

## Concepts and principles of health and disaster management

### Speed read

- Disasters create situations where the health system is stretched to a point where 'business as usual' is no longer adequate in providing services to the community.
- The main goal is to make sure that disruption to the services that underpin good health is minimised and wellbeing in communities restored.
- The health sector is the lead in some disasters, including, pandemic, depending on local jurisdictional arrangements.

### Key points

**The major focus of disaster health management is the primacy of life and the protection and recovery of community wellbeing.**

**Health and disaster management requires an all-hazards approach.** While some hazards require specific measures, having an all hazards approach to disaster health arrangements provides the foundation to manage any disaster including catastrophic and unforeseen disasters.

**Health and disaster management needs to be integrated.** A whole of community approach is essential to making sure good health outcomes are achieved. A significant proportion of hospitals are in the private sector, meaning that most community-based health care is not under the direct control of state governments.

**Managing health requires a multi-disciplinary, all-agency approach.** An approach that recognises governments, healthcare services, healthcare workers, non-government organisations and communities should all be coordinated in their contribution to disaster management and building disaster resilience.

**Coordination and cooperation between the three levels of government and across agencies and departments at each level is required in managing health risks and achieving sustained community wellbeing in disasters.** This applies across all activities and is particularly important during the disaster response phase where time and resources are limited and when agency and sector plans should be integrated.

**Health and disaster management requires risk management.** Most health risks can be managed by routine operations and practices such as screening high risk people, general immunisation programs, and health professionals attending crowded places and mass gatherings. Other risks may require organisations to work together in a non-routine way.

**Health and disaster management is complex.** The health system is a complex, global web of infrastructure, technologies and supply chains. Community reliance on, and expectations about, the provision of products and services can be high and tolerance of system failures low..

## In the health sector the most commonly used incident management system is Major Incident Medical Management and Support (MIMMS)

### Prevention

Disaster prevention in health is often contained in other policy fields such as transport safety, hazardous material storage or building standards. Activities in these areas reduce the likelihood of major health related adverse events. Prevention and mitigation activities may also include:

- Vaccinations
- Early warning systems
- Disease surveillance
- The design of facilities such as clinics, hospitals and nursing homes
- Safe working environments and security risk management such as biological and radiological controls.

### Preparedness

Preparedness activities may include:

- Development of health structures and systems that identify interdependencies and support arrangements
- Education, training of health care workers and managers through regular exercises
- Identification, evaluation and prepositioning of equipment required by the health system in a disaster
- Security of the supply chain of equipment, such as syringes, sutures, face masks etc.
- Immediate preparedness includes standing up operation centres, activating Memorandums of Understanding, forward positioning of resources and alerting appropriate staff.

### Planning

- A disaster health plan is a roadmap to run an organisation or part of an organisation in a non-routine way when business as usual is not an option.
- A clinic in a country town will have a different plan to a major tertiary hospital, but the planning principles are the same.
- Use a generic approach to health disaster planning so health plans are compatible with other emergency and disaster plans.

### Response

Response activities may include:

- Provide warning messages and public information
- Limit the threat from source of risk e.g. quarantine areas
- Expand normal services to meet the increased demand for health care (disaster surge)
- Provide health services including psychosocial support to displaced persons
- Situation awareness and reporting

### Recovery

The early and ongoing involvement of healthcare services is essential to ensure that health needs are effectively incorporated into the recovery activities. An important part of post disaster health activities is providing general practice and other primary care services, including ongoing management of existing physical and mental health conditions.

# Quick Guide



Australian Government  
National Emergency  
Management Agency



Australian Institute for  
Disaster Resilience

## Take action

- Find your state or territory health plans in the Health and Disaster Management Handbook (AIDR 2019) page 41: [www.knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/health-and-disaster-management-handbook](http://www.knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/health-and-disaster-management-handbook)

## More information

- [Health and Disaster Management Handbook](#) (AIDR 2019)
- [Australian Government Department of Health](#)
- [Australasian Major Incident Medical Management Support system](#)
- [Standards Australia, AS4083-2010 Planning for emergencies – Health care facilities](#)