



2022 NSW Flood Inquiry

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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value people of all cultures, languages, capacities, sexual orientations, gender identities and/or expressions. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion:

salvationarmy.org.au/about-us

The Salvation Army is an international movement and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.





About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country. Programs include:

- Financial inclusion, including emergency relief
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further Information

The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from Major Paul Hateley, National Head of Government Relations, at government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au or on 0413 830 201.





Recommendations

That the New South Wales Government:

1. Abolish stamp duty for home and contents insurance.
2. Include common home and contents insurance issues in disaster preparedness guides.
3. Revise the Welfare Services Functional Area supporting plan to clarify the role of community service organisations in a large-scale emergency.
4. Establish a register of organisations wishing to provide information and support services at evacuation and recovery centres.
5. Notify the above organisations of the timing and location of the centres.
6. Provide a contact point for community organisations to seek information from and provide updates to government.
7. Resource community service organisations to provide emergency relief, information and referral services, and financial support at recovery hubs.
8. Select locations for evacuation and recovery hubs with ample space for wraparound support services. These could include Commonwealth and state agencies, emergency relief, financial counselling, emotional support and professional mental health support.
9. Work with local and Commonwealth governments to establish a register of local, state and federal government land suitable for short to medium term housing to ensure families can remain within their community as they recover.



Introduction

The Salvation Army thanks the independent inquiry for the opportunity to share our experiences during the 2022 New South Wales floods.

The Salvation Army is a well-known presence during and in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency. We are grateful for government and the broader Australian community, who respond generously to our disaster appeals. This enables us to support individuals and communities in the days, weeks and months following a disaster. Our experience is that in the chaos following a disaster, community members seek out trusted organisations like The Salvation Army for aid, advice and support. It is a great privilege to be able to walk alongside people in their time of need.

During the first two weeks of the floods alone, the Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) and local corps (churches) provided over 40,000 meals and refreshments in more than 20 evacuation centres in New South Wales and Queensland. Our teams were then deployed to 30 recovery centres across the two states, where we assisted more than 28,000 households in total. Thanks to our generous donors, we were able to issue over 25,000 recovery grants and distribute more than \$6 million in financial assistance and in-kind support such as food parcels, clothing and household items.

This submission draws on our experiences over the past many weeks, as we continue to walk alongside communities devastated by the floods. Though we welcome the commitment to review and learn from the response to date, submissions are closing too early to relay the full experience of our teams, who are currently still active in both response and relief phases across the nation. In our view, this hampers the ability of the inquiry to properly consider the later stages of its terms of reference.

It is our hope that the experiences shared in this submission would assist the inquiry committee in its deliberations. We would welcome any future opportunity to provide updated statistics or information.

The Salvation Army emergency and disaster response model

As a crisis unfolds, **phase one (response)** involves Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) personnel feeding and providing support to first responders and evacuees and assisting with the management and service of evacuation centres according to agreements in place with state and local governments. The SAES is a national 24/7 state of readiness service with 18 full-time staff, who are supported by volunteers.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, The Salvation Army's support transitions to **phase two (relief)** – an initial assessment and provision of emotional care and emergency financial support, where available. Once the crisis is over, this leads to **phase three (recovery)** – grants, services, emotional support and practical assistance following a more detailed assessment of need.



Preparation and planning

Preparation is key to recovery. The Salvation Army's Moneycare financial counselling service has recently received funding from the Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services to deliver a program aimed at helping people prepare for a disaster, from a financial perspective. One of the topics to be covered in the program will be ensuring home and contents insurance is current and adequate, in the context of what is affordable.

Although it is not a direct contributor to disasters, insurance can either substantially reduce or exacerbate the impact that disasters have on individuals and communities. Our experience has been that rates of uninsurance and underinsurance are a significant concern. Analysis by the Climate Council, using data from consultants Climate Valuation, suggests that one in 25 households will be effectively uninsurable by 2030 and a further one in 11 will be at risk of becoming underinsured.¹ A large proportion of the risk to houses is expected to be due to riverine flooding, with the Northern Rivers region within the most at-risk regions in the nation.² People often make the decision not to renew insurance due to the high cost of premiums, meaning they are often those who are least able to afford to rebuild after the loss of their property. The extent of this problem is only expected to increase as we experience the effects of a changing climate.

Though a rise in insurance premiums may be inevitable in response to a changing climate, abolishing insurance stamp duty on home and contents insurance could go some way to removing the disincentive to take out insurance and alleviate the shock to household budgets. Governments and the insurance industry could also work together to incentivise hazard mitigation in building design and town planning, as has been done with the constructions of levees. As with areas at risk of coastal erosion, a national discussion is needed about the future of communities located in insurance 'red zones'.

The problem of underinsurance stems from several factors. Our experience in the Black Summer bushfires was that people had insured their houses only according to what their home and contents were worth, to find that the cost of reconstruction in keeping with current building standards is many times greater. There is a role for governments and insurance agencies to raise community awareness on how to prepare for and respond to a disaster, including the level of insurance needed to rebuild.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the New South Wales Government:

- abolish stamp duty for home and contents insurance.
- include common home and contents insurance issues in disaster preparedness guides.

¹ Climate Council. (2022). *Uninsurable Nation: Australia's most climate-vulnerable places*. https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CC_Report-Uninsurable-Nation_V5-FA_Low_Res_Single.pdf

² Ibid.



Response

The State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) details the role of various non-government organisations delivering ‘welfare services’ in the event of an emergency. Since the Welfare Services Functional Area supporting plan was agreed in June 2018, Australia has experienced multiple large-scale emergencies, including the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and now widespread flooding events in both New South Wales and Queensland.

Monitoring the evolving situation across multiple locations and state borders adds an additional layer of complexity to our service coordination role. The widespread nature of recent disasters has also meant fewer available volunteer resources that community sector organisations can call on to bolster the existing workforce. The logistical coordination involved with feeding 500 people in one location is very different to feeding 25,000 people across 40 locations. As widespread disaster events become more common in a changing climate, the increase in expected demand on services needs to be reflected in the division of labour under the EMPLAN.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the New South Wales Government:

- revise the Welfare Services Functional Area supporting plan to clarify the role of community service organisations in a large-scale emergency.



Transition

Through our experience of supporting communities through disasters across the nation, we have the privilege of observing the strengths and weaknesses of the different models used in various states and territories. Our observation is that local governments' connections and local knowledge could be better utilised to build community resilience. This could include strengthening relationships within the community, and raising awareness on how to take action before, during and after a disaster.

The Salvation Army Australia's role in disaster response varies from state to state. In New South Wales, The Salvation Army is contracted to "provide [or] coordinate emergency catering services to disaster affected people and [Welfare Services Functional Area] agency members"³. In Queensland, we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide a designated number of volunteers to recovery hubs and outreach locations as requested, with the state government covering expenses, including travel, accommodation and meals. As detailed above, we also provide additional community support outside of the scope of our agreements with government.

Often the support we can provide is also dependent on the level of funds that can be raised in a disaster appeal. Though riverine flooding is said to pose the biggest risk to properties⁴, flood appeals typically do not attract as many donations when compared to other types of disasters. This has limited the level and duration of support we can provide, particularly in the long term.

Our experience is that regardless of what is set out in the EMPLAN, there is an expectation that trusted community organisations, including The Salvation Army, will be present at evacuation and recovery centres. We often stand in the gap, providing financial, emotional and material support before community members can access government relief funding and insurance payouts. As this role is not formally recognised in the EMPLAN, we found that we were not automatically included in communication around the timing and location of recovery centres. Though it was not difficult to monitor the Resilience NSW website for this information, having prior knowledge of where and when recovery centres would be established would free up resources to focus on service delivery and allow us to better plan our staffing and other resources. Having a clear line of communication with government would also provide another set of eyes and ears on the ground as the response and recovery effort continues.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the New South Wales Government:

- establish a register of organisations wishing to provide information and support services at evacuation and recovery centres.
- notify the above organisations of the timing and location of the centres.
- provide a contact point for community organisations to seek information from and provide updates to government.

³ NSW Government. (2018, June). *Welfare Services Functional Area Supporting Plan: A Supporting Plan to the NSW Emergency Management Plan*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/Supporting-Plan-Welfare-Services-Functional-Area.pdf>

⁴ Climate Council. (2022). *Uninsurable Nation: Australia's most climate-vulnerable places*. https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CC_Report-Uninsurable-Nation_V5-FA_Low_Res_Single.pdf



Recovery

The recovery process for the 2022 floods has only just begun. Our ability to speak to this recovery effort has been curtailed by the deadline for submissions. We have drawn on previous experience walking alongside affected communities in the discussion below.

Recovery hubs

We cannot stress enough the importance of relationships in providing community-centred responses. We have found that the emergency response and relief models that allow for flexibility between organisations foster collaboration much better than models that directly or indirectly force community organisations to compete for roles. Flexibility allows us to meet people at their point of need.

Our experience is that co-location and collaboration between support services in evacuation and recovery hubs eases some of the burden on people impacted by a disaster. This means that they do not need to know which organisations to seek out for help and can access the support they need at a centralised location. Co-located services would also assist in alleviating any communication barriers between agencies. This requires government to designate recovery hub locations that are big enough to accommodate the necessary services, which could include Commonwealth and state government agencies, emergency relief, financial counselling, emotional support (such as those provided by disaster chaplains), and professional mental health support.

The Salvation Army struggled to maintain our presence in recovery hubs during these floods. As our role in recovery hubs is not recognised in the EMPLAN and there is no funding to do so, our ability to support communities recovering from emergencies is limited by our human resources and the funds raised in a disaster appeal. Both of these have been hampered by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and increases in the cost of living. The community sector needs government to recognise the value of our presence at these hubs and to resource us accordingly. We estimate that we would need between \$20 and \$30 million to establish and maintain the level of support we provided in the aftermath of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires. This included attendance at recovery hubs and outreach locations to provide chaplaincy, emergency relief and financial counselling. Adequate funding means that we are not only able to provide immediate emergency relief during the response phase. It also equips us to continue to walk alongside communities in the medium to long term, providing more significant, tailored support in response to specific needs. Ongoing funding would also allow us to maintain expertise and critical infrastructure to hit the ground running whenever disaster strikes.

Financial assistance

We commend the New South Wales Government on making financial support application forms available so quickly. Our experience is that affected community members tend to focus on the necessities – food and shelter – in the early days following a disaster. This means that financial assistance and the need for financial counselling services are not usually the most pressing need in the immediate term.





This is not to negate the importance of ensuring good independent advice is available at evacuation and recovery centres. It is valuable for people to know that help is available, and where they can seek it, should debt and insurance issues arise later. This advice could include talking through the implications of accepting a quick payout or what to expect when making an insurance claim.

Housing

The Salvation Army has witnessed the need for emergency and short-term housing options following natural disasters, including the 2019-2020 bushfire season, which saw large-scale losses of property and significant demand on already short supplies of affordable housing. Many residents, even those able to afford to fully reconstruct their properties, still experienced homelessness and required housing during their reconstruction.

Where possible and appropriate, local residents generally prefer to remain in their communities following a disaster event, however this may not always be possible where there has been widespread destruction of properties and infrastructure. Governments can share information about land available for short to medium-term accommodation as communities rebuild. This would help families to remain within and recover with their community.

The Salvation Army, with a consortium of service providers in the Northern Rivers region, is currently undertaking a research project into housing needs in the region following the recent floods. The research will identify gaps in the current suite of housing support interventions, ways to address medium-term challenges to the housing system, and actions to offer better mitigation and protections against future disasters for people experiencing hardship and injustice. The project is expected to finish mid-year and we are happy to provide a copy of the final report to the inquiry if this would be of assistance.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the New South Wales Government:

- resource community service organisations to provide emergency relief, information and referral services, and financial support at recovery hubs.
- select locations for evacuation and recovery hubs with ample space for wraparound support services. These could include Commonwealth and state agencies, emergency relief, financial counselling, emotional support and professional mental health support.
- work with local and Commonwealth governments to establish a register of local, state and federal government land suitable for short to medium term housing to ensure families can remain within their community as they recover.



Conclusion

The Salvation Army appreciates the importance of reviewing the response to the 2022 New South Wales floods, particularly as large-scale and widespread natural disasters become more frequent in a changing climate. It is our hope that the findings of this inquiry will stand New South Wales in good stead for the next disaster.

As mentioned above, it would have been valuable to have the option of providing a submission closer to the final report deadline. This would have allowed us to reflect more fully on lessons learned and opportunities for improvement.

Based on what we have observed to date and our experience providing support during and following previous natural disasters, our submission identifies potential opportunities for the New South Wales Government to improve preparedness for, response to and recovery from the 2022 catastrophic flood event. This includes addressing barriers to adequate insurance, recognising and funding the role of community service organisations at evacuation and recovery centres, and providing for housing in the short and medium term following a disaster.

We are grateful for this opportunity to share our experiences and would welcome any occasion to provide further information or clarification.