Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

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Scoping Report: Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

Version for external circulation

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About this report

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) is the custodian of the Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection ('Handbook Collection'). The Handbook Collection provides guidance on national principles and good practices for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), resilience, and recovery, with preparedness for effective response considered part of DRR. The Handbook Collection is aligned to the strategies and capabilities outlined in the National DRR Framework the Second National Action Plan, the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework, the Australian Disaster Recovery Framework, and the National Emergency Management Agency's Strategic Intent. Given the importance accorded to community-based risk reduction in the policy frameworks, and the growing number and diversity of stakeholders working in the disaster management sector, a scoping project to establish the foundations for community-based risk reduction guidance is a priority for AIDR.

The purpose of this report is to identify current and emerging trends in community-based DRR and resilience (nationally in Australia and internationally) and form findings and recommendations to determine potential uses of new or related guidance. The research scoping process included identification and engagement of stakeholders and subject matter experts to explore the Guidance theme, defined and commissioned by AIDR. The report aims to provide the conceptual foundation to develop principles-based guidance on community-based DRR and resilience in Australia. Recommendations from this project will inform the outputs needed to address gaps in guidance for community-based risk reduction, including guidance for better integration of initiatives and community-led action to optimise the opportunities those efforts provide.

The intended audience for the Guidance informed by this report are people responsible for developing policies, capabilities and guidance within their own jurisdictions, organisations and communities, including Commonwealth, state, territory and local government departments, emergency management and non-government organisations. The audience may also include community groups, educators, researchers, planners, businesses and the private sector.

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Key terms

The following list of terms uses the Australian Disaster Resilience Glossary where available, with AIDR's sources noted where relevant. The list highlights key terms commonly used in this report, for reference. Other key terms are explained throughout.

Capacity: The combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within an organisation, community or society to manage and reduce disaster risks and strengthen resilience. Capacity may include infrastructure, institutions, human knowledge and skills, and collective attributes such as social relationships, leadership and management. *(AIDR)*

Community: A social group with a commonality of association and generally defined by location, shared experience or function, and with a number of things in common such as culture, heritage, language, ethnicity, pastimes, occupation or workplace. *(AIDR)*

Community-based / focused: For the purposes of this research, community-based and community-focused refers to initiatives run with direct interaction and consultation with communities.

Community-led: For the purposes of this research, community-led refers to initiatives run with direct interaction and consultation with communities, that also contain ways for communities to design approaches, priorities, goals, define needs and lead decision-making related to the initiative.

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts. Note, there are jurisdictional legislative variations. *(AIDR)*

Disaster Risk: The potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets which could occur to a system, society or a community in a specific period of time, determined probabilistically as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity. The definition of disaster risk reflects the concept of hazardous events and disasters as the outcome of continuously present conditions of risk. Disaster risk comprises different types of potential losses which are often difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, with knowledge of the prevailing hazards and the patterns of population and socioeconomic development, disaster risks can be assessed and mapped, in broad terms at least. It is important to consider the social and economic contexts in which disaster risks occur and that people do not necessarily share the same perceptions of risk and their underlying risk factors. *(UNDRR via AIDR)*

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR): DRR is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development. DRR is the policy objective of disaster risk management, and its goals and objectives are defined in DRR strategies and plans. *(UNDRR via AIDR)*

Emergency: An event, actual or imminent, which endangers or threatens to endanger life, property or the environment, and which requires a significant and coordinated response. Note, there are jurisdictional legislative variations. *(AIDR)*

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Resilience: The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management. *(UNDRR via AIDR)*

Social capital: Social capital refers to the networks that connect individuals to each other either through weak or strong ties. These connections provide information, reliable data on the trustworthiness of the other network members, and access to resources. Research has identified three distinct types of social capital—bonding, bridging, and linking (more details throughout the report).

Systemic risk: Systemic risks emerge from the interactions of climate change and natural hazards, with the complex, interdependent and interconnected networks of social, technical, environmental, and economic systems. These risks are not necessarily obvious using traditional hazard-by-hazard risk assessments and revealing them requires an understanding of the degree of magnitude of failure across these systems that could suddenly or gradually exceed society's capacity to cope. *(AIDR)*

Vulnerability: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards. For positive factors which increase the ability of people to cope with hazards. *(UNDRR via AIDR)*

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Summary introduction

"I'm a big believer that more knowledge shared allows more opportunity for power to be shared."

This quote from an expert interviewed in this scoping research speaks to both the opportunities and challenges when contemplating national guidelines for community-based DRR and resilience. The title words 'community,' 'risk reduction' and 'resilience' reach us immediately into areas outside formal emergency management systems, beyond compartmentalised, top-down approaches and into complex and dynamic systems of knowledge, power, relationships and resources. It is unsurprising then, that this scoping research to inform guidance grapples with tensions and contradictions. The findings outline the need for consistency and cohesiveness in language and principles around community-based action but push against over-standardisation and loss of contextualisation that is incompatible with genuine community-led approaches. Practitioners and communities seek to measure community capital and be counted in frameworks that guide emergency management but rightly fear the simplification and quantification of community relationships into data. Community development, transdisciplinary and ecosystem approaches are referenced as fundamental for integration of community-based approaches in emergency management, while at the same time we struggle against confining community-based approaches to tools, roles, hierarchies and methods.

A fundamental challenge that presents itself from findings in this report is whether to design guidance for an aspirational emergency management system that is inclusive of and conducive to community-based approaches, or the current system that is not. The solution this report proposes through its recommendations is to work with practitioners and stakeholders to design guidance that *bridges* both states, building on the wealth of knowledge and practice in Australia that already exists in community-based and led approaches. To achieve this bridge, forming guidance that can act as a tool for advocacy as well as practice, is essential, and creating content that is accessible, two-way and represents the realities of different users (including people working or volunteering within current emergency management arrangements) is key.

Based on the findings in this report, characteristics of the current emergency management system (to bridge *from* in guidance) include top-down, siloed arrangements and approaches that centralise power, resources and knowledge and build from arbitrarily defined compartmentalisations out to communities (for example, specific hazards, isolated phases of emergencies, or based on government departments). Characteristics described in findings of aspirational systems of emergency management (to bridge *towards* in guidance, and which currently exist in excellent pockets of community-based initiatives but are not systemic or sustained), include ecosystemic, adaptable, community-led systems that hold and share knowledge, power and resources within and between local levels, with government and agencies working alongside communities in tune with their adaptive capacities (not communities alone). A clear building block identified in this report is for guidance to reflect the current realities across the spectrum of community participation, to facilitate better understanding, transparency and accountability in community-based action in emergency management. A community-led approach to emergency management will not be the right fit for every community, nor every individual, and to suppose as such goes against ecosystemic understanding of communities.

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AIDR is the custodian of a knowledge hub that is well positioned to facilitate collaboration and co-design with community-based practitioners across disciplines to form guidance that looks to cultural and systemic changes, not just practice changes. While considerable challenges and tensions related to community-led approaches in emergency management are reflected in this report, it also highlights existing threads of commonality and opportunities in knowledge sharing, particularly in the interest of furthering epistemic justice related to knowledge about community-based practices. The formation of guidance on community-based resilience and risk reduction (and emergency management generally) can be bolstered by motivations that are shared across the emergency management sector: to support communities to be resilient to shocks and stressors, to recognise the commitment of community leaders and groups in building community resilience in the way they know best, and to nurture systems that better navigate climate crisis and community disruptions.

Methodology

The review used two main methods of investigation, namely, a literature review of guidance, tools, research and policy surrounding community-based disaster risk-reduction and resilience in Australia and internationally, and key informant interviews with 19 practitioners from a range of government bodies and jurisdictions, emergency service organisations, community organisations and individuals in communities leading resilience and/or recovery efforts. The lines of inquiry were:

1. What are the existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the literature and guidance related to community-based disaster risk-reduction and resilience, and how should this inform future development of AIDR's guidance?
2. How should future iterations of community-based disaster risk-reduction and resilience guidance and literature be integrated and linked with other relevant resources and frameworks?

This review assumes a level of knowledge of emergency management, DRR and resilience disciplines, in that it does not give context for or interrogate the fundamentals of those disciplines, in favour of spending time and space on including schools of thought that are particularly relevant to community-led approaches and are typically less considered in emergency management guidance.

Conceptual framework

Interviews and literature review used a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis framework to investigate the themes outlined below. Strengths refers to existing positive factors related to the themes below, Weaknesses refers to existing negative factors, Opportunities refers to potential or emerging positive factors and Threats refers to potential or emerging negative factors.

Knowledge and shared practices. The review aimed to identify what knowledge and shared practices are typically covered in guidance and tools related to community-based DRR and resilience, and what content is missing or needs improvement or updating. Content types considered factual knowledge (measurable, observable and verifiable data, including case studies), conceptual knowledge (relating to perspectives and systems), expectational knowledge (developing or sharing knowledge rooted in expectations, hypotheses or judgement) and methodological knowledge (dealing with decision making, problem solving and processes and procedures). The review also considered timeliness,

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accuracy and relevance of the content for diverse audiences (also see the *Dissemination and accessibility* theme below).

Systems and power dynamics. Knowledge sharing and development and adoption of principles and ways of working does not happen in a vacuum but is shaped and influenced by external factors including norms, existing institutional systems and broader social, economic, political and environmental conditions. Therefore, this review aimed to capture relevant and current contextual issues that interact with community-based disaster risk-reduction and resilience initiatives and considered how power dynamics of stakeholders and advocacy between 'levels' of stakeholders plays a role in knowledge sharing and guidance. This theme became an extensive focus by key informant interviewees in semi-structured interviews.

Capacity, capability and relationships of stakeholders. The review included an exploration of who is currently involved in creating, sharing, seeking and accessing knowledge and guidance related to community-based disaster risk-reduction and resilience in Australia. This includes understanding who is involved in defining standards and guidance and who is missing from that conversation. This review also considered current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to capacity and capability building related to community-based DRR and resilience initiatives, and the way that interacts with guidance and tools. The scope and available methodologies for this short review means the exploration of this theme was not exhaustive, nor representative, but provides some initial insights with limitations. Surveying with a representative sample is recommended in future research/scoping.

Dissemination and accessibility. The review included an evaluation of dissemination and accessibility of resources and knowledge sharing related to community-based disaster risk-reduction and resilience in Australia, within a small scope. The scope included questions to key informant interviewees, and a review of literature regarding basic components of accessibility such as:

- Where / how the literature is held (digital, physical copies, available through multiple channels)
- Cost (paywalled / resources only accessible through paid services)
- Language (other than English)
- Literacy (suitable for differing levels of literacy, including digital literacy)
- Engagement (whether the content is presented in an engaging way for diverse audiences, whether it is linked to accessible, two-way communication accompanying the resource)
- Representation (whether diverse audiences would feel represented in the content)

Literature review

Community-based DRR and resilience sits within the intersection of a range of disciplines, including community development, disaster management, humanitarian response, and climate adaptation. Therefore, the potential scope of literature was significant. The literature sampling strategy included guidance and referrals from AIDR's Knowledge Development team, guidance and referrals from key informants during the interview process, and flexible criteria aimed at covering a range of literature across disciplines, and across both Australian and international authors / sources.

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Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with 19 people between January and March 2025. Interviewees were placed into three categories: (1) community-based practitioners (either individuals leading / participating in initiatives in their own communities and / or people working or volunteering with grass-roots community organisations); (2) individuals working with formalised community or emergency management organisations, with regular, direct contact with communities; and (3) individuals working at state / federal government departments and / or at a policy or academic level. Three people in Category 1 (community), 10 people in Category 2 (community facing), and 6 people in Category 3 (policy, government, academic) were interviewed.

Interviews went for 1 – 1.5 hours and followed an illustrative set of questions provided to interviewees prior to the interview, with flexibility according to the thematic areas identified as important by the interviewee. Following the development of draft Findings, Recommendations and Context section, all interviewees were sent the draft version and offered the opportunity to provide feedback in the form of a conversation or written comments. Nine interviewees responded with feedback.

Limitations

This research is subject to several limitations. First, the data collection methodologies relied on key informant interviews and literature review, which, while valuable for obtaining expert insights and synthesising existing knowledge, do not capture the perspectives of a broader and more diverse group of stakeholders. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences, concerns, and priorities of individuals and communities directly affected by the issues discussed.

Second, the selection of key informants was not wholly representative of Australian communities, particularly those disproportionately impacted by disasters and climate change. This limitation means that the voices of at-risk and marginalised groups has not been adequately incorporated into the analysis, particularly, critically people / practitioners from or working directly in remote and First Nations communities. Consequently, the project may lack a comprehensive understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to how these populations participate in community-led DRR and resilience initiatives.

Despite these limitations, themes emerged with great consistency across the semi-structured interviews with experts working or volunteering across different facets of community-based emergency management. This overlapping of themes supports the scoping study's main objective by indicating a level of expert unanimity in the findings. However, the findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind, and future research should prioritise more inclusive and participatory approaches, such as community-based research, broader surveys, and focus group discussions, to ensure a more representative range of perspectives and expertise.

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Context: current and emerging trends in literature

Over the past ten years, exposure of people and assets to disasters has increased faster than vulnerability has decreased. Within this exposure and vulnerability, new risks generate significant economic, social, health, cultural and environmental impacts in the short, medium and long term, especially at the local and community levels[1]. Rapid and significant changes in the nature and intensity of disasters mean that historical experience cannot always serve as a reliable indicator for future threats.

Within disaster management arrangements and literature, it is widely recognised that communities are central to reducing their own risk to disasters, relying on their localised knowledge and capacity. Many communities (linked by place, shared values and / or common interests) have always done this, outside of frameworks and policy, and regardless of integration with disaster management arrangements. Community-led approaches - that have always been the reality for communities - are maturing in formal emergency management spaces, with emphasis on community involvement in DRR in the Sendai Framework further prompting national governments to integrate community-centric initiatives into their strategies[2]. With increased recognition of the centrality of communities in humanitarian and emergencies work globally, the concept of community engagement is more embedded, but barriers to community entry into decision-making (particularly for at-risk and marginalised communities) are still high[3].

In the Australian context, formal and documented government resourcing of community-based DRR started with the Emergency Management Victoria supported Harrietville Resilience Project in 2014, and Australian Red Cross' RediCommunities program in 2015. Within the five years between the release of Australia's National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (NDRRF)[4] in 2018 and the Second National Action Plan to implement the NDRRF in 2023, reference to community-led approaches increased considerably. From almost no mention of community-driven or led work within national DRR strategies in 2018, community-led practices are now specifically encouraged under Priority 2 (aimed at improving accountable and risk-informed decision-making); Priority 3 (aimed at enhancing investment in DRR); Priority 4 (aimed at improving governance to support DRR), and supported in Priority 1 (understanding disaster risk) with community / local inclusion in knowledge building[5].

Over the past decade and increasingly in the past five years, Australian emergency services organisations, non-government organisations, community organisations and groups, local government and enterprises and consultants have worked with communities to support community resilience and self-organising initiatives. Out of these efforts, a wealth of guidance and literature has

[1] UNDRR, Sendai Framework for DRR, 2015-2030.

[2] Matharage et al., Empowering Communities: A Bottom-Up Approach to DRR, 2024

[3] Geekiyanage et al., Assessing the state of the art in community engagement for participatory decision-making in disaster risk-sensitive urban development, 2020

[4] Australian Government National Emergency Management Agency, National DRR Framework, 2023

[5] Australian Government National Emergency Management Agency, Second National Action Plan, 2023

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been developed that aims to help communities use local resources in a risk-management approach to prepare for, respond and recover from disasters.

The following contextual section summarises key concepts that emerge in contemporary research, policies and plans, case studies, evaluations, and Australian Royal Commissions and Inquiries related to community-based and led DRR and resilience. These concepts were foundational for key informant interview discussions and the development of findings and recommendations.

Risk reduction and resilience

Australia's emergency management arrangements are generally accepted as strong, with well understood principles that refer to emergency management being the core responsibility of state and territory governments. However, these perceptions and understandings continue to evolve in the face of increasing intensity and frequency of emergencies. According to a 2024 Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding, communities now expect a far greater emphasis on risk reduction and resilience from leaders within the disaster management community.[6] The review also found that increasing upfront investments in risk reduction and resilience can cause a downward trend on the trajectory of response and recovery costs. The investigation modelled an investment of $11.8 billion in 2023-24, increasing to $40.3 billion in 2049-50.

Contemporary literature considers how we understand and measure resilience, and multiple frameworks for conceptualising resilience have emerged. Some focus on the intrinsic capacity of a community or society to resist and recover, while others emphasise adaptability of communities in the face of potential hazards. For example, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines resilience as the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner. The Australian Disaster Resilience Index and Australian Red Cross measures a set of coping and adaptive capacities, with coping capacity referring to how available resources and abilities can be used to face adverse consequences that could lead to a disaster, and adaptive capacity referring to the arrangements and processes that enable adjustment through learning, adaptation and transformation. At Red Cross, adaptive capacity is assessed through four lenses: connection, knowledge, security and wellbeing.

Disaster research has long recognised that communities regularly work together to survive and recover from catastrophic impacts[7], and that beyond formal rescue operations, communities (geographic or connected via other commonalities) and informal networks often serve as first responders in times of disaster. Literature emphasises the diversity of experiences, concepts, and paradigms that inform community-based DRR and resilience initiatives[8]. For communities as the subject of community resilience, who exist within this diversity across disciplines and paradigms (including paradigms defined for them by the emergency management sector), an inclusive and flexible model is required to adapt to varying scales and local conditions.

[6] Colvin, A., Independant Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding, 2024
[7] Aldrich, D., Meyer, M., Social capital and community resilience, 2014
[8] Boston, M. et al, Community resilience: A multidisciplinary exploration for inclusive strategies and scalable solutions, 2024

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Literature considers how community resilience paradigms have and continue to evolve, namely:

- From an equilibrium or 'bounce back / better' paradigm focused on a system's ability to absorb the impact of a disaster while maintaining or returning to functionality.
- to an adaptation paradigm which recognises change as a positive response to a disturbance, an ongoing change or adjustment to the system, achieved by identifying and addressing vulnerabilities by increasing the adaptive capacity.
- to a transformation paradigm, which refers to complete change to a system or community to address vulnerabilities and inequalities without an endpoint, or without reaching equilibrium.

Interviewees for this scoping project generally indicated that current DRR and resilience guidance sits within either equilibrium or adaptation paradigms, while high level frameworks still tend to be stuck in equilibrium notions of resilience. Based on interviewee perspectives, a transformation paradigm is conducive to community-led resilience but is currently the least explored in frameworks and guidance.

Some literature argues that resilience is better understood as an organisational structure, rather than as an adaptive capacity model. Specifically, some literature explores resilience as structure in neoliberal societies used to conceal hierarchical power relations and justify forms of governance that emphasise responsible conduct, creating subjects capable of adapting to and exploiting situations of uncertainty[9]. The type of resilience initiatives that could act as a concept for governable spaces emphasise notions such as individual preparedness, making informed decisions and understanding roles and responsibilities. Notions of 'shared responsibility' evident in (for example) the 2018 National DRR Framework as well as the 2023 Second National Action Plan are rarely well-defined and emphasise individual responsibility at the community level and result in diffused responsibility and low accountability[10]. In a conversation hosted by AIDR in 2019, former Director-General of Emergency Management Australia, Mark Crosweller, discussed intention versus reality in disaster resilience, noting that in reality:

Individualistic (neoliberal) approaches aim to de-couple reduction in vulnerability and increases in adaptive capacity and instead foreground self-managed individual resilience as the means to address climate risk.

Mark Crosweller AFSM, 2019

Based on the literature review and interviews with experts, there is a strong indication that current guidance and policy in Australia are successful in defining and presenting frameworks for community resilience. However, as the findings of this report will explore, there are few examples of those frameworks effectively being embedded in or informing the wider emergency management system to the degree that community-*led* resilience approaches shape decision making. There is also little evidence of community-based DRR / resilience guidance or frameworks in Australia that question disaster resilience paradigms, for example, in the interest of acknowledging and exploring how community-led practices may be at odds with resilience as governmentality and therefore be fundamentally at an impasse.

[9] Joseph, J., Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach, 2013

[10] Maguire, R., et al, The Conversation, 2022

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Social capital and resilience

By design we are anti-community – disconnected, individualistic. A lot of community initiatives are about moving against this.

Key informant interview, 2025

Social capital enhances disaster resilience through the fostering of networks and relationships that facilitate community-level preparedness, response, and recovery. Data showing that our ties to other people influences if we survive and thrive during crisis events is increasingly evident in resilience research. Connection enables communities to mobilise resources efficiently and engage in collective action, thereby strengthening capacity to navigate crises[11]. Social connections exist at multiple levels, from households to communities, to all levels of government and across businesses and institutions. Communities that maintain both horizontal connections (within communities) and vertical ties (to government institutions) are better positioned to recover from disasters. Leveraging social networks for support and assistance fosters collaboration towards shared goals, a key element in building resilience against diverse adversities.

Research around the 2019–20 Australian bushfires showed that stronger social identification, continuity of group ties, and the formation of new connections improved community outcomes[12]. Most key informant interviewees participating in this scoping study referenced social capital as being a key component for community-based DRR and resilience work, with many specifically referencing the work of Professor Daniel Aldrich referenced here. In Aldrich's earlier research more than a decade ago, interventions named as strengthening social capital include time banking, focus groups, community events, and redesigning physical spaces to promote social interactions. Many case studies exploring community-based DRR and resilience include these interventions or similar, and various frameworks and guidance in Australia and internationally provide mandates and tools using methodologies that cultivate social capital through networks, trust building, and cooperation. Some experts interviewed, and notably (typically) those within or working closely with disaster affected communities, indicate that notions of social capital, and particularly those that tend towards transactional structures (such as time-banking) are 'cold' and capitalistic. Experiences within communities and writings on 'warm data' that speak to the complexity of relational systems are not necessarily at odds with findings in social capital research, but are nevertheless opposed to community relationships being reduced to tools, methods, role and hierarchies.

Barriers to community relationships or social capital being centred within DRR and resilience that explored across literature include social exclusion, governance structures not being conducive to community centring, and inconsistency, inflexibility and lack of adaptability in resilience strategies. Addressing these challenges related to community relationships and social capital in DRR / resilience guidance or tools first requires recognition of who controls and makes decisions related to those barriers within the unique social, economic, and political contexts of different communities, followed by ensuring guidance and tools are targeted at those barriers.

[11] Visave, J., Aldrich, D., The role of social capital in strengthening community resilience against floods: A case study of Mumbai, India, 2025
[12] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Aldrich, D., New tactics for a new era: how emergency management needs to change, 2024

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From equity and inclusion to decolonised and anti-racist approaches

Equity and inclusion are themes regularly explored across community resilience literature, with resilience plans and guidance often highlighting the need to consider all voices in a community and recognise that vulnerability and resilience are experienced differently by different people[13]. Policy, research and some guidance related to community-led DRR, and resilience notes the cruciality of involving extensive networks that reach and include marginalised and at-risk people within communities. Specifically, researchers note the growing awareness that resilience community engagement practices and policy development need to incorporate First Nations knowledge. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the National Disaster Resilience Strategy and New Zealand's Ministry for the Environment mandate working with Māori communities to ensure the First Nations cultural view is included[14]. Researchers note a growing awareness that incorporating First Nations perspectives in disaster resilience strategies is essential to define and assess community resilience.

Internationally, guidance and research has begun to shift from the often-critiqued diversity, equity and inclusion approaches to linking decolonised and anti-racist approaches to concepts of localisation in humanitarian response[15]. For example, the Start Network – a global network of non-governmental organisations made up of more than 50 national and international aid agencies – produced an Anti-Racist and Decolonial Framework in recognition that the humanitarian sector has its roots in colonial systems and structures and that systemic racism continues to prevail in societies. Within Australia, where the emergency management system echoes global command-control structures of humanitarian response, and where governance and social structures are also built from colonial systems, there is little evidence of decolonial, and anti-racist approaches embedded in guidance and frameworks related to community-based DRR and resilience as of early 2025.

Complexity and systems thinking

Discussions around community-led DRR and resilience inevitably lead to discussions about the need for systems thinking and change. Specifically, within emergency management, but as this section will explore, also across and within a transdisciplinary or transcontextual approach to community resilience. Research, policy and guidance regularly refer to and explore complex and dynamic systems related to DRR and resilience, but findings from this scoping study indicate that challenges persist in actually changing or building systems to suit that complexity. In 2018, the former Emergency Management Australia (now the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)) grappled with this concept in a report outlining their approach, methods and results for co-producing a systems understanding of disasters (a technical report accompanying the development of the Australian Vulnerability Profile with CSIRO). In his forward, Mark Crosweller said:

[14] Boston, M. et al, Community resilience: A multidisciplinary exploration for inclusive strategies and scalable solutions, 2024

[15] Patel, S., Humanitarian Practice Network, 2021

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There is limited knowledge or understanding, not only amongst decision-makers but also the public, of how these complex and highly dynamic systems interact and the cascading impacts when one or other part of the system fails or is disrupted. Also, there is little knowledge about the patterns within them that can build resilience and reduce vulnerability.

Mark Crosweller AFSM, 2018

Every expert interviewed as part of the scoping study mentioned or referenced the need for more complex, comprehensive, adaptive systems thinking and/or for there to be actual change of structures and guidance to reflect that kind of thinking. All experts interviewed referred to that shift as being central to any success or progress in relation to community-led DRR and resilience. However, conversations with interviewees about their actual experiences working and living within systems also tended to qualify how systems thinking / approaches are described in research, pointing out that systems thinking can end up functioning as a form of reductionism. Based on expert interviews, community-led approaches align with concepts of *complexity thinking* appropriate for complex interdependencies of community, which - as Jelenko Dragisic recently wrote *"calls for an ethical reorientation, beginning not with the system, but with our entanglement within it"*, as opposed to a position of distance and presumed neutrality that systems thinking brings. Interviewees refer to experiences or knowledge of change as more akin to ecological processes, as opposed to change driven by legislation or policy (in fact, law and policy often preserve the status quo or makes matters better for some and worse for others).

More inclusive and complex systems thinking is understood to be critical for approaches that are more inclusive of communities, that in themselves have complex systems (for example social, governance, knowledge and information sharing systems). Critically, within Australia (as well as many post-colonial countries), it should be acknowledged that our jurisdiction systems (governance, legal, political, social, emergency management) do not align structurally with First Nation perspectives and systems. This lack of alignment and capacity for systems change or more complex systems thinking directly challenges community-led DRR and resilience efforts with those groups and causes significant loss in integration or positive disruption based on First Nations leadership, culture and knowledge.

Lessons learned from Fire to Flourish (a long-term community impact program providing direct support to communities as the first and last responders to disasters) shows that thinking and acting systemically is a powerful mindset and skill set for communities. In the initial Fire to Flourish Lessons learned in activation[16], practitioners note that systems thinking enabled unpacking of persistent challenges and identification of transformative solutions rather than 'band-aid fixes' (which links back to preferences mentioned above for transformative paradigms for resilience, not adaptive or equilibrium paradigms). The program identified that systems thinking comes naturally to many community members, but that people feel disempowered when the systems change they have sought and worked for seems too great or beyond reach. Mitigations developed for this include the linking of systems mapping approaches with collective re-imagining of a hopeful future, and by unpacking different scales of influence to help communities decide where and when they want to have a voice and a role in seeking change.

[16] Fire to Flourish, Lessons learned in its activation, 2024

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At the emergency management systems level, systems referred to as needing complexity thinking or change include the mitigation / prevention, preparedness, response, recovery (PPRR) framework, which acts as a core structure that defines how government departments plan for and manage emergencies in Australia (interacting with other key models such as the Australian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS)). The PPRR model has faced critiques for more than a decade, with experts expressing concern that the cycle does not include anticipation and assessment of risk to properly inform resilience factors. Critics also note that the model is emergency service organisation-focused rather than community centred and is limited to an emergency framing with emphasis on response and recovery rather than on the community's experiences of risk.[17]

Transdisciplinary and transcontextual approaches

DRR and resilience sit within the nexus of community development, emergency response and climate adaptation and intersect with a range of disciplines (such as science, health, gender, technology, and accountability to communities). DRR specifically can be seen as a bridge between meeting immediate needs for emergency preparedness and long-term resilience building[18]. A transdisciplinary approach can be defined as an approach in which all players and stakeholders in various disciplines (natural, social and humanity sciences) and sectors (public, private, academia and civil society) collaborate to achieve a common goal[19]. More broadly, and relevant to communities, transcontextual approaches refers to approaches that understand the interconnectedness and cross-influencing of multiple contexts, rather than working on them in isolation. Within the emergency management-focused scope of this research, this section mostly interrogates transdisciplinary approaches to provide background on the need to extend across disciplines in DRR-related guidance. Importantly, the development of guidance for communities and community-led approaches should also incorporate transcontextual thinking. Communities - even those experiencing disasters - are not confined the emergency management context, but rather exist within broad, interconnected contexts that experience shocks and stressors.

Several experts interviewed as part of this scoping study spoke of the challenges and successes of transdisciplinary/transcontextual approaches to DRR and resilience programming, noting it as necessary but structurally challenging when working within typically more siloed emergency management arrangements and funding. The 2019 Global Assessment Report on DRR noted challenges in transdisciplinary approaches, namely the difficulty for stakeholders (such as disaster managers, community leaders, scientists and organisations) to coordinate on disaster-related issues that have a level of uncertainty, and the propensity for stakeholders to prioritise their particular area of interest. Literature also notes limitations in knowledge, skills, financial resources and lack of institutional commitment and leadership as bottlenecks to transdisciplinary approaches in DRR and resilience.

[17] Holley, A., McArthur, T., AJEM: PPRR and AIIMS: a whole-of-government strategy in NSW, 2022
[18] UNDRR, Sendai Framework for DRR, 2015-2030
[19] Matsuura, S. and Razak, K.A., Global Assessment Report on DRR, 2019

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Resilience efforts to achieve transformational change require transdisciplinary approaches incorporating shared conceptual frameworks. Such efforts require that the enablers of resilience transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, share knowledge bases, and use skills from all relevant disciplines.

Boston, M., et al, Resilient Cities and Structures, 2024

Explored further in the *Findings* section, experts interviewed particularly emphasised community development as an essential discipline to community-led DRR and resilience, and one that is also more conducive to transcontextual approaches (though community development approaches are not without critiques of rigidity in some cases). Experts interviewed noted that communities transcend disciplines and contexts within their day-to-day lives, focusing more on impact and experience rather than artificially defined sectors or disciplines. Transdisciplinary and transcontextual approaches within community-led initiatives have the potential to be more conducive to communities' reality, but are often overlooked, not prioritised and rarely appropriately resourced.

Systemic risk

Over the past decade, a significant shift occurred in international disaster risk management policy and in Australia to move to systems-based approaches, as evident in major agreements like the Sendai Framework for DRR, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on climate change. This change precipitated a move from hazard-based risk reduction approaches to understanding and managing the systemic nature of risk. Key aspects of the approach include incorporating understandings of general resilience as well as preparing for specific hazards; understanding drivers of resilience and vulnerability in the face of sudden shocks or long-term changes; interconnected systems (such as human and natural systems) that can change in unpredictable ways; issues of equity, fairness and representation[20].

Systems change

Guidance and research in Australia and internationally on systems change in humanitarian / emergency management contexts often reaches into reform of different components of systems, but it is rare to find comprehensive guidance for systems change (particularly towards complexity thinking) approaches in disasters / humanitarian work. Building on a range of research and guidance from academic institutions and other humanitarian / development organisations, the Start Network began a dedicated approach to systems change in 2024, which provides insights into definitions around systems change and overall objectives[21]. This guidance resonates with some of the questions and frustrations raised during this scoping study about systems change and complexity thinking relevant to community-based DRR and resilience.

[20] Western Australia State Emergency Management Committee, Emergency Preparedness Report, 2023
[21] Start Network, Systems Change, 2024

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The Start Network defines their systems change approach as:

An intentional approach to shift the conditions that hold the current system in place. By doing so we will catalyse a shift away from the old, centrally controlled and often colonial humanitarian system to a new one, fairer and more just, that redistributes power and resources among local communities and to those directly affected by crises and disaster.

Start Network, 2024

The guidance presents a framework for change as follows:

From a system that...	To a system where...
Centralises and concentrates power and resources in a handful of dominant and self-interested organisations making key decisions far from the locus of crisis	Power and resources are concentrated in local Hubs and those directly affected by crisis making key decisions right at the locus of crisis
Prioritises accountability to donors and governments over people in crisis	Accountability structures are not linear but dynamic, reflecting the complexity of challenges, and center those communities and people directly affected by crisis and disaster
Is too reactive and funding too slow to reach those impacted by conflict and disaster	Funding for humanitarian aid is fast, flexible, equitable, and used for not just responding to crises but for anticipating and strengthening resilience
Is overly risk averse. Risk is pushed to smaller organisations without commensurate funds or support to manage risk effectively	The system as a whole takes a balanced approach to risk, sharing the risk burden equitably and with commensurate support to navigate risk effectively
Lacks demonstrated models and evidence for viable alternatives to current ways of working	Humanitarian programming shifts to a portfolio approach to experimentation that places people affected by crisis at its heart, generates alternatives to current ways of working, and focuses more on learning than outputs and KPIs.

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Knowledge and power

Local knowledge is routinely acknowledged in literature as an important resource related to DRR, resilience and community-led strategies and practices. Studies note that due to deep ties locals have with their environment, communities are uniquely positioned to offer assessments of the issues they face and also provide practical solutions[22]. Neglecting the wealth of community-specific knowledge harms communities and derails disaster management efforts to meet objectives efficiently. Priority 1 (Understanding Disaster Risk) of the Second National Action Plan[23] commits to building "*evidence, intelligence and insights by integrating local knowledge and lived experience, including traditional knowledge, to inform effective decisions*". However, in practice, there is a gap between what is acknowledged and the degree to which these approaches are embedded. Research notes this is particularly the case for Indigenous knowledge, the exclusion of which often means the emergency management sector overlooks valuable insights and practices that have been developed over time to improve resilience through adaptation[24].

A range of information and knowledge systems are relevant to community-based DRR and resilience approaches:

- Within communities (including between individuals, between households)
- Between communities
- Between communities and the emergency management system
- Between communities and the wide range of other disciplines relevant to DRR and resilience (for example, climate information, science information, health information, etcetera)
- Knowledge about communities held by emergency management system

All these information and knowledge systems are subject to power dynamics that affect how knowledge is shared, sought, defined and created. Power dynamics are fed by a range of factors including social and political frameworks (for emergency management systems, Western ones[25]) and resources (including who controls and holds the money). Critically for this scoping study, these knowledge systems impact how guidance is developed around community-based DRR and resilience, with power dynamics deciding who gets to define and describe communities, who defines resilience, who defines measurements of success and who defines objectives and agendas. Conclusions from literature about overly standardised treatment of disaster research can be similarly applied to epistemic injustices against communities in relation to guidance and knowledge sharing around DRR and resilience, and this is particularly profound within claims of community-led approaches.

How community data and knowledge is extracted, stored, used and shared outside of community is a further consideration for community-led DRR and resilience approaches. Use of digital tools to more safely and effectively collect, analyse, store and share community data to inform emergency management practices is increasing, but further consideration is needed for fair control over and access to data at a local community level. Priority 1 (Understanding Disaster Risk) of the Second National Action Plan provides implementation ideas under National Action 3: *Collaborate to harmonise and improve*

[22] Matharage, S., et al, Empowering Communities: A Bottom-Up Approach to DRR, 2024
[23] NEMA, Second National Action Plan – To implement the National DRR Framework, 2023
[24] Boston, Megan et al, Community resilience: A multidisciplinary exploration for inclusive strategies and scalable solutions, Resilient Cities and Structures, March 2024.
[25] Gaillard, JC., AJEM: The epistemological non-sense of disaster studies and some more sensible prospects, 2022

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how data, information and research is produced, shared, tailored and used to inform effective approaches to risk reduction. These ideas include creating safe platforms for sharing data; convening forums around knowledge sharing; identifying knowledge gaps and improving understanding of knowledge systems; creating tailored information products and guidance for communities; and building shared understanding to drive better use of data and evidence to support decision making.

Literature notes that measuring resilience is critical to demonstrate the impact of resilience enhancing initiatives, but few measurement frameworks exist and few have been validated in practice[26], including community-based / led initiatives. Reviews of existing frameworks notes an absence of measurement conducive to qualitative data, and consistent, comprehensive indicators, due to the fact that science and evidence underlying many models is still emerging.[27] Practitioners need practical and easily applied measurement frameworks that can link effectively between community-led practices and decision makers, including good practice that drives feedback loops back to community to let them know how their data has been used. Literature regularly notes challenges in resourcing monitoring and evaluation and promotes participatory techniques as being relatively low-cost ways to collect and validate data with community involvement and prioritise feedback loops. There are examples of tools and guidance internationally to draw from, including the 2013 Zurich Flood Resilience Measurement Tool, which has been applied at a large-scale in more than 70 communities worldwide, with consistent measuring of pre-event characteristics and post-event outcomes. Additionally, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement Community-Based DRR Monitoring Guide developed in 2013, which aims to assess changes in risk mitigation, preparedness, and response capacity as a result of Red Cross activities. However, measuring *community-led* DRR and resilience requires additional framing not only to measure and assess community resilience over time, but to evaluate and capture lessons learned and successes related to community-led approaches, and there is a significant lack of well-tested literature and guidance for this currently, in Australia and globally.

National Action 5 under Priority 1 (Understanding Disaster Risk) of the Second National Action Plan provides an outline of plans to implement the Systemic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (SysMEL) project to monitor, evaluate and measure DRR activities in Australia and link outcomes to the Sendai Framework. However, there is no evidence in the literature of planned or existing mechanisms to effectively incorporate community-led approaches into this system. National Action 5 doesn't mention participatory or community-level involvement in monitoring and evaluation of DRR, or notions of community control and leading.

Community-led approaches, participation and accountability

Concepts, definitions and principles of participation of communities are present across a wide range of literature, with more robust and developed explorations sitting outside of (but still applicable to) DRR and resilience. This includes exploration across community-led recovery, humanitarian response (internationally) and within other disciplines such as community development, local solidarity, mutual aid and advocacy movements and even citizen science.

[26] Climate Resilience Alliance, Measuring flood resilience: the Zurich Flood Resilience Measurement Tool, 2017
[27] Clark-Ginsberg, A., et al, International Journal of DRR: Practitioner approaches to measuring community resilience: The analysis of the resilience of communities to disasters toolkit, 2020

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Aligned with command-control emergency response structures, DRR has historically followed a top-down, centralised, emergency management organisation or government-led approach. According to research, top-down approaches provide efficient, controlled procedures for decision making, conducive to mobilising large resources, but these approaches discourage community involvement and local adaptation. Top-down strategies frequently ignore the contributions made by local capacity, resources and knowledge and assume an alignment of priorities between government and communities. Within top-down resilience approaches, studies found polarised priorities between communities and policymakers, for example, where communities views were guided by long-term planning and flexibility, and policymakers focused on fiscal responsibility (economic growth). 28 Current community resilience practices tend to incorporate top-down and bottom-up approaches, and this is recommended across research and evident in Australian emergency management policy and frameworks. However, inherent power imbalances in these structures, with top-down control over resources, knowledge, measurement and agenda setting are not conducive to successful and balanced community-led approaches. Literature also discusses the role of centralisation in top-down approaches, and the need for well-resourced decentralisation to local governments for DRR and resilience programming. However, in one of the most recent commonwealth level reviews of disaster management funding, the Colvin review found that Australia is increasingly reliant on local governments and community in response and recovery, while resources are allocated in a way that means they have the least capacity and often limited capability[29].

Spectrums of participation

The international association for public participation spectrum (IAP2 Spectrum) has long been a framework in Victoria, and increasingly across Australia, for defining and guiding differing levels of participation and collaboration with communities. This framework is often referenced or mirrored in emergency management literature in Australia, including AIDR's Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook (2020) and Community Engagement Framework Companion to the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2013). The spectrum sets out a promise to the public / communities at each different participation level, thereby being transparent about the level of community ownership. The IAP2 spectrum spans *inform* (providing the public with information), *consult, involve, collaborate, empower* (placing final decision making in the hands of the public). Other similar frameworks (such as Arnstein's ladder for Citizen Participation) also cover 'lower' areas of the participation spectrum, identifying the power relationships within 'Therapy' and 'Manipulation' of populations. There are critiques in literature of participation frameworks, namely the potential for frameworks to overly standardise approaches, stifling creativity, contextualised and community-led approaches.[30]

For the purposes of this review, spectrums of participation provide clarity on the distinction between guidance for community engagement in DRR and resilience (which can often tend towards the *inform* and *collaborate* end of the spectrum), and community-*led* principles and approaches (the *empower* end of the spectrum). Principles of community engagement defined in AIDR's (2020) Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook align with community-led approaches and can act as a

28 Matharage, S., et al, Empowering Communities: A Bottom-Up Approach to DRR, 2024
[29] Colvin, A., Independant Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding, 2024
[30] Barry, J. et al, "Shared Language" Or "Straitjacket"? The Hidden Costs of Legitimising Participation Through Standardised Frameworks, 2021

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useful reference point, however within the guide, community-led approaches are presented as one option across a spectrum of approaches (mirroring the IAP2 spectrum)[31].

Emerging examples of defining community-led principles and approaches within DRR and resilience, include Fire to Flourish's research based on the first three years of the project and explored within the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) / University of Sydney (USYD) fact sheet Critical dimensions for community-led resilience building. Highlights of Fire to Flourish's research includes lessons learned that being community-led does not mean community alone. Experiences across multiple communities demonstrated that finding the right balance between community-led and program / institution-led is needed for each context. FRRR / USYD critical dimensions overview notes that working in a community-led way means that local community members act as equal decision makers, and that community-led resilience building starts and continues with listening and collaboration. Of note within the critical dimensions (one that is not as evident across other guidance / literature) is the dimension of self-organising systems. Self-organising systems are defined as people organising themselves in communities, all the time, outside of (and sometimes in spite of) formal institutions. Lessons from community-led movements that are rarely integrated into emergency management are extensive (such as mutual aid and solidarity movements, citizen science) and would require a wider scope of review – particularly to engage with important perspectives and lessons learned that may not be formally researched or published.

Participation revolution and accountability to communities

Under the Grand Bargain - an agreement between donors and humanitarian organisations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of international humanitarian aid (adopted at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and extended in 2023) - sits a commitment to a 'participation revolution'. At the highest levels, United Nations agencies and international humanitarian organisations undertook to *"include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives"* and to keep humanitarian action *"as local as possible, as international as necessary"*32. To be effective the participation revolution needed to weave amongst the nexus of aid and development and within DRR and resilience spaces. However, at the point of extension in 2023, criticism over the *"participation revolution that never was"* abounded, pointing to gaps between what is discussed globally versus tangible change towards community participation in decision-making.[33]

In the lead-up to the so-called Participation Revolution in 2016, literature documented a critical mass of accountability activity in humanitarian and disaster programming. Referred to as *accountability to affected people* or *accountability to communities*, these mechanisms mandate that all humanitarian agencies fulfil their obligations to provide accurate and timely information, make time and space to listen and respond to people's needs and concerns on an ongoing basis and involve people affected by crises in decision making.[34] The advent of organisations like Ground Truth Solutions meant more attention and resourcing was given to tracking perception data of people affected by crises to feed into decision making of humanitarian actors, envisioning a sector that recognises the agency of

[31] AIDR, Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience, 2020
32 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2016
[33] Anderson, J., The New Humanitarian: As the Grand Bargain gets a reboot, the limits of aid reform come into focus, 2023
[34] Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance, Accountability to Affected People, accessed March 2025

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communities. The Core Humanitarian Standard (a globally recognised, measurable standard) emerged at a similar time, providing nine commitments to ensure organisations provide support to communities in ways that respect people's rights and dignity and promote their primary role in finding solutions to the crises they face. Community listening and accountability efforts have grown in the past decade internationally and in Australia, notably in initiatives like How We Survive that collates community listening and perceptions data with the objective of changing the way community-centred disaster recovery efforts are enacted and understood. In the context of guidance for DRR and resilience efforts, there is a wealth of knowledge and tools to guide community listening and accountability, as well as more than 15 years of lessons learned from the gaps that remain between high-level intentions around accountability to communities, and tangible change in practice and policy that resonates with localised, community-led systems.

Trust

Concepts of trust within community-based / led DRR and resilience are so fundamental in community participation and engagement, in knowledge and power considerations, and connect with complexity thinking in systems change (hence Trust having its own section in this context paper). Examples of relationship-based approaches to trust building are evident in some community engagement initiatives in Australia, and specifically in DRR / resilience initiatives within approaches developed by (for example) Fire to Flourish. In their reflective practice and research, practitioners regularly highlight the need to move at the pace of trust with communities in resilience building efforts[35], and this is now a well-known phrase echoing across other organisations, consultants and emergency management practitioners. Guidance and tools related to trust building and accountability to communities are present in community engagement and community-led development resources, but - given the degree to which these concepts are called out as existing weaknesses and challenges in DRR and resilience work - approaches and measurement of these concepts lack maturity. Recent literature highlights the potential for further study, measurement and guidance around the relationship between trust, social capital and collective action to reshape understandings of community resilience.

Trust and social capital are mutually reinforcing elements of community resilience. Strong social ties foster trust and cooperative norms, while social networks facilitate resource access during disasters.

Visave, J., Aldrich, D, 2025

A recent study[36] in Mumbai, India shows positive correlation between trust in community members and the adoption of resilience strategies. However, literature notes that the nuanced role of trust is typically overlooked in many existing strategies for enhancing community resilience, presenting dissonance between top-down and bottom-up approaches. The Mumbai study notes that trust dynamics are not a monolithic concept but rather a web of relationships impacted by factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, personal experiences and perceptions of risk.

[35] Walden, I., Bos, A., Rogers, B. & Werbeloff, L., Fire to Flourish: Lessons Learned in its Activation, 2024
[36] Visave, J., Aldrich, D., The role of social capital in strengthening community resilience against floods: A case study of Mumbai, India, 2025

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Trust in information is a critical component of communities thriving and adapting in the face of shocks and stressors. Specifically, trust in disaster information sources is paramount to DRR and resilience building, as it motivates individuals to adopt protective measures and act on advice and emergency warnings. Research indicates that absence of trust or distrust results in complacency and confusion and amplifies disaster vulnerability. Priority 1 (understanding disaster risk) of the Second National Action Plan mentions development of tools and methods to guide and support DRR that are tailored to and trusted by end users[37]. However, in Australian emergency management, there is little evidence of methods or mechanisms being used to measure trust, or to prioritise involvement of community-level trusted sources in communication with communities. There is a difference, for example, in state governments using community organisations or Neighbourhood Houses / Centres in the dissemination of top-down disaster preparedness messaging, versus involving those groups in locally-led, contextualised communications with their own communities.

Some efforts and methods in international humanitarian action to measure trust relationships (including with information sources and channels) have been successful, though are still in early days of roll-out. These include the Internews Trust Analytical Framework, which looks at four dimensions of trust in information: Accuracy (including timeliness, contextual accuracy); Proximity (how accessible, understandable and representative the information and sources are); Intention (how transparent the source is about their interests and capability); and Agency (the level of agency communities have in choosing the information source, and how accountable and safe the information channel and source are). The framework builds on decades of experience addressing misinformation in humanitarian crises and aims to offer deeper insights into how and why communities accept or reject information and services. The framework is accompanied by a toolkit to support the design, monitoring, and evaluation of information services, including information, communication and knowledge sharing within humanitarian and development programs. The Community Trust Index, developed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) provides a framework and tools to measure and enhance trust between humanitarian organisations and communities. The index is built on the basis that competencies and values are key to building trust with communities and uses a dual-axis framework of assessment for organisations, anchored in those two elements.

[37] Australian Government National Emergency Management Agency, Second National Action Plan, 2023

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Findings

Knowledge and shared practices

Strengths: Based on interviews with experts and literature review, there are existing positive factors related to knowledge and shared practices in community-led DRR and resilience. There is evidence of existing tools and resources that provide guidance on certain key elements of community-based and led approaches to DRR and resilience (for example, community engagement, assessment of adaptive capacities, and to a lesser extent, community development approaches). These tools are based on a wealth of experience in Australia, particularly linked with communities recovering from disaster events, including communities going through long-term recovery and repeated events. There are also examples of mature, place-based, community-based initiatives working from well-developed tools and clear principles. In some cases, these initiatives show evidence of strengths-based approaches, trauma informed approaches and decolonised approaches.

Anecdotally, there is a high level of understanding and knowledge in facilitation of community mapping of risks and vulnerabilities at the community level. In some cases, there is a *culture* of horizontal sharing of knowledge and practices from community to community, and vertically between practitioners at different jurisdictional level. There are examples of effective collaborations between academic institutions and emergency management / community development organisations in community-led DRR and resilience practice, which plays an important role in fostering a culture of evidence building and reflection. With some exceptions, there continues to be frustrations in these collaborations existing largely within the realm of conferences, and much of the study feeling repetitive or duplicative, and not willing to tackle the 'wicked' intractable problems.

Weaknesses: Common principles and values around community-led DRR and resilience are clearly shared amongst experts interviewed. However, experts indicated a lack of formal documentation of clear, overarching principles and values for community-led DRR and resilience nationally. This links to a dominant critique amongst experts interviewed, as well as in research, of challenges with accessible, shared language around community-led approaches in this context. Experts expressed frustration in ongoing attempts to explain, justify, or form (for example) definitions of community-led, versus community-based, versus community-focused approaches. Based on interviews, there is a prevailing sense that if the spectrum of community involvement were genuinely present and understood as fundamental in emergency management arrangements, we would not need to talk about it or grapple with definitions quite so much.

Frustrations with language also stem from perceived politicisation of language, with terminology misappropriated to serve the interest of certain groups (particularly government). For example, one interviewee referred to a commonly used term in DRR and resilience: *"When they talk about shared responsibility, they really mean shared blame*." Findings indicate the exclusionary nature of some DRR and resilience language reinforces existing silos, working against complexity thinking and systems approaches. Similarly, experts interviewed raised concerns consistent with the literature that dissonant language, and the perceived 'mysteriousness' or lack of clarity in community-led

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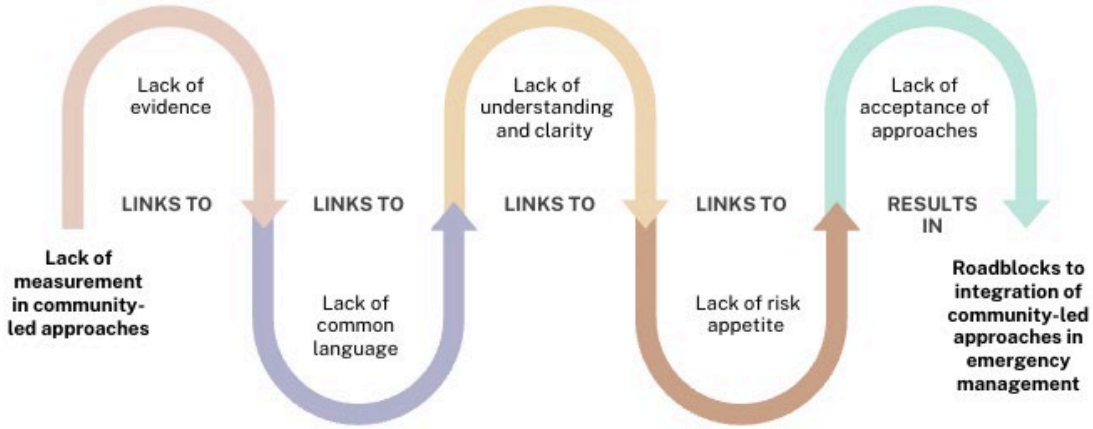
approaches leaves room in command-control / response phases of emergencies for claims that community-led approaches are too complex and risky to integrate.

Based on the substantial experience of expert interviewees, lack of evidence and measurement is a central, compounding issue linked to some of the biggest perceived barriers to community-led / based DRR and resilience. Experts interviewed expressed the need for metrics that scaffold community-led DRR and resilience approaches and outcomes to procedures and processes at jurisdictional level strategies, starting with local emergency management plans. As one interviewee said: *"I've never met anybody who doesn't think community-based is the way to go, but the metrics don't reward it."*



It should be noted that while community practitioners seek ways for community-led efforts to be counted and integrated, they are also wary of over-standardisation and loss of contextualisation. Therefore, recommendations should be understood as sitting alongside calls for complexity thinking and systems change that would enable more fundamentally contextualised approaches in emergency management. Many experts interviewed mentioned the need for *cohesive* (not monolithic) building of an evidence base for community-led approaches in emergency management, that encourages complexity thinking and systems change related to DRR funding.

Commonly understood and acknowledged evidence of community capacity is also essential to catalysing emergency service organisations to adapt their response and recovery approaches based on community-led resilience efforts and outcomes. Qualitative case studies on community-led – or at least community-focused – approaches are the darlings of strategy documents, conferences and guidance, but interviewees note frustration with the same lessons learned and 'innovations' being presented over and over, in different locations or being paid attention to by different jurisdictions at different times. Without consistent measurement across community-led / based initiatives, expert interviewees do not foresee a meaningful, actionable evidence base being effectively developed. Currently, there are no nationally consistent indicators for measuring social capital and adaptive capacities, and as a result these are not systematically embedded in risk assessments and

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vulnerability data. In an article for the Australian Journal for Emergency Management in 2024, Daniel Aldrich called on government departments, emergency services organisations and non-government organisations to share data for a holistic social capital and social infrastructure measurement.

Let's encourage stakeholders to think differently about their data and how it can contribute to measurement tools and capabilities that will positively change how we prepare and survive future shocks. Ideally, this will let us overlay social capital heatmapping and social infrastructure measurements with risk assessments and vulnerability data.

Daniel Aldrich, AJEM, 2024

Additionally, several interviewees see barriers in turning findings from community listening data / assessments into action for emergency services organisations / government (including community visioning, emergency planning). Interviewees attribute limitations with short-term funding models as a key barrier to meaningfully and continuously closing listening loops or feeling as though listening loops are closed (from the community perspective), however desk research also indicates a lack of literature on developed and accountable community listening practices in Australia.

We're getting better at asking communities what they think, but we're still so bad at allowing whatever that is to have an impact on decision making.

- Key informant interview, 2025

While there is generally agreed to be a wealth of tools and resources within emergency management and community development literature that can support aspects of community-led / based action in emergency management, there are specific aspects that lack guidance. This scoping study found a gap in accessible guidance around community governance, including formation of governance / committee structures, how to sustain and maintain those structures in fair and inclusive ways, and forming and establishing decision-making processes. Experts interviewed also pointed out tension between genuine community-led practices and a top-down 'guidance' on what community governance should look like but recognised the need for bridging structures that speak to organic community ecosystems and the emergency management system. Though there are some resources that guide these functions, interviewees noted them as too high-level and difficult to apply to the community / emergencies context, or only available through funded work with organisations or consultants. Importantly, there is also little accessible guidance on how those community governance approaches can interact (or in some cases, be integrated with) emergency management systems. For example, community committees being linked to municipal emergency management committees and arrangements; or groups of neighbours in a community working with insurance companies for a more collective-level approach to insuring against disasters. These findings present varied and context-specific needs for guidance (noting, for example, that each jurisdiction has different approaches to municipal emergency management arrangements). National-level guidance from AIDR could therefore present shared principles and values consistent across different contexts of integrated governance models, without being prescriptive.

Opportunities: When interviewees described success in sharing of knowledge for community-based / led DRR and resilience within our current emergency management structures, they spoke of vertically and horizontally linked initiatives. Vertically linked to levels of government so that outcomes, lessons

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and community perspectives are integrated into decision making, and so that resources, knowledge and power is shared with communities effectively. Horizontally to other communities for peer-to-peer learning, cooperation and resource and knowledge sharing. The links presented above between lack of measurement and lack of resourcing, risk appetite, shared understanding and integration can be a roadmap for improvements that result in better vertical and horizontal knowledge sharing.

For example, a current, typical approach (described by interviewees) is for an organisation or community group to receive funding from government for a community-based / led resilience project. They complete the deliverables of that project and report on them to the funder (often with an emphasis on quantitative data). The data from that reporting remains with the funder and the analysis of community-led actions and outcomes are not based on measurable indicators or linked with other emergency management organisations, to be applied to response or recovery interventions. Instead, we can envision a commonly understood measurement framework that links outcomes and lessons learned across other community-led initiatives, assesses increased adaptive capacity, and triggers emergency management agencies to adjust their approach in the next emergency affecting that specific community. Based on this cycle, a dynamic evidence base is developed for community-based / led resilience efforts.

Opportunities exist within monitoring and evaluation efforts as part of the NDRRF, and specifically the (in-progress) Systemic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (SysMEL) project. However, any measurement framework must include effective metrics for community-based/led approaches (and therefore community level practitioners must be involved in developing and defining those metrics), and roll-out of the SysMEL must include participatory approaches. There is opportunity in drawing from wider disciplines in the development of measurement frameworks and metrics, including from community development and resilience initiatives internationally (see Context section for some existing examples). Opportunities also lie in looking further afield than this scoping study could, into the frameworks and measurements around community organising and solidarity movements, and other wider disciplines that cluster around community / social capital building. Updates and adaptation of these resources to the Australian emergency management context would be required, most importantly in terms of contextualisation with community practitioners.

Threats: Information overwhelm threatens effective sharing of knowledge and practice in community-based DRR and resilience. Though practitioners seek to fill gaps in tools and knowledge outlined above, they are overall navigating a significant volume of resources, often written and inaccessible in style, and with very little time or capacity to explore resources properly. Experts interviewed indicated that the lack of a cohesive framework from a trusted, impartial source (for example, around principles and measurement) means navigating the wealth of resources across disciplines (which for resilience, is diverse) can feel aimless and ineffective. The increase over the past 10 years of consultants and organisations (particularly national organisations) working in this space and developing resources has at times resulted in competing and conflicting 'standardisations' and professionalisation of language and approaches, in an effort to claim authority and ring-fence approaches for the purpose of being competitive for funders. Experts interviewed who work within or closely with community's express

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frustrations with this, as well as sympathy, recognising that scarcity and funding arrangements are the key driver for this tension.

A scan of existing guidance and tools shows a high proportion of generic advice about how to engage with communities in emergency / humanitarian settings, but little that provides guidance in – and counter to - the context of the systemic challenges practitioners regularly face in community-*led* DRR and resilience work. For example, resources that properly address working in low-resource environments, within in short, arbitrary timeframes set by funders, within a siloed emergency management system and within power imbalances that do not meaningfully incorporate community-led action. Experts interviewed also note a sense that guidance and tools in DRR and resilience do not currently appropriately reference or address the increasing frequency and complexity of disasters faced by communities due to climate change, which is highlighted by the frequent siloing of climate change adaptation and resilience efforts (including in knowledge sharing and in how organisations form their teams).

The most dominant threat mentioned by experts interviewed in this scoping study in relation to knowledge and shared practice in community-based DRR, is an over-reliance on resources, guidance and tools being a stand-in for evidence, shared principles / understanding and actionable processes. Practitioners feel that funders are over-reliant on the development of resources as evidence of success, with a tendency to emphasise tinkering with innovations and new approaches rather than the systems change that is needed. Overwhelmingly, interviewees mentioned frustration with 'turf wars' amongst organisations, consultant firms, and even community groups / organisations in communities. This relates to funding issues that are built on a competition structure and was referenced as "toolkits as tools for turf wars", where tools are seen as a sufficient – or even preferred – 'outcome' by funders, with those who have the capacity to produce them valued higher (more successful in gaining funding) than those sustaining community-based work. In some instances, intellectual property rights held by organisations / consultants have blocked communities accessing knowledge and shared practices, threatening the valuing of "tools for tools sake" over actual community-based action in DRR and resilience building.

Overall, limitations on sharing of knowledge (that ideally includes a measurement and evidence-based component) is recognised as a threat to realising a shift to an emergency management system that genuinely incorporates community-based and led approaches. As one expert interviewed remarked: *"I'm a big believer that more knowledge shared allows more opportunity for power to be shared."*

Complex systems and power dynamics

Strengths: This scoping study found examples of initiatives that are holistic in relational community / community development-based approaches to DRR and resilience building, for example Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland, Resilient Lismore and the work of Befriend in the northern suburbs of Perth. Some experts interviewed who work with community organisations noted their work around disasters at times feel like the most authentic community development or community-led work they do, because they can be truly responsive to communities, rather than delivering pre-defined, top-down services. There are also clear examples of initiatives that have successfully merged community development approaches within a disaster management / resilience context, with

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community members (volunteers) and practitioners pulling from a range of community development and disaster resilience / recovery resources to guide their work. Though not widespread or mainstreamed, there are good examples of foregrounding First Nations wisdom and leadership in community resilience building, and a clear imperative for improvements in this area from all types and levels of stakeholders (for example, academic, local government, community group, state government).

Existing strengths also include a general sense of respect for people in communities as capable agents of DRR, resilience and recovery work, but – as outlined throughout the findings – this is not necessarily systematically respected, particularly in emergency response and relief systems. Case studies and experiences shared by experts interviewed in this scoping study highlight the strength of community networks and alliances, particularly in rural and regional areas where we are seeing the emergence of those networks as a dominant force in disaster management – initially in recovery and increasingly in ongoing community resilience efforts.

The Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance (founded by grassroots community groups, including Plan C and Resilient Lismore) is a clear example of where a network of community organisations and groups with long-standing connections to communities is best placed to manage emergencies and disruptions and advocate for community within emergency service organisation / government emergency response, relief and recovery. Instances where Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland have acted as Community Recovery Centres or generally been a place of community gathering and source of information after disasters, has increased sixfold in recent years. Small, community-based organisations such as Neighbourhood Centres have been found to be very effective in their responses during emergencies because of their emphasis on smaller geographical areas, focus on neighbourhood-level responses, local economies and organisational nimbleness[38]. At the prompting of community groups, South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM) is beginning efforts to formalise the role of community groups and spaces in disaster recovery that organically act as a go-to place for people in communities. Practical guidance and tools should emphasise the importance of the formation, resourcing and maintenance of these networks and community spaces, and support emergency services to better coordinate with them.

Weaknesses: This scoping study found that though there is evidence of projects merging community development and emergency management approaches, practitioners largely feel that community-based or led approaches are not ultimately integrated or respected in emergency management and are quickly undermined by command-control / top-down approaches. Experts interviewed feel this disconnect exists at several levels: structurally, culturally and in terms of what is understood as effective and viable. Current guidance and tools reflect this, as there is little evidence of guidance that reflects the reality of this divide. The successes in bridging this divide are currently reliant on individual practitioners (at community level – including consultants and organisations operating with this approach) and their relationships in communities, who feel that consistent documentation of principles and 'minimum standard' approaches would better equip them to advocate for funding and

[38] Mundy, Chris., Queensland Neighbourhood Centres and Community Development: Remembering our Past and Adapting for the Future, July 2024

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projects that meet the holistic standards they strive for. As experts interviewed noted, community services and community development approaches bend to rigid disaster management arrangements (at each jurisdictional level), not vice versa – and guidance should reflect this reality. Strengths in community-based DRR and resilience outlined above reference a growth of self-sustaining networks of community groups and organisations, aimed at effectively managing emergencies and disruptions. However, this scoping study shows a lack of coherent national leadership and coordination of community-based / led initiatives (with the caveats mentioned above in *Knowledge and shared practices* findings regarding tensions with over-standardisation and loss of contextualisation).

Lack of documentation within official emergency management arrangements of the realities of formal and informal (community-led) emergency management (before, during and after emergencies) was also referenced by experts interviewed. Interviewees feel there is a level of discomfort in emergency planning properly acknowledging how communities act informally and without support from government, particularly in rural and regional areas. Community action in emergency management that occurs outside of formal systems is at times referenced as 'spontaneous volunteers,' but this does not capture the dynamic culture of community mobilisation, nor the breadth and depth of what people in communities do in emergencies. Emergency management plans reference the importance of community engagement and 'sentiment analysis' of affected communities, but this rarely appropriately acknowledges actual community-led action (which is almost always present in some way) and how emergency services should coordinate with that action.

Other disconnects in current guidance and tools relate to siloed emergency management planning not being conducive to the transdisciplinary and transcontextual nature of community resilience and DRR, nor to the web-like way community's function. Experts interviewed find current resources and the structures those resources align to (such as the PPRR cycle, and the siloed way emergency services organisations are structured) do not support community-based work, which hits frequent roadblocks in trying to exist across disciplines and contexts that in reality are not stagnant, but flowing and complex. Much guidance and literature has progressed in the past decade to at least being non-hazard specific, which aligns with a community-centric approach that understands communities deal with shocks, stressors and impacts of emergencies. Within DRR, certain initiatives require targeting to specific hazards, however these should always be set within a wider resilience context that flows across all types of emergencies and disruptions. Practitioners note that even with this progress, they find themselves forced to jump between (for example) bushfire-related funding and flood-related funding and developing resources associated with that funding, in a way that is not in touch with the realities of communities.

Generally, guidance that does not acknowledge the realities and systemic barriers to community-based work is not perceived as useful by, and even frustrates, practitioners in communities. This links to similar frustrations within communities about lack of transparency around the actual level of community engagement available in emergency management for any given situation, for example, presenting opportunities to collaborate (involve community in decision making) when in fact decision makers only have the capacity to consult (obtain community feedback). As authors or commissioners of guidance, frameworks and tools, lack of transparency from government regarding where it is willing to sit in the spectrum of community participation / engagement threatens uptake by

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communities and community-based practitioners. Expert interviewees were clear: if government continues to support the development of guidance, frameworks and measurement around community DRR and resilience initiatives, emergency management policy and structures need to adapt to include these initiatives in a meaningful way, and be transparent about whether they plan to work with community-led initiatives, or simply community-focused (consulting / informing communities).

It's not only about empowering community to do this work, but also about empowering agencies to step back and not see it as a risk.

Key informant interview, 2025

Current resources for community-based DRR and resilience lacks guidance and tools for emergency management agencies to hand over control of resources and knowledge to communities. Based on this scoping study and as outlined throughout this report, risk management and liability requirements in emergency management are not conducive to community-led approaches, and there is no guidance or framework currently to develop an evidence base that would change the risk appetite.

Opportunities: Emerging positive actions related to improvement of systems and power imbalances in community-based DRR and resilience building can be found in local and international examples of systems change initiatives and community organising (as outlined in the Context section of this report). Some movements to pay attention to in guidance and tools development are:

- The localisation agenda in international humanitarian response that operates with the principles of redirecting funding to local actors, strengthening local capacity, shifting power and decision making to national actors, promoting equitable partnerships and respecting local knowledge.
- The participation and accountability revolution in international humanitarian response that seeks to shift power to crisis-affected people through an emphasis on two-way communication, improved feedback mechanisms and transparency of decision-makers.
- Mutual aid movements, with core principles of solidarity, not charity (communities supporting each other as equals); decentralised, horizontally organised movements; direct action (immediate, practical help without waiting for institutions to intervene); autonomy and self-determination with communities / participants defining their own needs and solutions; inclusivity and accessibility, where everyone is welcomed and there is no eligibility or means-testing for provision of resources.

Experts interviewed pointed to mainstream initiatives that could provide entry points or inspirational models for integration of community-based / led approaches in emergency management. Examples of decentralised, ecosystem models referenced by experts interviewed include the Reconciliation Action Plan model that provides a structured approach for businesses, government agencies, and community organisations to mainstream reconciliation. Though there are critiques of this model, there are lessons in its approach. Recommendations from the Colvin review of Commonwealth disaster management funding emphasise investment in resilience and risk reduction and refer to the need for state and territory governments to ensure adequate investment in local government and communities to respond to disaster events. The review also recommends flexible funding

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arrangements to support First Nations community self-determination towards disaster preparedness, risk reduction and resilience[39]. Though the recommendations are high-level, they present a potential advocacy point to align with in the development of guidance that also encourages investment in local level ownership. Finally, there is opportunity for guidance and literature to go further – particularly in accessible ways – in building more interdisciplinary guidance and complexity thinking around DRR and resilience that incorporates a climate justice lens, a social justice lens, and an epistemic justice lens.

Threats: Potential or emerging negative factors related to systems and power imbalances in community-based DRR and resilience centre on currently lacking strategies to decentralise funding and resourcing to devolve power and authority to local governments. Experts interviewed work and engage with all levels of government in Australia and noted with concern a perceived decrease of investment in local governments for disaster management, and these concerns are validated in the Colvin review. The chasms between decision making at state and territory level to local government to communities are already considerable, and the perceived direction of state and territory emergency management organisations to centralise power and funding threatens to widen this gap and further reduce capacity and capability at local levels.

This scoping study finds that most community-based practitioners experience funding mechanisms as rigid, short-term (usually two-years and under) and based on specific disaster events in a way that does not recognise the continuous and increasingly frequent cycles of emergencies that people in communities experience.

...community organisations called for a shift in thinking away from a reactive cycle of response and recovery. The authorities need to stop treating disasters as one-off events and move towards a long-term focus on disaster preparedness.

Monica Taylor, Fiona Crawford, 2024[40]

Rigid and unsuitable funding structures result in resources (including staff, consultants, co-design processes) not being able to meet the needs of communities. Interviewees provided numerous examples of Resilience and Recovery Officers based in local councils who materialised in projects with no time for relationship building, or practitioners who prioritised relationship building only to be cut short with project timelines before outcomes were achieved, let alone sustained within communities.

A common occurrence quoted by interviewees are community-based resilience projects that facilitate community level visioning and planning but are not supported with a reasonable timeframe to support the execution of plans. This is linked with a proclivity for funders to favour development of tools and resources over relationships and social capital (as described in *Knowledge and shared practices* findings). Communities and practitioners perceive election cycles, pressure on politicians and the threat of bad media coverage around misspending as the reason for warped priorities that do not meet community preferences or enable community-led approaches. Overall, short-term and non-adaptive resourcing threatens to further decrease trust in disaster funding and initiatives in

[39] Colvin, A., Independant Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding, 2024

[40] M Taylor, F Crawford, The Conversation: Disaster season looms, but the senate inquiry has failed to empower communities, 2024

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communities. Opportunities and lessons learned are emerging from participatory grant models, where funding mechanisms are coupled with co-design processes and grant reporting focuses on evaluating outcomes rather than acquitting dollar by dollar. However, criticism and concerns have emerged with some models, where community-based practitioners experience groups or communities being 'pitted against each other' for funding.

Experts interviewed referred to current weaknesses, and barriers and threats to community-based / led approaches as similar barriers to decolonial and anti-racism approaches, and – as a result – the barriers to inclusive and equitable emergency management. Lack of resourcing and commitment to complexity thinking and systems change to prioritise community-based / led initiatives could compromise diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in emergency management.

Capacity, capability and relationships of stakeholders

Strengths: Interviewees note the wealth of experience and long-standing relationships that exist between practitioners and stakeholders in community-based DRR and resilience. This has built a cohort of practitioners with a level of mobility across different levels and stakeholders in emergency management (for example, people in communities who participated first-hand in community-led resilience and recovery efforts, who also work as mentors, consultants or with state / territory emergency management organisations and local governments). Some networks and communities of practice exist that foster relationships and peer-to-peer learning and cooperation between the increasing number of communities with experience and expertise dealing with more frequent, omplex and intense impacts of emergencies.

At the organisation level, experts interviewed perceive a diversity of stakeholders, with grass-roots groups, emergency service organisations, community development / services organisations, different levels of government, academics and businesses theoretically accepted at the DRR and resilience 'table.' Governments have clear mandates to consult with community networks and peak bodies in the formation of strategies, frameworks and guidance around DRR and resilience, particularly to give voice to those disproportionally at risk.

Weaknesses: Where stakeholder capacity and relationships fall short in relation to community-based/ led DRR and resilience links to the systemic issues mentioned in the previous findings section, with stakeholder dynamics often not moving past consultation and community 'focused' initiatives and into a meaningful partnership approach with shared power, resources and knowledge. Challenges associated with capacity and capability in community-based DRR and resilience largely stem from lack of funding that can facilitate the preferred long-term community-led, ecosystem approaches. Experts interviewed outlined frequent failures in community-based projects moving beyond initial phases of planning and visioning, to being implemented and sustained. The barriers here are not necessarily related to *capability* in the implementation and sustainability phases, but due to resources and project timelines that restrict practitioners and communities. Peer-to-peer learning and coordination opportunities are rarely consistent or systemically supported and are mostly dependant on existing relationships and networks (or ones that develop out of emergencies), resulting in many being communities and people – including potentially those most in need - being missed from those networks.

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In some cases, capacity and capability challenges also stem from a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities within an emergency management system that (as explored in earlier findings) is not inclusive of community-based approaches. Interviewees regularly noted that developing useful role descriptions and onboarding processes for practitioners working in this space is difficult when the system they are operating in is fundamentally flawed, and when evidence of good practice is not defined due to lack of cohesive measurement. Practitioners call for guidance and documentation to support better development of role descriptions and training, with the caveat that it needs to be alongside systems change, or at the very least, with clear and transparent acknowledgement of systemic challenges. Several experts interviewed noted specifically that understanding of effective capacity and capability in community-based initiatives needs to embrace the fact that a high proportion of time and resources are spent on relationship building, and that this is often at odds with what funders or emergency service organisations are willing to support in paid positions. Interviewees also consistently noted lack of capacity for advocate roles to translate between 'layers' of stakeholders (community, local, regional, state and territory, federal and international) and across disciplines and contexts. Capacity and resourcing are needed for these types of roles, as well as guidance. Findings from the literature review and key informant interviews also indicate a lack of diversity in people involved in the formation of guidance, frameworks and tools.

Opportunities: Community-based and led initiatives present opportunities for representative inclusion of stakeholders, alongside community and stakeholder mapping to understand what appropriate representation looks like within the community ecosystem. Practitioners are exploring ways to build an ecology of resilience made up of a different workforce to that currently (largely) manufactured by emergencies funding, based in community groups and services (for example, community healthcare workers, teachers, Neighbourhood Centres / Houses, local government workers across disciplines). The need for significantly more capacity within this workforce is recognised, and this should be reinforced by guidance and capacity building initiatives in DRR and resilience. Experts interviewed highlighted examples where community-based approaches to DRR and resilience merged with (for example) local arts and creative projects, urban planning initiatives or technology hackathons.

At the community level, experts interviewed say there is opportunity and appetite for improvements in participatory governance structures, particularly learning from First Nations governance structures and approaches. Alongside this, there is an ongoing need for continued investment in leadership training at the community level, particularly around resilience through recovery. To bolster this, experts interviewed emphasised the need for capacity to sit within backbone community organisations that have *ongoing participation and engagement with* communities, not with emergency management departments or organisations that are built around unsuitable PPRR cycles.

Threats: The biggest threat to successful community-based DRR and resilience related to capacity is lack of trusted community level relationships. Guidance and tools, particularly to support building and measurement of social capital, can play an important role in trust building between stakeholders (including community). This report highlights the positive correlation investigated in literature between trust held by community members and the adoption of resilience strategies but notes that trust is typically overlooked in many existing strategies for enhancing community resilience. These lessons learned will not be revelatory for community-based practitioners, whose day-to-day work is

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filled with face-to-face catchups, facilitating community gatherings and fostering relationships that build trust, naturally. They are, however, critical reflections for emergency management decision makers and systems that overlook the need to give capacity to relationship building and continue to manage funding and project cycle timelines entirely removed from the pace of trust. Interviewees referred to a culture within community-based initiatives that embraces and drives change but also referred to high levels of exhaustion and fatigue in dealing with persistent systemic barriers (over decades).

Amongst information overwhelm and increasing competition for funding and resources, a lack of shared values and principles and national leadership in community-based DRR and resilience risks developing a culture that is less conducive to cooperation and peer-to-peer learning across communities. Experts interviewed noted competition over funding ('turf wars') as a key reason behind a protective culture around intellectual property, rather than a communal one. Additionally, as local governments become further stretched and under-resourced in emergency management responsibilities, they have less capacity to play the critical connector role between communities and state / territory jurisdictions. According to some experts interviewed, states and territories are increasingly (problematically) referring to local governments as the main stakeholder in community-led approaches, rather than a connector or facilitator.

Finally, a growing tendency by some government jurisdictions to outsource and de-link themselves from community-based, community-focused approaches, and to continuously devalue those teams within government, is concerning for the future of community-based emergency management and counter to increased mandates of 'shared responsibility' (for example, in the Colvin review). This is coupled with a growing dependency on volunteerism and the informal community sector to shoulder community-based work, without appropriate sharing of resources, knowledge and decision-making power to support that burden. As people in Australia face growing cost-of-living pressures and daily stressors within capitalist systems that oppose the building of social capital, this imbalance perpetuated by current emergency management structures threatens to derail community-based and led approaches.

Dissemination and accessibility

Strengths: This scoping study finds an existing theoretical emphasis on tailored or adaptable frameworks, guidance and tools for community-based DRR and resilience initiatives, and strong existing capacity amongst a cohort of practitioners to develop those resources (though, as mentioned above, the cohort is likely not representative of communities in Australia). Literature reviews and feedback from experts interviewed indicates guidance and tools often provide explicit instruction and sometimes guidance for local and contextual adaptation of tools.

Resources are available through multiple channels, and often cross-posted / linked between departments and organisations. According to this scoping research, AIDR is generally respected as a trusted and useful source by emergency management practitioners. Case studies and narratives included in resources demonstrate attempts to provide an inclusive geographical spread, and a rural / regional / metropolitan spread of communities represented. Strong examples of communities of practice, reference and working groups exist related to community-based emergency management -

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particularly in disaster recovery, which inherently link with resilience building, though findings indicate these links could be more tangible. Dissemination of guidance and tools for community-based initiatives are typically coupled with seminars, training and workshops to guide skills development and knowledge.

Practitioners working as consultants in this space (of which there is a growing number in Australia) and people working with organisations within DRR and resilience initiatives demonstrate an eagerness and willingness to share lessons learned via written resources, and (sometimes, given capacity) audio and video resources. Based on this scoping study, there is a prevailing sense that practitioners want to share resources openly, and in some cases, consultants and mentors regularly work pro bono or (as with – for example – Resilient Co / Resilience Canopy) are making structural changes to shift to models that can facilitate inclusive access to their programmes and support.

Weaknesses: The strengths mentioned above represent a level of goodwill and in some cases, a culture of collaboration within community-based DRR and resilience cohorts and their use of guidance and tools. However, systemically, there are significant weaknesses and barriers in the accessibility and dissemination of these resources. Experts interviewed, particularly those from disaster affected communities who have firsthand experience in community-based resilience building that occurs regardless of funding, note that useful frameworks, guidance and tools are often only accessible through funded services (for example, if an organisation is funded to work with a community, or if the community has secured funds to procure services of consultants). There have been instances where community groups were blocked from adapting and / or continuing to use resources they were originally involved in developing, once a funded partnership with an organisation / consultant ended (citing intellectual property violations).

Resources supporting DRR and resilience building continue to be primarily written in what interviewees describe as text-dense documents that are difficult for many people (especially those not working full-time in emergency management roles) to process, adapt and apply given time and capacity constraints. Literature is also mostly held online, which has benefits for being more widely available, but is limited to those with internet and computer access and digital literacy. The largely English-language, sometimes jargon-filled, and complex nature of a lot of frameworks, guidance and tools is not accessible to people who do not read and write English, and with lower levels of literacy. Most experts interviewed noted the professionalisation of language in DRR and resilience resources, even those pitched at communities and community-based programming, as exclusionary. Findings from this scoping study indicate a lack of guidance and tools to support measurement of community-based initiatives, and interviewees note that where there are resources available to guide this – including high level frameworks like the National DRR Framework – they lack practical guidance that enable community initiatives to allocate time and capacity to. Some experts interviewed also noted that guidance on community-based / led approaches can be exclusionary or off-putting to emergency management practitioners and policy makers more familiar with traditional, command-control systems, meaning guidance fails to bring these practitioners to a place of integration.

Some experts interviewed noted unique challenges for very remote and rural communities in accessing resources for DRR and resilience, referring to key information regarding changing climate, disaster risks and adaptation strategies, weather updates and what support is available suitable and

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specific to their context. State and territory jurisdictions and local governments are often sources for this information, but practitioners working in rural and remote areas say they are less of a priority amongst the vast areas supported by one council, meaning information is less accurate to hyper-local experiences, and available in less timely and accessible ways.

This scoping research also finds the dissemination of resources is largely static and lacking two-way communication mechanisms available alongside guidance and tools. There are strengths mentioned above in communities of practice, networks and workshops or capacity building sitting alongside guidance for community-based work and / or DRR and resilience. However, the desk review of available resources found that opportunities and invitations to ask questions to experts / authors of guidance and tools, discuss adaptation, contextualisation and challenges in implementation is less accessible to people not working within paid emergency management positions, or participating in funded programmes.

Opportunities: Emerging positive factors in the dissemination and accessibility of guidance tools is increasing involvement of community representatives in consultations for the formation of resources, including jurisdiction level strategies. There is further opportunity and need for community representatives (for example, networks and peak bodies) to be clear and transparent about their own internal community listening and participation practices, so that their representation of community input into the formation of guidance and frameworks is sound.

Increasing access to digital platforms that have capability for two-way communication and sharing of non-text-based resources – even in low bandwidth areas (for example, WhatsApp audio files, short videos, etcetera) - is an opportunity for improved dissemination and accessibility. Artificial intelligence and other advancements in digital technologies provide opportunities for both creators and consumers of information to better navigate guidance and tools for DRR and community resilience (though with some cautions and critiques). This is being explored in some community-based initiatives, where disaster management organisations, communities and technology companies are partnering to find solutions. For example, the Australian Red Cross RediCommunities project in Dargo, Victoria will partner with WEO to pilot a platform that collates satellite data, artificial intelligence analysis and local knowledge to provide communities with information to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate, specific to their local area.

Technology (including artificial intelligence) also has the potential to enhance data collection, analysis and sharing within DRR and resilience initiatives, which is potentially helpful for improved community listening, measurement and building of evidence for community-based initiatives. Organisations facilitating the use of digital / technology solutions for community-based work, and communities themselves should be aware of the responsibilities and risks associated with these tools, as well as the limitations. For example, limitations in language, limitations in accessibility in areas with low internet access, expensive subscription models and technical expertise required to use the tools ongoing.

Threats: An overarching emerging challenge in dissemination and accessibility of guidance and tools for community-based DRR and resilience is lack of clarity on who can sustain leadership that is accessible to all levels and types of stakeholders involved, including communities self-organising. Though community-based organisations, groups, local governments and consultancy firms attempt to make resources accessible to communities in a way that is not funding-dependant, they are also

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struggling to survive within a competitive and limited funding environment. Based on this scoping study, organisations, academic institutions and departments with relatively long-term and sustained funding, that could remain reliable, centralised sources for guidance and tools (for example, AIDR) are currently more focused and equipped to provide guidance targeted to professional emergency management audiences, not self-organising communities. Given the degree to which capacity is reliant on top-down, events-based funding in the current emergency management system, inaccessible and highly competitive funding and grant mechanisms for community-based work perpetuates these challenges for accessible resources and knowledge sharing at all levels.

Finally, as per the limited representation, inclusion and systematic decolonisation efforts within community-based DRR and resilience outlined above, decision-makers involved in development of guidance and tools need to be aware that those limitations make resources less accessible to diverse communities. Lack of progress and improvement in this area will threaten further inaccessibility and decreased trust in guidance and information for community-based initiatives.

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Recommendations

Scope

Recommendation 1 – Purpose

The recommended overarching purpose of guidance on community-based DRR and resilience is to provide shared principles and practical tools for *harmonisation* of the emergency management sector with community-based and led approaches. Principles-based guidance needs to reflect the existing, collective desire and need for emergency management systems change that is conducive to and inclusive of community-based and led approaches. National-level guidance on community-based approaches should recognise and address the need for complexity thinking and systems change.

Recommendation 2 – Audience: define user character profiles

The findings recommend production of guidance that is targeted towards both community-based practitioners and emergency management practitioners and decision makers, with recognition they are often one and the same in DRR and resilience work, but not always. Forming 'user character profiles' that speak to the layered nature of people's involvement in community-based work would be useful in guiding the development of useful resources, and clearer navigation of resources by users.

Recommendation 3 – Advocacy tool for audiences

Alongside 'how to' style resources (focused on areas that are currently identified as a gap in CBDRR and resilience guidance), this scoping research recommends integration of direct guidance aimed at decision makers in the emergency management sector, framed as advocacy for better harmonisation with community-based and led approaches.

Conceptual foundation

Recommendation 4 – Models for knowledge, resources and power sharing

Based on this scoping research, there is a general perception that AIDR is in a unique position to provide nationally consistent, principles-based guidance on community-based and led DRR and resilience. Based on the findings so far, some potential, draft frameworks for the conceptual foundation of that (specifically positioned) guidance have emerged and will be shared with AIDR for consideration in the further design of guidance (see also: *Future research and development directions* recommendations below). Common threads across the potential models relate to meaningful sharing and responsible management of knowledge, resources and power in community-based / led emergency management, as well as mechanisms for measurement, accountability and community listening across stakeholders.

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Recommendation 5 – Existing gaps in knowledge, attitudes, practices

While the overarching conceptual foundation needs further refining in the in-depth development of guidance, some specific gaps have been identified in this scoping research, particularly in relation to guidance facilitating collective action towards systems change. Therefore, it is recommended that guidance prioritises:

- 4.1. Providing overarching documentation of shared principles and values in community-based and led emergency management.
- 4.2. Engaging with relevant parties to develop integrated guidance and tools for measurement linked with relevant frameworks, for example the National DRR Framework, to build an evidence base of successful community-based DRR and resilience practices.
- 4.3. Designing guidance and capacity building programs for locally contextualised community-level governance that both harmonises with and advocates to emergency management structures.
- 4.4. Designing principles-based guidance for the emergency management sector to facilitate transparency and understanding around the *spectrum* of community participation in community-based approaches
- 4.5 Providing access to existing tools, or - where needed - developing tools to enable emergency management practitioners / policy makers to move across the participation spectrum (as per 4.4) with accountability to communities. Specifically: feedback mechanisms, community listening, co-design tools, guidance for community feedback loops.

Recommendation 6 – Guidance, frameworks and capacity need to reflect the ecosystem

Siloing frameworks and guidance for community-based approaches to one segment of emergency management (DRR and resilience building) may not be useful. This echoes calls for emergency management practitioner role descriptions (and the funding streams that fund their capacity) to sit across the ecosystem, rather than be (for example) recovery or resilience specific or event specific. Findings indicate that community-based approaches (community development, social capital building, transdisciplinary approaches and communities self-organising), more naturally operate across ecosystemic structures that are not restricted to before, during or after emergencies, but rather across everyday life, and guidance, training and roles should reflect this. In terms of language, findings from this scoping research indicate that reference to *community-based emergency management,* rather than siloed community-based DRR and/or resilience may be a more aligned with current practice, as well as aspirational systemic thinking. For AIDR, this may impact and need to interact with a range of current handbooks, including the Community Recovery Handbook and the Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook.

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Accessibility and dissemination

Recommendation 7 – Design for inclusive user profiles

Dissemination of and access to DRR and resilience resources in Australia is currently limited beyond a typical use case, namely: emergency management practitioners who read and speak English, have time and capacity to use dense documentation and who have digital literacy / accessibility. People outside that group face significant barriers in accessing guidance unless funded projects specifically address those barriers, and in those cases the accessibility is rarely sustained or scaled. Therefore, it is recommended that any guidance developed recognises these barriers and designs resources accessible to the 'user character profiles' (as above). These profiles should be developed *with* community-based practitioners so that that the accessibility requirements can be identified in the design stage, resourced appropriately, and executed well in dissemination.

Recommendation 8 – Modular form

This scoping research recommends a modular guidance that enables 'users' to easily and quickly identify segments useful to them and apply to their community-based work. This does not exclude a handbook form, however, one that is more easily navigable guided by self-identified user character profiles (as per Recommendation 2) will better meet the needs of time and resource-poor practitioners who find text-dense guidance less useful. If resourcing allows, it is recommended to move beyond .pdf handbooks and opt for web-based, click-through guidance with integrated video / audio elements, that can also be shared and downloaded in a neat offline package.

Recommendation 9 – Disseminate with community development / services networks

Findings on the need for better integration of emergency management and community development disciplines, and the tendency for DRR and resilience resources to be disseminated through emergency management networks and cohorts, point to the need for a dedicated dissemination strategy with community development / community-based networks and practitioners. Lessons learned from that approach can be documented and shared with other producers of community-based DRR and resilience guidance.

Recommendation 10 – Facilitate guidance as a two-way conversation

Guidance around community-based approaches needs to be accompanied by two-way communication mechanisms to facilitate learning, such as:

- Accompanying training modules
- Engagement with existing communities of practice and discussion groups and / or generation of new networks where needed
- Provision of clear contacts for peer, practitioner or researcher support
- Multi-channel feedback mechanisms to collect experiences from community-based lessons learned

Good practice examples of 'two-way' guidance in resources developed and housed by organisations and consultants exist and can inform AIDR's approach.

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Future research and development directions

Recommendation 11 – Further exploration of key concepts through co-design

Further exploration to decide on key concepts is recommended as part of the development phase of community-based and led emergency management (or specifically DRR and resilience) guidance. Extensive experience in community-based emergency management approaches exists to draw on from across emergency management and community development sectors in Australia and internationally, including, importantly, at hyper-local level. Therefore, it is recommended that the development of guidance be highly participatory, including co-design with community-level practitioners and with an advisory group made up of diverse stakeholders across all levels (including existing producers of guidance).

Recommendation 12 – Link with complexity thinking and systems change initiatives

Given the prevalence of findings in this scoping research related to complexity thinking and systems change expectations and aspirations, the design of guidance related to community-based emergency management should stay linked (potentially through advisory group formation) to relevant systems change initiatives in Australian emergency management more broadly (particularly in community recovery). This includes within work under the Second National Action Plan to implement the NDRRF, and based on inquiry findings and recommendations that point to reform in community-based funding, knowledge and data sharing and in measurement of community-based approaches within local, state and territory and federal emergency management frameworks / plans.