

# Understanding community-led disaster recovery

The term 'community-led disaster recovery' is becoming increasingly used. This handout explores the term and what it means.

## What is a disaster?

A serious disruption to community life which threatens or causes death or injury in that community and/or damage to property which is beyond the day-to-day capacity of the prescribed statutory authorities and which requires special mobilisation and organisation of resources other than those normally available to those authorities. Most associate disasters with weather-related events, though also include:

- climate change
- terrorism
- crimes of extreme violence
- exotic plant and/or animal diseases
- human pandemics
- infrastructure failure

## What is recovery?

Recovery is the process of coming to terms with the impacts of a disaster and managing the disruptions and changes caused, which can result, for some people, in a new way of living. Being 'recovered' is being able to lead a life that individuals and communities value.

## Stages of Recovery

Disasters vary in their scale and intensity, as well as their level of impact and generally, the phases and overall duration of recovery take much longer than many people anticipate, often by months and even years.

Figure 1 shows some of the common reactions, experiences and emotions that may be experienced by individuals and communities following disasters and before they feel they are able to get 'back on their feet'.

Community-led and disaster-focused initiatives have long been taking place in Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland; with a locally driven focus on needs specific to individual communities. As place-based organisations with trusted relationships and understanding of current community needs and experiences, Neighbourhood Centres are well placed to provide community-led response efforts to support disaster recovery long after the initial impact to the community.



Figure 1: Stages of Recovery

Reference: Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection: Community Recovery

## Community-Led Disaster Recovery

As much as possible, community-led approaches should be to be used to empower individuals and communities to manage their own recovery. Recovery planning built upon community development fundamentally aims to support self-help and strengthen the resources, capacity and resilience already present within individuals and communities.

Community development is a method of working with people. It starts from the needs and aspirations of individuals and groups and moves to articulate and organise action around those needs and aspirations—placing them at the forefront.

Decision-making processes are vital to realising community-led disaster recovery.

**Rather than decisions that affect community members being made by external actors, community-led recovery requires collaborative planning processes leading to community-driven decision-making.**

Community focused recovery is essential. Disasters can deeply impact people's lives and livelihoods, and helping communities recover from disasters can be challenging and complex.

Every community is unique and will have its own history, values and experiences. They will also have their own distinct challenges. It is recognized by the federal and state government that successful recovery is community-centred, responsive and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward. According to the [Australian Disaster Recovery Framework Principle 3 – Use Community-led Approaches](#), recovery should:

- Assist and enable individuals, families and the community to actively participate in their own recovery;
- Recognise that individuals and the community may need different levels of support at various times;
- Be guided by the community's priorities;
- Channel effort through pre-identified and existing community assets, including local knowledge, existing community strengths and resilience;
- Build collaborative partnerships between the community and those involved in the recovery process;
- Recognise that new community leaders often emerge during and after a disaster, who may not hold formal positions of authority; and
- Recognise that different communities may choose different paths to recovery.

To help guide considerations around community-led practice, refer to the Spectrum of Community-led Approaches below developed by the Tamarack Institute.

**Figure 2. Tamarack Institute spectrum of community-led approaches (2020)**

Reference: Tamarack Institute



Neighbourhood Centres Queensland acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of Country; we pay our respects to their Elders, Ancestors, land and seas. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.