

Appendix Q – Supporting people during extreme weather events



📌 Nick was sleeping in his usual place, unaware that the Bureau of Meteorology was sending out warnings that the area was about to be inundated with significant flooding and loss of electricity. All Nick owns is on the footpath with him and he has no wet weather gear or shelter. He doesn't know where to go for help at this hour of the night. 📌

Each person has their own unique experience and needs. It is important to understand the intersectionality between a person's gender, race, sexual identity, culture, experiences and circumstances. Workers may refer to multiple appendices to assist their understanding, engagement and support for each person they engage.

Overview

Extreme weather is any unusual, unseasonal and severe weather that has a devastating impact on people and places. Extreme weather conditions can force people into homelessness and pose a significant risk for people already experiencing homelessness.

New South Wales, including rural and regional areas, has been significantly impacted by severe flooding, bushfires, storms, extreme heat and extreme cold. These events can damage homes and personal belongings, force people into shelters, cause financial hardship, threaten a person's safety and stability and result in weather-related health conditions or even death.

People may not be prepared physically, emotionally, or financially to protect themselves from the impacts of extreme weather. In response to an extreme weather event, people may experience mental distress or shock which may also impact their ability to control their emotions or make decisions. For more information on mental distress see **Appendix J**.

Extreme weather can impact on a person's physical health. For example, some anti-psychotic medications have metabolic effects that can impair the body's ability to regulate temperature and increase the risk of overheating during extreme heat events. Extreme heat also increases the risk of dehydration, particularly for people with uncontrolled diabetes or kidney disease.

Urgent physical needs, such as protection/shelter from the weather and/or clean drinking water must also be addressed during extreme weather.

People experiencing homelessness face additional challenges during extreme weather including:

- exposure to the weather
- limited access to public health warnings and messages
- extended travel between sleeping spots and emergency accommodation
- lack of storage facilities or protective equipment
- damage to personal belongings including clothing, blankets and other items
- disconnection from community.

People may face several barriers to accessing support as there is further strain on the service system during these critical times.

Workers must have a good understanding of emergency response protocols for different weather events. Workers are asked to use discretion and work with a person to address their physical and emotional needs during these circumstances.

Agencies, departments, organisations and business are encouraged to develop a local extreme weather guide with relevant stakeholders, including people with disability¹. The guides should provide details of the available resources and services in the area including:

- safe places to go/stay in various extreme weather conditions
- accessible drinking water
- public toilets
- free bus routes
- free electronic device charging stations
- doctors who bulk bill
- areas of free Wi-Fi coverage
- weather information sources.

NSW emergency management plans are updated regularly. For information on the most up to date plan visit: <http://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au>

The NSW State Emergency Services (SES) provide a number of resources to assist during extreme weather. Examples include safety tips during and after a flood and severe storm ([During a Flood Fact Sheet](#), [After a Flood Fact Sheet](#)).

Engagement strategy

Things to consider before engaging:

- Extreme weather events can trigger or exacerbate a person's trauma, mental health, or physical health conditions; therefore, workers should provide a trauma-informed response.
- Ensure workers have up to date emergency information to maintain safety and assist others to stay safe.
- Assess safety risks in the surrounding environment and engage appropriate services as required (i.e. SES, police).

- Be familiar with local amenities and services that can assist during extreme weather events.

Strategies for engagement:

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner, stating your name and the agency/organisation you work for.
- Remain calm and empathetic, using trauma-informed engagement principles and respect throughout the interaction.
- Address urgent physical needs by handing out water bottles, warm clothes, wet weather gear and other needed items as appropriate. Where possible, this includes providing supplies in advance of known weather events.
- Work with the person to identify what type of help or support is needed and when to provide the support.
- Support people to connect to available services such as evacuation centres, accommodation services and medical care.
- Increase flexibility in the provision of support and assistance to ensure a person's safety and wellbeing is addressed. This may require discretion and seeking out-of-guidelines approvals where necessary.

If the person is showing signs of being unwell, or is injured, then call **Triple Zero (000)** / emergency services.

Best practice example

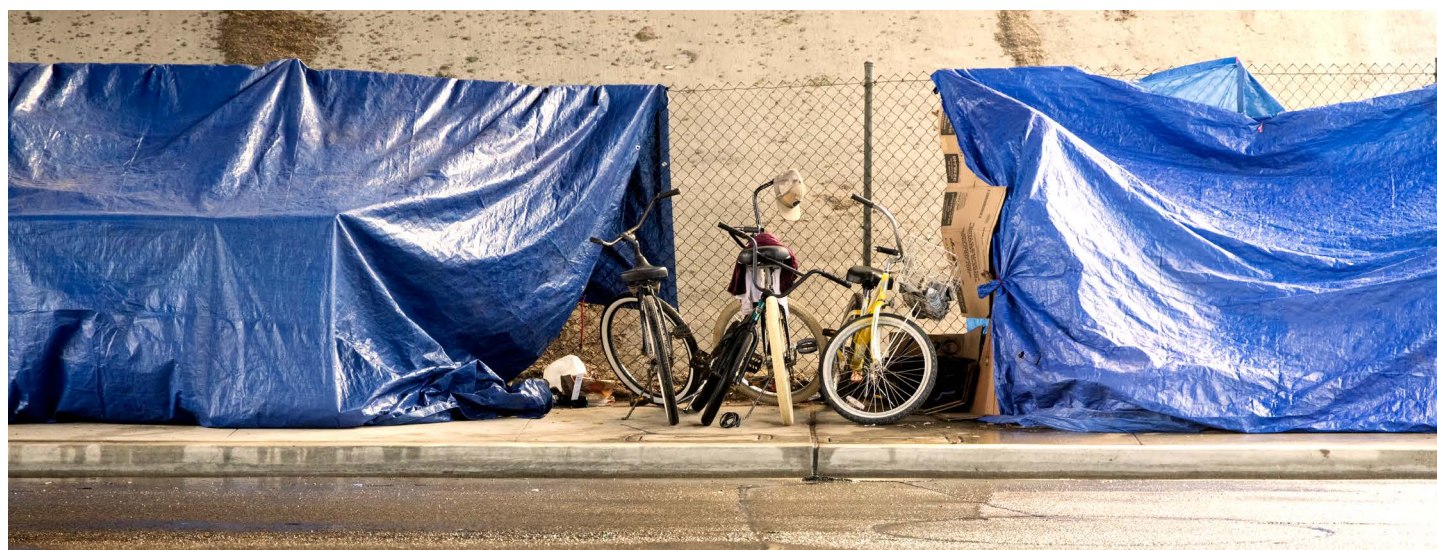
The City of Sydney in collaboration with the Department of Communities and Justice developed the *Inner City Emergency Response Protocol* which provides instructions on how to assist people experiencing homelessness in the local area during extreme weather events. This is activated during severe storms, flooding, extreme heat, cold and other emergencies such as disruptions to power, transport and security. Other local areas may look to develop their own alert system with dedicated strategies specific to local needs.

RESOURCES

CRISIS SUPPORT

Name	Service	Contact Details
Ask Izzy	A website directory that connects people who are in need with nearby services such as housing, food, health care and legal services in their local area.	Website: https://askizzy.org.au
Link2Home	A statewide telephone service providing information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness services, temporary accommodation and other appropriate services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week every day of the year.	Phone: 1800 152 152 Website: https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless

OTHER SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
Australian Red Cross	Practical help and resources to use before, during and after emergencies.	Phone: 1800 733 276 Email: contactus@redcross.org.au Website: https://redcross.org.au/emergencies
Local Government Directory	Local councils across NSW represent the interests of their communities and deliver local services and infrastructure. This directory provides the contact details to connect to the local council.	Website: https://olg.nsw.gov.au/public/local-government-directory
NSW Health	Provides information and instructions about ways to prevent weather related illnesses.	Website: https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/emergency_preparedness/weather/Pages/storms-and-floods.aspx
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	National Parks and Wildlife Services manage more than 890 national parks and reserves including plant and animal conservation, fire management, sustainable tourism and visitation, research, education, volunteering programs, upgrading infrastructure and more.	Website: https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au
NSW State Emergency Services (SES)	Provides guidance on how to plan, evacuate and recover from extreme weather conditions. SES provide information on extreme weather conditions in each local area and road closures	Phone: 132 500 Website: https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au
OzHarvest	Provides state-wide food rescue and relief for people in need.	Phone: 1800 108 006 Email: info@ozharvest.org Website: https://www.ozharvest.org/contact-us
Service NSW	Government initiatives and resources are available for people impacted by natural disaster.	Phone: 13 77 88 Website: https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/contact-us



- i University Centre for Rural Health (UCRH), [Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Emergency Planning and Response](#), UCRH, 2020.
- ii State Emergency Services (SES), [What's your plan?](#), State Emergency Services website, 2022.