

Government response to the IGEM's review of emergency management for high-risk Victorian communities

The Victorian Government is committed to building community and individual resilience to emergencies. Improving connections to share expertise, experience and information are critical to effectively preparing, responding and recovering from emergencies, and achieving our vision of safer and more resilient communities.

Overview

The government welcomes the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's (IGEM) review of emergency management for high-risk Victorian communities. Since the time this review commenced in 2017, work has continued to better manage the impact of emergencies on particular communities, including those that are vulnerable or at risk. A key activity that relates to emergency management for Victorian high risk communities is the passage of the *Emergency Management Legislation Amendment Act 2018* (EMLA Act 2018) on 9 August 2018 being implemented by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV).

Some of the recommendations in the IGEM's review were made in a context that will change with the implementation of the planning reforms enabled through the EMLA Act 2018. These changes have informed the response to the IGEM's recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) lead the development of an agreed definition of high-risk communities and individuals. The development of an appropriate definition will require broad engagement with the Victorian emergency management sector organisations and build on the findings of this report, and other relevant reviews, including the DHHS review of Vulnerable People in Emergencies policy.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE – SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) agrees that a consistent, sector-wide approach to support and promote resilience in Victorians who may be at-risk in emergencies is required.

A review of contemporary literature commissioned by the DHHS analysed current approaches and definitions of vulnerability, both in the context of emergency management and community development. This analysis confirmed that restrictive approaches to 'defining' vulnerability or high-risk communities do not adequately capture the complexity of potential vulnerabilities to emergencies, nor the related opportunities to enhance emergency resilience in light of these vulnerabilities. These concerns were also reflected in submissions to DHHS's review of the Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy in 2018.

DHHS is leading work to scope contemporary approaches for the sector to support and promote resilience in individuals who may be at greatest risk in emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management recommends that Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) continue with its development and application of the Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA) model as an important source of place-based intelligence of local hazards and vulnerabilities. The development should provide for:

- *Improved accountability for the translation of CERA assessments into mitigation outcomes state-wide*
- *Improved place-based data capture and integration into system level (state and regional) intelligence and decision-making platforms.*

This will require the support of Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), the Department of Health and Human Services, and key responder agencies.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE – SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

Risk assessment is the cornerstone of emergency management planning, and as the IGEM notes, CERA is one of a number of inputs to assist with decision making. VICSES undertook a review of the CERA process and tool with key facilitators and users during 2018. This review has highlighted some areas for improvement and informed a business case proposing to enhance and modernise the CERA tool. The scope of the business case includes functionality to better record and manage agreed mitigation actions, in addition to developing enhanced spatial capability to represent information, including hazards and risks. These features will address parts of the recommendation for improved accountability and better place-based data capture. The transition to a more agile platform provides the potential to provide a flexible, scalable, tool that will support emergency planning into the future.

The CERA process can capture data from local expertise and other hazard specific tools, while assisting to assess the risks of those hazards. This provides the municipal footprint with an overall risk assessment for consideration in an emergency management context. Whilst data can be aggregated using the existing CERA tool, it has not yet been determined how this may inform regional and state level risk assessments, or integrated planning and system level intelligence under the new arrangements. Opportunities to meet this need and enhance broader integration are likely to be identified over the period of the implementation. Delivery of an improved tool will provide greater analytical capability to inform ongoing improvement under the auspice of the emergency management planning reforms (see recommendation 3).

While under the EMLA Act 2018 VICSES's role has changed, VICSES continues to be best placed to deliver on this recommendation with the support of EMV to ensure alignment to emergency management planning reform implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Inspector General for Emergency Management recommends that Emergency Management Victoria, in consultation with community service organisations, lead the development and implementation of a plan to:

- *Develop and implement an engagement strategy to improve collaboration and information sharing between the emergency management sector and community service organisations;*
- *Integrate sector-wide place-based and system level intelligence relevant to high-risk communities and individuals to support effective emergency management decisions across all phases of emergencies;*
- *Develop sector capability and capacity for spatial identification of high-risk communities.*

The plan should be developed and implemented through a working group with oversight by State Crisis and Resilience Council or relevant subcommittee. The plan will require consideration of findings provided in this and other relevant reviews, including the Department of Health and Human Services review of the Vulnerable People in Emergencies policy and the Local Government Victoria review of local government emergency management capacity and capability.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE – SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The government acknowledges the crucial role that community service organisations (CSOs) have, and the intelligence they can offer the emergency management sector. The government does not segregate CSOs from the emergency management sector, and consider CSOs to be a critical partner in the sector. The Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) is the peak body for the social and community sector. VCOSS is a member of the State Crisis and Resilience Council's Relief and Recovery Sub-committee and the Sub-committee Plenary. Neither VCOSS nor EMV can direct the work of other organisations; in the spirit of the recommendation, they will work in partnership to understand the needs of both the emergency management sector and CSOs to improve collaboration and information sharing.

The new multi-agency municipal and regional emergency management planning committees established under the EM planning reforms, will provide an additional forum for sector organisations and communities to strengthen connections and share information to better prepare, respond, and recover from emergencies.

Currently, various forms of spatial representation of hazards exist within specific agencies and departments, as the emergency management planning reforms mature, municipal and regional emergency management planning committees will be able to identify the gaps in the sectors spatial capability to identify and prioritise opportunities for improvement.

The specific processes, systems and tools to support the emergency management planning reforms are currently being developed and will continue to be progressed through the phased implementation of the planning reforms. Throughout the planning reform implementation, continuous improvement opportunities will be identified and captured. This will support ongoing identification and development of appropriate systems, tools and processes that best support collaboration and information sharing into the future.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services, with the support of the emergency management and community service sector, continue to monitor the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme to ensure:

- *High-risk individuals are transitioned appropriately;*
- *The reforms accommodate appropriate emergency management training of carers to support high-risk individuals' planning for emergencies;*
- *That appropriate and consistent mechanisms are in place to facilitate the provision of local intelligence regarding high-risk individuals and communities to emergency management decision makers across the sector.*

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE – SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

Prior to 30 June 2019, the department monitored compliance of Victorian-registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers under the Victorian quality safeguards working arrangements for transition.

From 1 July 2019, Victorian quality and safeguards arrangements continue to apply for state funded clients and disability service providers involved in the transfer of Victorian Government services. In all other circumstances, registered NDIS providers must comply with the requirements of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

Supporting the emergency planning capabilities of NDIS providers is important. The Department of Health and Human Services currently assists the health and community service sectors, including disability providers, in their emergency management planning by providing the *Preparing for emergencies: A reference guide for organisations in the Health and Community Services Sectors*. This guide provides information and resources to support the sector to plan for and effectively respond to external emergencies.

Local collaboration and connection with individuals and communities in the development of the municipal and community emergency management plans will provide a crucial opportunity to promote the range of services and tools available to support people who face greater risk, and their carers and families, in their planning for emergencies, such as the Australian Red Cross RediPlan and programs run by emergency services.

With the support of the emergency services and community service sector, DHHS is developing options for sector-wide consideration to reduce risk, ensure appropriate emergency management planning by the health and human services sector, and promote local planning and identification of supports by individuals who face greater risk, their families and their local communities to prepare for emergencies.

GOVERNANCE

Governance of the implementation of the above government response planned actions will be provided by the relevant organisations own internal project or program mechanisms. Coordination and integration of these activities to meet the intent of the IGEM's recommendations will be facilitated through local, regional and state emergency management planning arrangements.