

# Supporting primary care in emergencies

Murray PHN plays a vital role in ensuring the local primary health system can withstand, adapt to and recover from emergencies, including natural disasters, health crises and major service disruptions. Across all stages of emergency management, we work to keep primary care services connected, coordinated and delivering care to the communities that need it most.

## Our role in emergency management

We support providers throughout all phases of an emergency to ensure the primary care system remains connected, adaptable and responsive. While our everyday work is guided by three core functions of coordination, commissioning and capacity building, our emergency management approach spans the four phases of Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR), and together, these help strengthen system-wide readiness, continuity and resilience.

## What we do

<p><b>PREVENTION</b> We help reduce health risks and strengthen community resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting health promotion and public health initiatives</li> <li>• identifying system vulnerabilities and monitoring service impacts</li> <li>• working with Victorian and NSW agencies to address cross-border issues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PREPAREDNESS</b> We build capability across the primary health system - general practices, ACCHOs, pharmacies, aged care, mental health and commissioned services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing tools and resources, including emergency planning guides, digital continuity materials and training</li> <li>• encouraging the use of digital health tools to ensure business continuity</li> <li>• supporting workforce readiness, including emergency procedures, scenarios and staff role registration</li> <li>• having a primary care Emergency Volunteer Register to support surge workforce and temporary clinic models.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESPONSE</b> When emergencies occur, our Emergency Management Team works to ensure a timely, efficient and coordinated primary care response across the region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• real-time monitoring of risks, disruptions and official emergency advice</li> <li>• rapid communication with providers to support early action</li> <li>• targeted assistance, such as workforce surge, outreach and digital support</li> <li>• cross-border coordination with neighbouring PHNs and emergency agencies</li> <li>• support for vulnerable and high-risk communities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RECOVERY</b> After an emergency, we help to restore services and support communities to recover through</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• impact and needs assessments</li> <li>• filling service gaps where needed e.g. mental health, AOD, outreach</li> <li>• supporting continuity of care for affected providers</li> <li>• helping secure and distribute recovery funding</li> <li>• conducting debriefs and improvement processes to strengthen future preparedness.</li> </ul>

## Working within emergency governance structures

We actively participate in and contribute to meetings. Through these below partnerships, we ensure primary care is embedded in planning and decision-making and that the needs of general practice, commissioned services and high-risk communities are recognised at every stage.

- Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (VIC)
- Local Emergency Management Committees (NSW)
- Regional Emergency Management Planning Committees (VIC and NSW)
- State-level emergency and health agencies.

## The role of primary care in emergencies

Primary care providers play a central role in protecting community health and maintaining essential services during emergencies. As the first and most accessible point of contact for many people, general practices, ACCHOs, pharmacies and Murray PHN-commissioned services, are critical to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities across the region.

During emergencies, primary care organisations work to sustain safe access to essential healthcare, activate organisational business continuity plans, support vulnerable community members and provide real-time insights into emerging health needs. This includes adapting service delivery through flexible models such as telehealth, outreach, mobile clinics and culturally safe care approaches.

Primary care providers also contribute local intelligence, reporting service status, disruptions and community impacts to inform regional coordination and support. They play an essential role in supporting displaced or isolated individuals, managing chronic conditions during prolonged events, and reducing pressure on hospital and emergency departments.

## Tools and resources

- Emergency Management Framework
- Emergency Response and Business Continuity Plan
- Primary Care Preparedness resources
  - Bushfire
  - Earthquakes
  - Extreme heat
  - Flood
  - Severe weather
  - Thunderstorm asthma
- Emergency Volunteer Register
- Digital Health Emergency and Natural Disaster Toolkit

To access these and other resources, and to learn more about the Murray PHN's role in emergency management, visit our emergency preparedness webpage:

