preparedness information is generally disseminated online. These information needs to be made accessible to the aged population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, culturally and linguistically diverse community, and vision-, hearing- and cognitive-impaired community, and any other community with a vulnerability. People are more able to make informed decisions when equipped with the necessary information and knowledge.



Additionally, Neighbourhood Centres assert that educating the community about preparedness needs to involve conversations around the preparedness information to enhance understanding and assist in preparing action plans. These conversations would involve “asking questions and sharing of experiences” about:

- how to plan for monsoons
- waste management to reduce hazards
- insurance options
- how to put together an emergency and cyclone kits
- how to put in place an evacuation plan
- what emotions to expect in the lead-up, during and after an event
- connecting with neighbours and Community Centres
- what types of support services are available during and after a monsoon
- where to go for support during and after an event, and so on.

These conversations need to also involve ‘what if’ planning sessions, whether people are asked to think about ‘what would I do if this or that happens’. The ‘what if’ planning sessions aims to shift the thinking from ‘it will not happen to me’ to a preparedness mentality of ‘if this happens, I will...’. Neighbourhood Centres also envisioned for these conversations to take place within the community whether people locally congregate to optimise accessibility and engagement. These places include community neighbourhoods, corner stores and local markets, schools, post offices and shopping centres. The intention is to encourage people to have these

conversations with their families and neighbourhood well ahead of the monsoon season to allow adequate preparation time.

SHARING A STORY

"It would be beneficial to have the capacity to fund and prepare small 48-hour cyclone kits for the community. The kit will include hand-held radios, torches, matches, candles, batteries, laminated, power banks, long-life food and emergency contact list, etc. These kits could be pre-made in the days leading up to a potential disaster and distributed to community members who are sleeping rough."

- Neighbourhood Centre, Regional Queensland

At the Community Level

The Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience highlighted that a resilient community is one that *"works together to understand and manage the risks and vulnerabilities that it confronts and enhances its capacity to address its vulnerabilities to all hazards."* Consistent with this opinion, Neighbourhood Centres proposed that preparedness at the community level needs to involve a round table planning discussion with all organisations and businesses on the following matters:

- the severity of monsoons that can occur in that community;
- media sources that can be used to find and disseminate up-to-date information;
- available shelters, including for domestic animals and livestock;
- resources that are available within the community including generators, water tanks and solar lights;
- a coordinated response plan that outlines the roles and responsibility of all that is involved;
- a coordinated approach to supporting community members prepare for monsoons, including the preparedness sessions.

It provides an opportunity to reflect on local knowledge, skills and resources that are available to address the needs of the community in preparing for and responding to monsoons. The insights that emerge from these conversations can also be with the Local Disaster Management Group to inform the Local Disaster Management Plan.





Raise awareness about the most-affected population during monsoons being the vulnerable individuals; and the value of Neighbourhood Centres being able to refer identified individual to some local Council's 'Vulnerable People Register'. Additionally, to build the resilience of the vulnerable population through strengthening their connection to a support network.

3.4 Strategy C : Strengthen Vulnerable People's Resilience

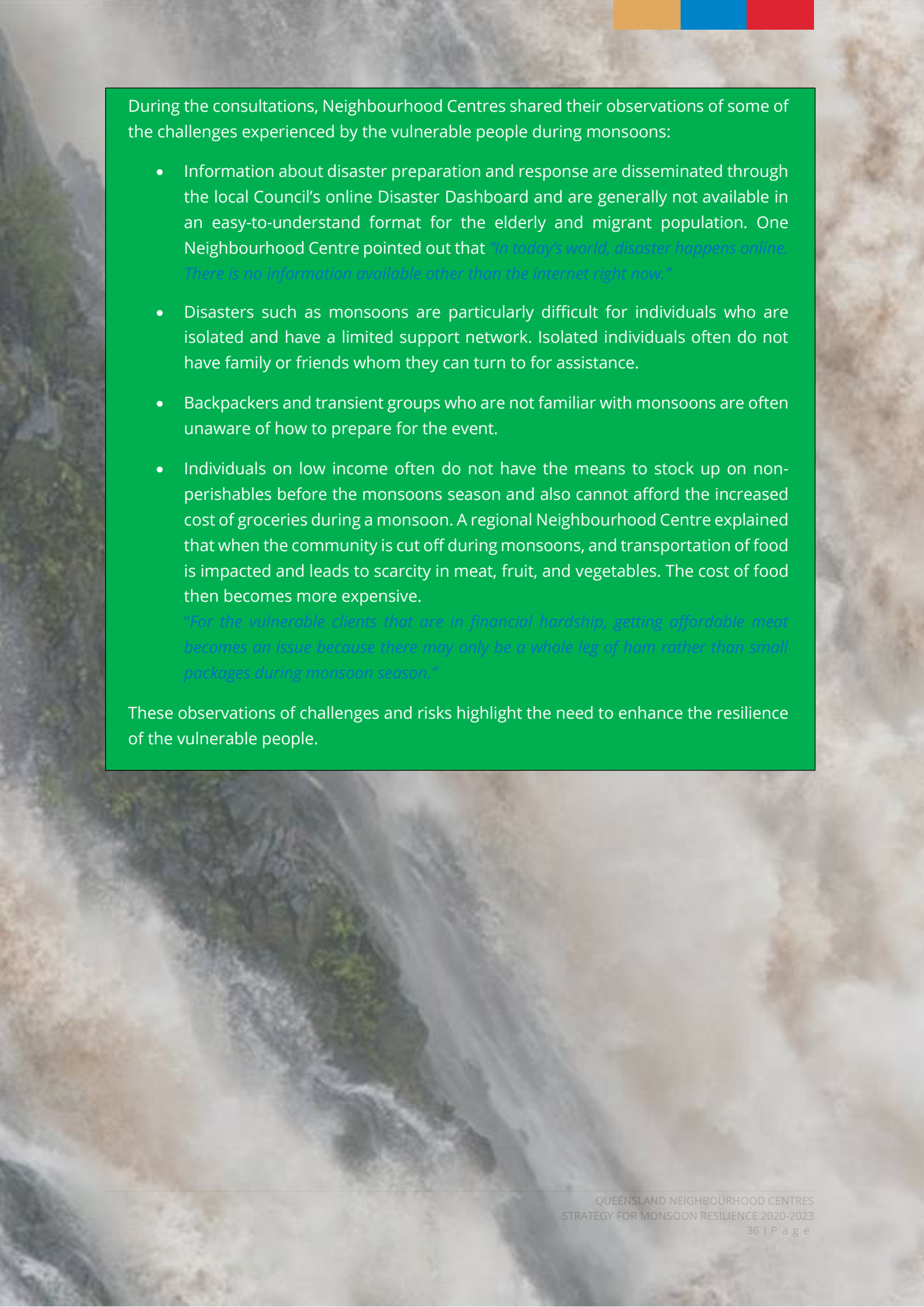
3.4.1 Vulnerable People in Disasters

Every person faces the social, ecological and economic risks of monsoons, regardless of age, ethnicity and background. Vulnerable people, however, are more susceptible these risks. In the context of disaster management, 'vulnerable people' are individuals with one or more of the following characteristics:

- Impaired mobility
- Diminished sensory awareness
- Chronic health conditions
- Social limitations – such as communication barrier, limited support network, low social engagement and low socioeconomic background.

These characteristics impact the individual to “anticipate, withstand, and recover from the damage resulting from an adverse shock” such as a monsoon (Morrone et al., 2011). Ability-impaired, elderly, migrants and individuals who are isolated are examples of the vulnerable population.

Neighbourhood Centres are generally aware of and/or connected with the vulnerable people in their local community. They recognise that the vulnerable population are often not only the least prepared for natural disasters like monsoon (Queensland Government, 2016), but also require the most support in recovery. Therefore, greater awareness and management of the needs of the vulnerable population at the community level is necessary.



During the consultations, Neighbourhood Centres shared their observations of some of the challenges experienced by the vulnerable people during monsoons:

- Information about disaster preparation and response are disseminated through the local Council's online Disaster Dashboard and are generally not available in an easy-to-understand format for the elderly and migrant population. One Neighbourhood Centre pointed out that *"In today's world, disaster happens online. There is no information available other than the internet right now."*
- Disasters such as monsoons are particularly difficult for individuals who are isolated and have a limited support network. Isolated individuals often do not have family or friends whom they can turn to for assistance.
- Backpackers and transient groups who are not familiar with monsoons are often unaware of how to prepare for the event.
- Individuals on low income often do not have the means to stock up on non-perishables before the monsoons season and also cannot afford the increased cost of groceries during a monsoon. A regional Neighbourhood Centre explained that when the community is cut off during monsoons, and transportation of food is impacted and leads to scarcity in meat, fruit, and vegetables. The cost of food then becomes more expensive.
"For the vulnerable clients that are in financial hardship, getting affordable meat becomes an issue because there may only be a whole leg of ham rather than small packages during monsoon season."

These observations of challenges and risks highlight the need to enhance the resilience of the vulnerable people.

3.4.2 Vulnerable People Register

In Queensland, some local Council manage a Vulnerable People Register as a part of a Local Disaster Management Plan, often in collaboration with other welfare agencies and support services. The Vulnerable People Register is typically list of identified residents who have a physical or cognitive impairment that affects their ability to prepare and respond to a disaster. The Vulnerable People Register is shared with the State Emergency Services, hospitals and Queensland Police Services, who will provide assistance to these residents in times of a disaster like monsoons.

Neighbourhood Centres suggested that the criterion for the Vulnerable People Register be broadened to include any person who have pre-existing vulnerabilities that weakens their capacity to prepare for and respond to monsoons (Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, 2018). These include:

- the ageing population
- aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities
- culturally and linguistically diverse communities – including migrants, refugees, overseas/temporary workers, students and tourists
- individuals who are socially isolated
- caravan, boarding houses, rough sleepers, and the homeless community
- those experiencing domestic violence.

Neighbourhood Centres – who form strong relationships with people from these different groups as part of their daily work - asserted that individual from within these groups may need additional support when it comes to monsoons. Neighbourhood Centres are connected with their community and are thus in a unique position to coordinate with the Local Disaster Management Group, to ensure key individuals are added to the Vulnerable People Register.





Continually identify opportunities to communicate and collaborate with local organisations, Local Disaster Management Group and local Council on supporting monsoon-affected communities; and for Neighbourhood Centres to be linked into their referral database.

3.5 Strategy D: Enhance Collaboration

Effective disaster management requires a comprehensive approach of risk reduction, resilience enhancement and coordination of preparedness, response and recovery (Queensland Disaster Management Committee, 2018). The approach needs to be locally relevant, reflective of the needs and resources identified within the community. Furthermore, it needs to be a collaborative and cooperative approach where the community is working together and having ongoing conversations to manage the risks and the impacts of the disaster (Council of Australian Government, 2011).

The *National and Queensland Strategy of Disaster Resilience*, has highlighted that managing disasters require sound understanding of community complexity and diversity. A community's resilience to disaster is shaped by its ability to use the "use diverse local information to better understand the assets, strengths, and capabilities" (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2020) in order to address the varied needs, vulnerabilities and possibilities for effective collaboration, knowledge and resource sharing.

As discussed earlier in Strategy A, disaster management is coordinated by the Council's Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG). Our consultation identified that Neighbourhood Centres across the state have varying connection with the LDMG. A small number of Neighbourhood Centres are members of the LDMG and actively involved in planning conversations. These are often Centres who are a part of the local Council or who have connected with the LDMG after a monsoon event. The role that most Neighbourhood Centres play in this space is supporting the LDMG's coordination of monsoon preparation, response and recovery. This role primary includes dissemination of information to the community via their website or social media page, hosting disaster support services and supporting the delivery of emergency relief.

While Neighbourhood Centres are not resourced to deliver the initial response to monsoons - carried out by the LDMG, state emergency services and Australian Red Cross - it can offer local knowledge and relationships to optimise the support that the community receives.

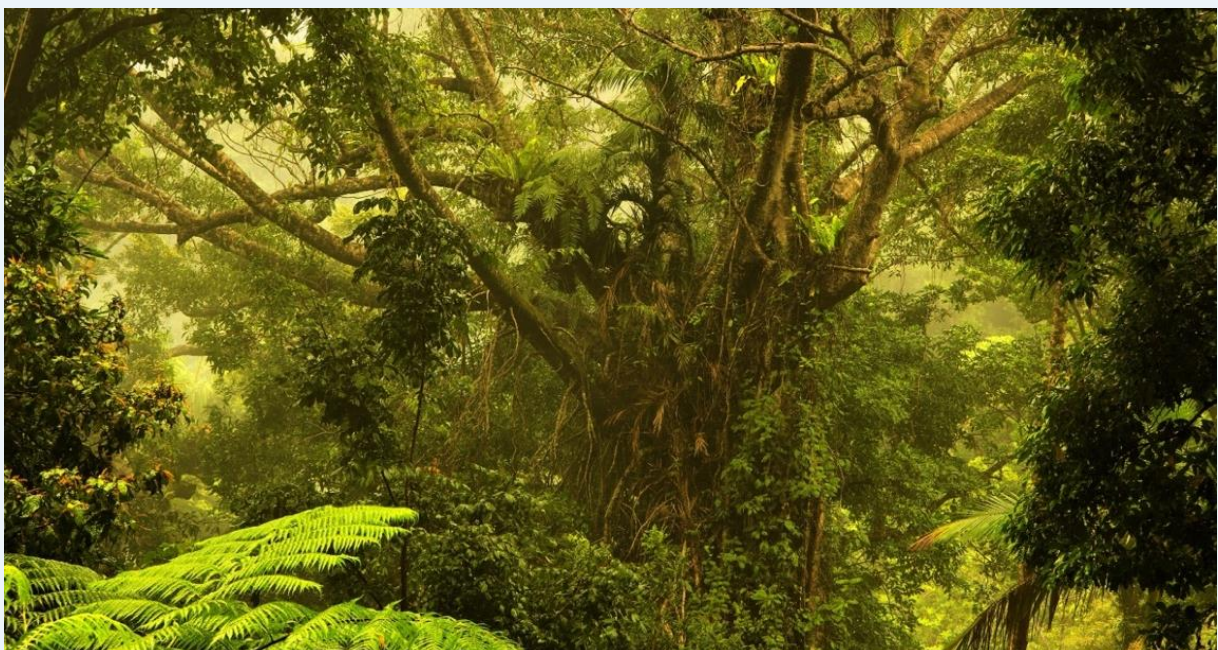
As highlighted in Strategy C, Neighbourhood Centres are aware of the vulnerable people within their local community and understand how to best engage with them. By working with Neighbourhood Centres and valuing their insights about the needs of their community in the response planning process, first responders are better able to provide adequate and appropriate support to monsoon-affected individuals.

Greater collaboration among local organisations will also enhance and ensure the continuum of care and support provided to the community beyond the initial response by LDMG and SES. By tapping into local organisations' resources and services, Neighbourhood Centres will have the versatility to respond to the varied needs of the community. With greater partnerships, Neighbourhood Centres will have more capacity to help community members navigate and access the supports they need that are limited or absent at the Centre. It will also strengthen people's connection to local supports and services, and thereby bolster their resilience to monsoons.

SHARING A STORY

"A very valuable outcome of the Cyclone Ita event was the partnership that we developed with the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army had staff deployed in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone. Conversations held over the month led to a joint partnership where we can tap into their Doorways Programs - a support services for vulnerable people - for our South Cape York region. The partnership continues to provide our one (singular, lonely) Remote Worker access to the resources, networking, training and mentoring of a much larger national organisation. It has also created a range of supports and other opportunities for our Centre overall and will no doubt auger well for the management of any future events."

- Neighbourhood Centre, Far North Queensland



CASE STUDY

A community development worker from a Community Centre on the Sunshine Coast spoke with a range of community group members, who said they felt it was important to start talking together about being prepared for the increasingly severe natural disasters. A partnership was formed with the local Council and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services to host a series of preparedness workshops with community groups and services across the Glasshouse Country area.

The groups plotted together what capacity and resources they had to support one another, and the broader community, in times of natural disasters. Initially the groups looked at what they would need to consider with the real scenario of Cyclone Oma, which was predicted to cause significant damage in the area. Resources and contact details were collated into directories for all to share. These directories, combined with information about disaster management arrangements with the LDMG and communication channels, formed into a Disaster Management Community Handbook. The groups decided to form as a Network and to meet quarterly to continue strengthening their relationships and preparing for disasters.

Volunteer members of the Network emphasised that “this is the most important thing we should all be doing” and “with disasters being more and more in our lives, this is so important for us all to be coming together”.

- Glasshouse Country Disaster Management Network



CASE STUDY

The Whitsunday Neighbourhood Centre maintains a strong whole-community focus during disasters by collaborating with local business to support monsoon-affected communities. One such collaboration allowed a local scaffold business to provide weekly \$1000 grants to families still struggling in the lead up to Christmas in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

The Whitsunday Neighbourhood Centre's Back 2 School Packs project enabled two local businesses to sponsor back-to-school packs to school children affected by Tropical Cyclone Debbie. Similarly, the Feet First Project channelled funding obtained through collaboration with the Westpac Group into school shoe vouchers for two other local businesses. Between these two programs, the Whitsunday Neighbourhood Centre was able to supply either school supplies or shoes to every applicant across local schools, while stimulating the local economy by supporting small businesses.

- Whitsundays Neighbourhood Centres (2018)





Advocate for Neighbourhood Centres to be included in disaster planning by raising awareness with the Local Disaster Management Group and the Government about their capacity and available resources to support monsoon-affected communities.

3.5 Strategy E : Optimise the Use of Neighbourhood Centres' Resources

Being place-based, Neighbourhood Centres are a holder of local information about the community. They also have a relationship with residents and local businesses, having supported them through various crises, including monsoons. These connections with the community equip Neighbourhood Centres with a rich understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities experienced by different groups of the community; knowledge which are invaluable to the planning of disaster management. By tapping into the local knowledge and relationships that Neighbourhood Centres hold, disaster planning will be more locally relevant and responsive to the local needs - particularly the needs of the vulnerable people.

Many Neighbourhood Centres deliver resilience-building initiatives and activities to the community. Examples include:

- **Cooking with Council:** During monsoons, a community may become cut off and go on for weeks without fresh fruits and vegetables; and this program teaches how to use long-life items in the pantry to create meals.
- **Building Resilience Community Committee:** This initiative focuses on getting feedback from the community on how their local Neighbourhood Centre can better support them during disasters like monsoons.

Through these interactions, Neighbourhood Centres gain an in-depth understanding of the barriers that people face in preparing for, responding to and recovery from monsoons. It also offers insight into the supports and resources that bolster individual the community's resilience to monsoons.

Scoping conversations with Neighbourhood Centres and stakeholders, and findings from the Neighbourhood Centres Survey highlighted that Neighbourhood Centres are equipped with knowledge, skills, and resources that are highly valuable to disaster management. The resources are identified in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9. Resources that Make Neighbourhood Centres Valuable to Disaster Management.



CASE STUDY

The Fraser Coast Regional Council put together a Community Coordination Committee, made up of local stakeholders including Neighbourhood Centres, to improve disaster planning and response. The group meets regularly to discuss ongoing challenges of disaster response within the community and strategise approaches to engage with local residents about their needs. It also focuses on building connections between various stakeholders to enable faster and more coordinated community response. Recently, the Burrum District Community Centre at Howard was able to open as a respite centre in response to a disaster, within only 45 minutes of the request being made - because of organisational relationships fostered by Community Coordination Committee.

- Queensland Reconstruction Authority (2020)





Acquire adequate funding for (i) supporting staff number and wages, and (ii) upskilling staff in disaster management, to enhance Neighbourhood Centres' capacity in working with local networks to support monsoon-affected communities

3.7 Strategy F:

Support Staff to Support Community

The place-based and community-focused nature of Neighbourhood Centres makes a vital support hub during monsoons, particularly in the preparation and recovery stages. Neighbourhood Centres play a unique role in supporting monsoon-affected communities being able to be adaptive to the changing needs of the community. With the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, however, Neighbourhood Centres need greater funding and resources to meet the growing level and complexity of demand from the community.

Staff Numbers

A common dilemma faced by numerous Neighbourhood Centres in our consultation is the extra burden placed on a small workforce during a natural disaster, when the workload increases significantly - often without warning and for an unspecified period of time. This is particularly challenging for Neighbourhood Centres operating a "one worker model" due to limited financial resourcing. Surveying conducted by the QFCA in 2020 revealed that Neighbourhood Centres based in monsoon-affected regions receive an average base operational amount from the Queensland Government of \$133,370.63. The average number of full-time staff per Centre in these regions is 0.88 per Centre, with many centres bolstering their work with around 6 part-time or casual staff resourced through other funding streams and community programs. 31% of surveyed Neighbourhood Centres pay private rental rates or own their own building, resulting in greater overheads than Centres owned by the Local Council or Queensland Government (QFCA Neighbourhood Centre Survey 2020).

During our consultations, a Neighbourhood Centre in a regional city with only one full-time staff member explained: *"We only have one permanent staff, and that is me, and I manage the Centre. If I cannot get to the Centre in times of a disaster because the roads are cut off, we cannot open our doors. It also limits me from attending disaster planning and coordination meetings in town because I need to be here at the Centre [in order to keep the doors open to community members]."*



Another Neighbourhood Centre described the infeasibility of the funding requirement to stay open during the Christmas season with only one full-time staff member: *"I need to take time off once a year to look after myself. By looking after myself and not burning out, I am looking after the organisation."*

Inadequate staffing impacts both the operation of the organisation as well as the wellbeing of the community in times of disasters. It can also limit the Centres' ability to grow the resilience of communities before, during and after a disaster. Centres with only one permanent staff member are hampered in their capacity to adapt to the changing and increasing community needs during monsoons. For example, Neighbourhood Centres with multiple staff members are more able to rearrange internal roles when required to provide disaster support in addition to its core operations. Staff can also provide invaluable support to each other during trying times. When understaffed, the local community loses out on receiving the level of the support it needs. In the monsoon context, this means the community may take longer to recover and bounce back from the social impacts of the disaster.

CASE STUDY

In addition to funding opportunities through government, Neighbourhood Centres have successfully built relationships with local and national businesses in their communities to help relief efforts after monsoon related disaster. After Tropical Cyclone Debbie, Bethania Community Centre and the Logan House Fire Support Network partnered with the RACQ Foundation to secure \$23,000 of funding to run a program that helped community members replace white goods and small household appliances destroyed during the event.

- Torpey (2018)



4. Conclusion

In developing the Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Monsoon Resilience, twenty-five Neighbourhood Centres from North and Far North regions came together to reflect on their current work on monsoon resilience and identified strategies that can be implemented, with the support of QFCA, to increase their capacity in this space. Neighbourhood Centres hope the learnings and perspectives they have shared in this Strategy will create stronger connections and collaboration in monsoon-affected communities so communities can work more collectively and creatively to strengthen their resilience to monsoons.

With the increasing effects of climate change, the rising frequency and intensity of monsoons are becoming a challenge more and more Queenslanders will face. Being locally based and connected to the community, Neighbourhood Centres have valuable insight into the issues experienced by monsoon-affected individuals. Furthermore, Neighbourhood Centres understand and apply community-based responses to support those affected by natural disasters. It is critical that the local communities are heard and that they participate in preparation for, response to and recovery of monsoons, through the immense power of local place-based Neighbourhood Centres throughout Queensland.



Appendix A – Participant Survey

QUEENSLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES STRATEGY FOR MONSOON RESILIENCE PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Welcome.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; we greatly appreciate your participation. Please make yourself a cup of tea - this survey should take about the time (10-15 mins) it takes to drink it!

Please ensure that you keep this email conversation or browser page open until you have completed all questions and press 'submit'. Keeping the page open is the only way to turn to the survey if you are interrupted midway.

Neighbourhood and Community Centres often play a vital role in disaster management, including preparation, response and recovery following one or multiple disasters. As such, this Queensland Disaster Response Strategy survey seeks to understand and highlight the unique roles, functions and approaches that the Centres bring. It also aims to identify the needs and opportunities for Centres across the state to grow their capacity in supporting the communities throughout the stages of natural disasters - in particular, monsoons, bushfires and drought.

Findings from this survey will be collated and provided back to Centres through facilitated workshops where we will be strategising with Neighbourhood and Community Centres on approaches that:

- Expand and deepen collaborative disaster response work, in particular, to raise ownership, leadership, capacity and self-determination within local communities,
- Advocate for recognition and resources from local and state government, and other key stakeholders, so that Centres can continue and grow its active involvement in disaster management, and
- Identifies how the Queensland Families and Communities Association can support Centres in the disaster management space

Disaster management literature highlights the importance of a collaborative response and shared responsibility across: the three levels of government; the business and the private sector; the for-purpose sector; and individual community members. The characteristics of a resilient community include: (i) the ability to function well while under stress; (ii) successfully adapting to change and "bouncing forward"; (iii) high degrees of social capital; (iv) community agency and solidarity; (v) network connections; and (vi) strong social supports and services (COAG 2009).

We look forward to hearing your stories, ideas and initiatives on supporting the Queensland communities at the upcoming workshops.

Please note: The survey is targeted to Neighbourhood and Community Centres and other

organisations with equivalent funding and roles. The term 'Centre' is used to represent all of these organisations.

Acknowledgement: We would like to recognise that the Queensland Monsoon Response Strategy is jointly funded under the Commonwealth/State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.



Before we get started...

Basic details about your participation and the Centre you represent

1. 1. Are you willing to complete this survey?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. 2. Are you willing for this information to be used for research and evaluation purposes?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. 3. What is the name of your Neighbourhood/Community Centre?

4. 4. What is the governance structure of your organisation?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ A local government council
- ☐ A national non-profit organisation
- ☐ An incorporated association
- ☐ Company limited by guarantee
- ☐ Local community based governance committee
- ☐ Committee containing members outside local community
- ☐ No board or committee
- ☐ Deductible gift receipt status
- ☐ Other:

SECTION 1: BUILDING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The following section will provide evidence to highlight the importance that social capital plays in developing the resilience of disaster-affected communities.

5. 5. Does your organisation have any plans or initiatives in place for 'Disaster Preparedness'?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. 6. If yes, please let us know what these above initiatives have been. How effective have they been in supporting people's needs? Have any notable challenges arisen?

7. 7. What do you think is seen as 'disaster preparedness' in your community?

8. 8. What scope does the Centre have to do community development work related to disaster preparedness and response (e.g. bushfire, monsoon) beyond its core operations?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Large scope
- ☐ Medium scope
- ☐ Low scope
- ☐ No Scope

9. 9. Would the Centre like to have a greater focus on community development related to disaster preparedness and response?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. 10. If yes, what factors affect the Centre's ability to achieve this?

11. 11. What strategies do you think can be developed to enable Neighbourhood/Community Centres better support communities in preparing for, responding to and recovering from a disaster?

12. 12. What strategies can be developed to better place Neighbourhood/Community Centres within the Disaster Management Frameworks led by authorities?

SECTION 2: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IN TIMES OF MONSOON

The following questions highlight the role of Neighbourhood/Community Centres in the context of monsoons.

13. 13. How does the Centre establish and/or strengthen connections and community capacity with people affected by monsoons?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Activities and events with a disaster response focus or theme
- ☐ Share disaster-specific information e.g. funding packages
- ☐ New projects which directly respond to disasters
- ☐ Develop new partnerships and relationships to enable more referral pathways for people affected by disasters
- ☐ Support other community groups and activities
- ☐ Nothing

Other: ☐ _____

14. 14. During monsoons, what are the main reasons that community members access your Centre?

15. 15. If your centre experienced increased demand during monsoons, in what ways did you seek to respond to and fund this need? (Tick all that applies)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Utilised existing funds
- ☐ Sought funding from government grants
- ☐ Sought funding from other sources (please specify)
- ☐ Utilised existing referral pathways to other organisation/s
- ☐ Established new referral pathways to other organisation/s providing disaster relief/support
- ☐ Built on existing partnerships with other organisations to meet community demand in new ways
- ☐ Created new partnerships with other organisations to meet community demand in new ways
- ☐ Collaborated with formal and informal volunteers in the local community
- ☐ Utilised the centre as a contact point or hub for targeted disaster-related services (please describe)
- ☐ Not applicable - Needs have not increased
- ☐ Not applicable - We were not able to meet increased demand (please tell us more)
- Other: ☐ _____



16. 16. If applicable, what is your experience in accessing and gaining support for monsoon-affected clients through targeted disaster support services? (Eg. Rural Aid, Red Cross, Lifeline) Please note all relevant services in your area.

17. 17. How would you describe the Centre's relationship with emergency response services?

18. 18. Please share a story that illustrates the challenges and successes of responding to a monsoon in your community.

**SECTION 3: THE ROLE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES IN THE CONTEXT OF
DISASTER RESPONSE**



19. 19. What do you think is the role of Neighbourhood/Community Centres in disaster preparation, response and recovery ?

20. 20. What do you think makes Neighbourhood/Community Centres and other equivalent Centres unique, or most valuable, in the context of disaster response and recovery?

21. 21. In the disaster context, how is the role of your Neighbourhood Centre perceived by the Local Disaster Management Group?

22. Please share any comments or extra details from any questions here.

23. THE QUEENSLAND FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES ASSOCIATION SINCERELY THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THIS SURVEY. If you wish to provide feedback or discuss any aspects of this survey, please contact Mengting Lin via E: disasterprojects@qfca.org.au or M: 0476 281 288.



Supporting our members to build Community
Queensland Families & Communities Association

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