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Office of the Advocate for
Children & Young People

**Children &
Young People's
Experience of
Disaster**

2020

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We would also like to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal people and culture within the NSW community.

ACYP advises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers this report may contain images of people who may have passed away.

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About ACYP

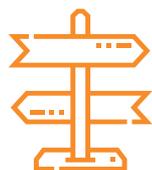
- about us

The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People. ACYP advocates for and promotes the safety, welfare, wellbeing and voice of all children and young people aged 0-24 years, with a focus on the needs of those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Under the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014, the functions of ACYP include:



Making recommendations to Parliament, government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services that affect children and young people



Promoting children and young people's participation in activities and decision-making about issues that affect their lives



Conducting research into children's issues and monitoring children's wellbeing



Holding inquiries into important issues relating to children and young people



Providing information to help children and young people.

Glossary

- glossary

ABS

Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACYP

Advocate for Children and Young People

AFAC

Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council

BOM

Bureau of Meteorology

CALD

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

CERA

Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority

CISS

RFS Critical Incident Support Service

COVID - 19

Coronavirus

CRC

Bushfire and Natural Hazard Cooperative Research Centre

CRC

Convention on the Rights of the Child

DPI

NSW Department of Primary Industries

DPIE

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Illawara YES

Youth Employment Strategy

LGA's

Local Government Areas

NGOs

Non Government Organisations

NSW

New South Wales

RFS

Rural Fire Service

RTO

Registered Training Organisation

RYTF

Rural Youth Task Force

SES

State Emergency Service

VBRC

Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission

YAC

Youth Advisory Council

Foreword



I am pleased to present this report on a topic that matters perhaps more so now than ever, but is also something that will set us up for greater success in the future, should we face situations like NSW has seen in the past few months. Let me be clear, we do not hope for that, but we do hope that children and young people are elevated as the remarkable, brave, selfless and influential individuals that they are within our communities and broader society.

This report would not have been possible without the incredible work of the ACYP team, with particular mention to Melissa Goldman and Liam McGovern for the writing and collation of the work. Also to our Participation team, Kate Munro, Rhys Morris, Meherunnessa Rahma, Melissa Goldman, Jessica Fielding and Evette Hanna who conducted the consultations with children and young people and always ensure their voice and views are respected and reflected in our work. We want to acknowledge the partnership we had with Deloitte Australia and the Partners Sarah Winter and Simone Cheung, Manager

Commercial Advisory, Cheryl Lorens, Manager Consulting, Charmian Grove and Senior Analyst Harini Warriar. We also want to note here that Deloitte provided a substantial pro bono contribution to this work.

Deloitte were eager to support this work, and were humble and gracious in the writing and work they did. We want to thank the young people and the team at Youth Insearch who worked with Deloitte, and us, around this report and participated in workshops. Your insights, voice and feedback has been incredibly valuable. We want to acknowledge the team at

- foreword

Newgate Research who worked with us around the quantitative polling and who continue to be champions for children and young people, through data and ongoing work.

A report like this is not possible without the support of both The Hon. Gareth Ward, MP and The Hon. Bronnie Taylor, MLC and the Department of Communities and Justice, the Office for Regional Youth, the Department of Customer Service, the Department of Education and the support of Department of Premier and Cabinet. We want to acknowledge the support and work of Professor Mary O’Kane AC and David Owens APM around the Independent Bushfire Inquiry and we thank them for welcoming us into their community meetings.

We want to take the opportunity to sincerely thank the work of the emergency services personnel throughout the fire season, including but not limited to the volunteer firefighters and salaried staff of the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and National Parks and Wildlife Service. Thanks must also go to the SES for their work during the flooding earlier in 2020.

We want to thank the communities we visited, the schools that opened their doors to us and the various local and State Members who worked with us as well.

To that end we want to acknowledge all the frontline workers who provided support to children and young people in NSW during these disasters. The charity organisations, Youth Workers, NGO’s, librarians who opened up their libraries for children and young people, police, health care workers, teachers and the many others who were mentioned by children and young people as supports.

But ultimately this work is not possible without the children and young people of New South Wales, who from across the state shared their thoughts, feelings and hopes with us.

We all say that children and young people are resilient and our future leaders, but this report demonstrates that they are leaders now, and that they have strong thoughts and feelings about how they can support and guide us through disasters. I am grateful for the over 1,400 children and young people who spent time with us, and who have shared their voice and their experiences. We have an opportunity now, not only through this report, but with the work of Resilience NSW and the ongoing recovery efforts across government and the community, to elevate the voice of children and young people and ensure they are not only heard, but their very real recommendations are acknowledged and implemented.

We look forward to working with government, the community and business to implement the recommendations. Whilst we hope that we never see the disasters of 2019-2020 again, we have a framework, recommendations and very strong young leaders who can ensure we recover, rebuild and prepare in a way that is community lead, that is inclusive of all members of the community and that sees us more resilient than ever.



Zoë Robinson

A/Advocate for Children and Young People

Contextualising Disaster

- contextualising disaster

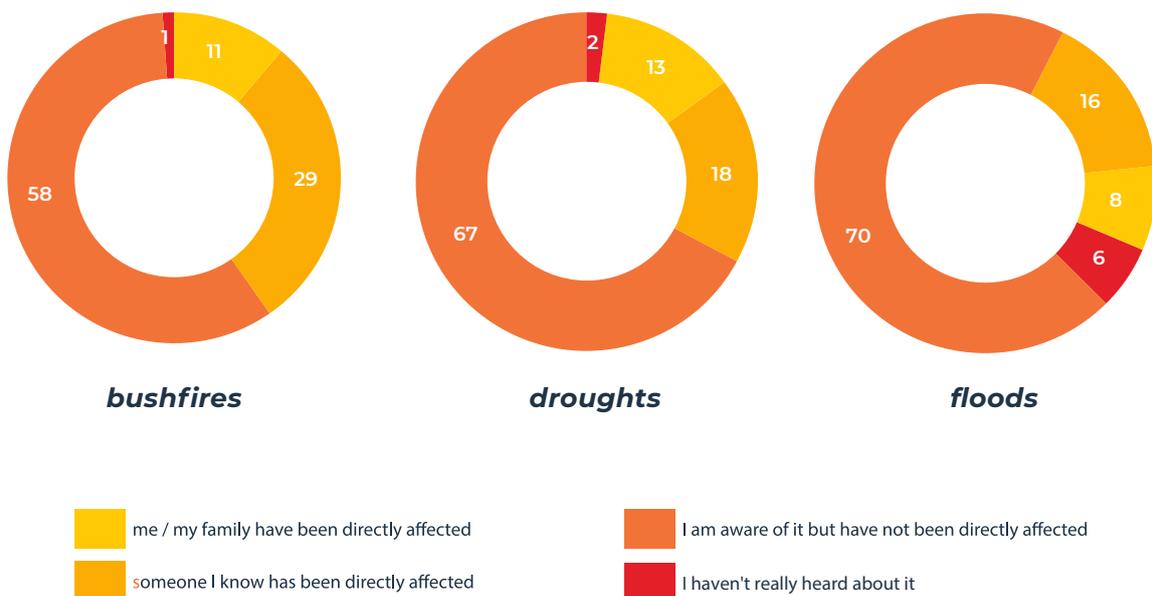
To complement ACYP's standard consultation methodology, quantitative research is often undertaken to obtain a representative sample of children and young people's attitudes on issues affecting them.

In recent polling of 1,031 young people, over half of respondents felt positively about living in NSW. In the polling they highlighted; having a good social life and connecting with friends, having lots of activities to do and events to go to, opportunities to get a good education and access to outdoor and natural spaces as just some of the best things about living in NSW. What we have recently seen in the media and heard from children and young people was the unfortunate reality that all the things that make NSW a great place to live have been significantly impacted and/or cancelled as a result of these recent consecutive disasters. This reality has meant that communities and individuals have had to build a certain degree of resilience.

However in the last few years communities have had that resilience challenged with compounding disasters in drought, bushfires, flooding and now COVID 19. These events have had significant impacts on individuals and communities.

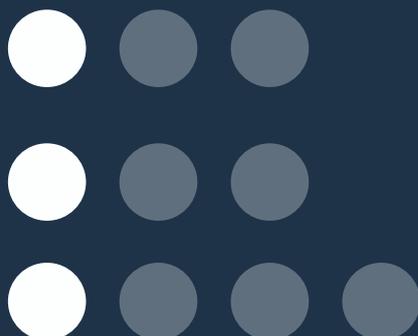
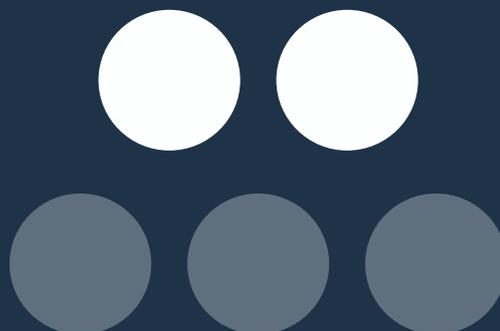
In our quantitative polling, responses to the question of whether children and young people had been personally impacted by the recent bushfires, drought or floods, either directly or by knowing someone directly affected, are shown below. The results demonstrated that there was a significant number of people either directly or indirectly affected by disaster.

Over the last 12 months how have you been feeling about the following ? (%)



Two out of five respondents had been personally impacted by the bushfires

either being directly affected (11%) or knowing someone directly affected (29%).

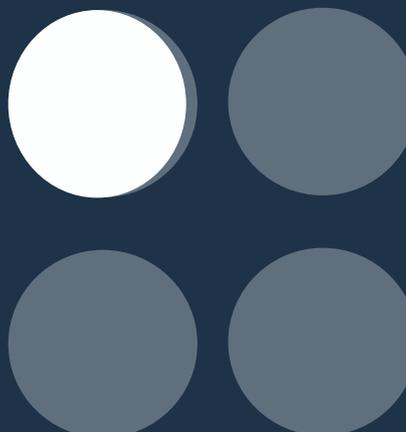


Three in ten respondents had been personally impacted by the drought

either being directly affected (13%) or knowing someone directly affected (18%).

Almost one quarter of respondents had been personally impacted by floods

Either being directly affected (8%) or knowing someone directly affected (16%).





Of those that had been directly affected by a disaster, 7% had experienced two of the three disasters and 2% had experienced all three disaster types.

Respondents were asked if there were any other disasters that had impacted their community or the wider NSW area in the past two months. Responses were coronavirus (23%), storms (1.1%) and blackouts (0.6%).

The COVID-19 crisis escalated rapidly during the course of the online poll being in the field, however the

implementation of Public Health Orders were only beginning to impact society in NSW.

If the poll was undertaken at a later date or if prompted, awareness and personal impact would likely be much higher.

The severity of the drought

The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) defines a drought as; ‘a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet normal use.’¹ The severity of the current drought that much of inland NSW has experienced is undeniable. This current drought in NSW began in mid-2017 and given its significance and prolonged duration it is considered a major drought event.

At the height of the drought 100% of the State was in one of the three drought phases (as defined by DPI); drought affected, drought or intense drought. In the most recent season update prepared by DPI in May 2020, the NSW drought event continued to weaken in May 2020 with large areas of the state in the Drought Affected category and much of NSW is in the early stages of drought recovery. The NSW DPI Combined Drought Indicator (CDI) showed that 90.8% of the state was in one of the three drought categories at the end of May and that winter rainfall is still needed to continue improvement.¹

Due to the prolonged nature of the drought, it is difficult to quantify the number of children and young people affected by drought as those in rural and regional NSW would have been significantly affected while other, such as those in metropolitan areas, may have just experienced secondary challenges. As the UNICEF Drought Report noted;

‘While the drought certainly impacts on children and young people in different ways and to different degrees, every child living in a drought-affected area is impacted. Families who own properties, families who typically work on them, ‘townies’ whose income is connected

with farming (however loosely), families with livestock and crops, families who’ve de-stocked, children and young people who attend local schools and those who board elsewhere – it affects the entire community and every child in it.’

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), as of the 2016 Census, there were approximately 2.5 million people aged under 25 in NSW. Approximately one third of these live in regional and rural NSW.

While drought conditions appear to be decreasing and some areas of the State appear to be entering a period of drought recovery, much of the State remains drought affected. It is also important to acknowledge that the effects of drought will be present for the longer term in many communities. There has been significant media attention of how the drought has affected communities and families. Unfortunately, outside of the research conducted by UNICEF for the recent NSW Youth Drought Summit in partnership with the NSW Government, there is little research into how the current drought is impacting children and young people. It is for this reason, ACYP made the decision to expand the focus of this project from the recent bushfire season, to natural disasters more broadly.

The record breaking fire season and subsequent flood

The 2019-2020 bushfire season in NSW has been described as 'unprecedented' in both their extent and intensity.

This bushfire season saw an extensive amount of land and infrastructure destroyed. The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) noted in its Annual Climate Statement 2019, published on 9 January 2020, that;

'The extensive and long-lived fires appear to be the largest in scale in the modern record in New South Wales, while the total area burnt appears to be the largest in a single recorded fire season for eastern Australia.'³

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) stated that as of 3 February 2020 'the fire ground in NSW covered approximately 5.4 million hectares (7% of the state), including 2.7 million hectares in national parks (37% of the NSW park system).'⁴ In addition on the 12th February 2020, the Rural Fire Service (RFS) reported that 2,439 homes have been destroyed in NSW.⁵

This bushfire season saw an extensive deployment of emergency personnel. On 31 January 2020 the NSW RFS reported in a tweet that more than 1,600 firefighters were in the field.⁶ The Australasian Fire and Emergency

Service Authorities Council (AFAC), noted that 5,732 interstate and international personnel were deployed to NSW, as of 28 February 2020.⁷ Due to these numbers, AFAC stated;

"This bushfire season has seen Australia's largest coordinated interstate and international deployment of fire and emergency personnel by far."⁸

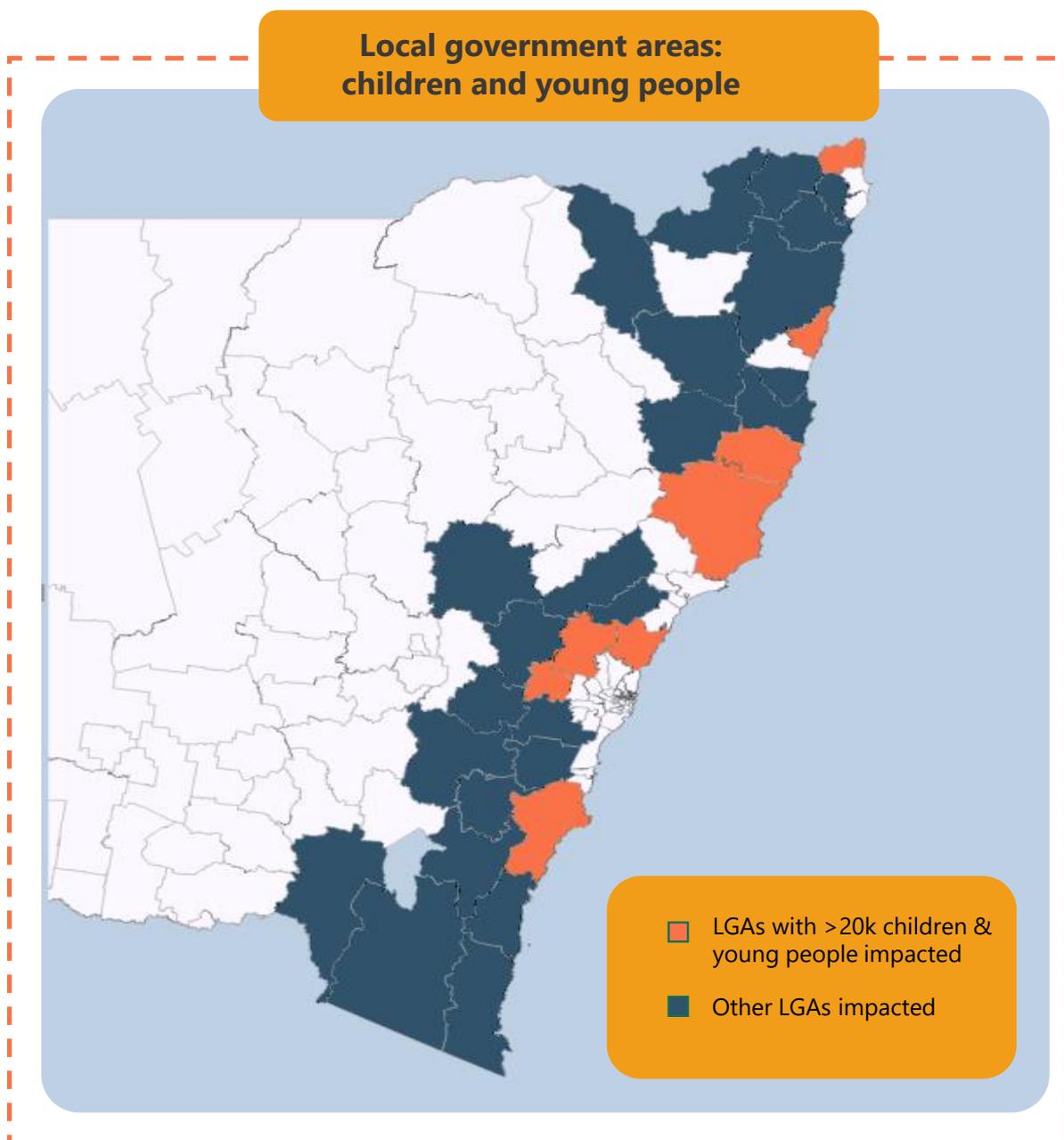
Unfortunately, this bushfire season also recorded, as of January 24 2020, NSW experienced 25 fatalities as a result of the bushfires.

The above statistics demonstrate just some of the ways in which the bushfire season has been quantified. To assist in demonstrating the quantitative impact of these bushfires on children and young people, ACYP commissioned a report by Deloitte which included a quantitative case study and population profile of some of the areas affected by bushfire.⁹

Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Children and young people affected by local government area

The recent bushfires impacted 34 local government areas across NSW. The map below identifies those areas with particularly high numbers of children and young people



Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Impact of the 2019/2020 NSW Bushfires on children and young people

The recent NSW bushfires impacted thousands of children and young people living in affected areas. This quantitative case study shows the extent of the disaster on young lives.

Total population impacted by the bushfires

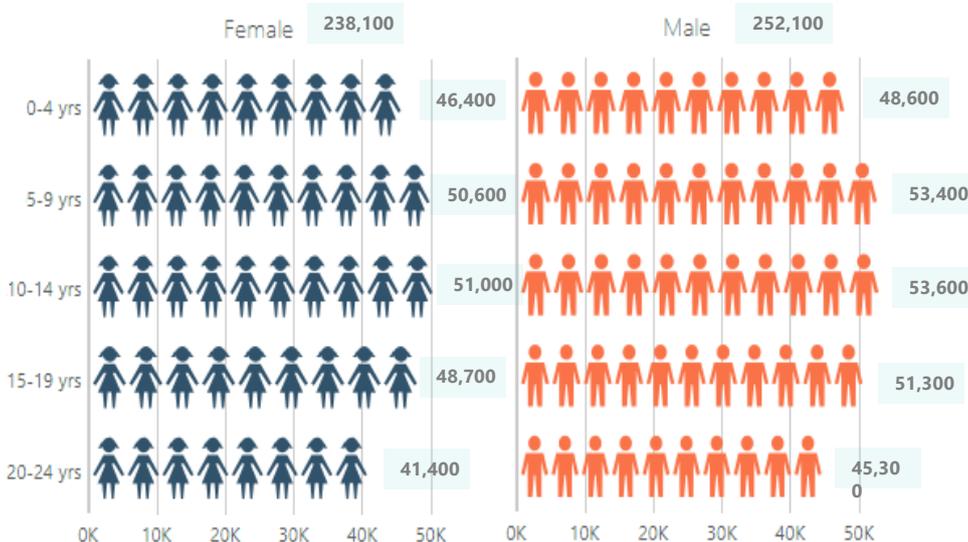
1.65 million

Number of children and young people impacted by the bushfires

490,000

The 2019-20 bushfires affected over 1.5 million people in NSW. Of the total population impacted, approximately 30% were children and young people aged 0-24 years.

Demographic Profile of Children & Young People Impacted*



*Rounded to the nearest thousand

Out of the total children and young people affected, the proportion of males and females were split fairly evenly across age groups. Children between 10-14 years of age represented the largest age cohort, with more than 100,000 children estimated to be impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires.

ABS (Regional Population by Age and Sex, Australia, 2018); LGA Growth Rate: ABS (Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2018-19)

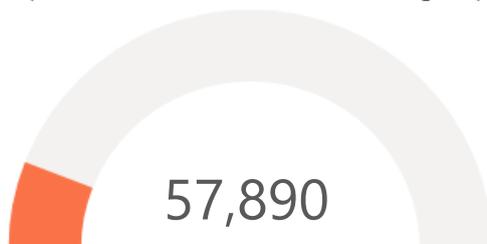
Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Vulnerable children and young people

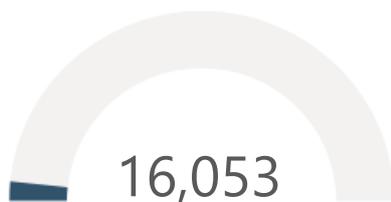
While approximately 490,280 children and young people were affected by the NSW Bushfires, a number of those are particularly vulnerable to the heightened effects of the disaster.

Vulnerable children and young people impacted

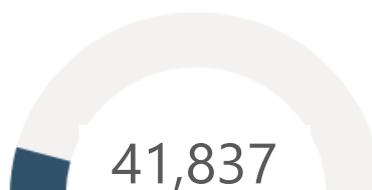
Proportion of Vulnerable Children and Young People



Proportion of Impacted Children and Young People with Disability



Proportion of Impacted Aboriginal Children and Young People



Approximately 12% of children and young people impacted belonged to more vulnerable groups, which considers children with disability (3.3%), Aboriginal children and young people (8.6%). The overlap of vulnerability categories were not taken into account.

Vulnerability proportion derived from ABS (2016 Census of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples); ABS (2016 Census of People and Communities)

Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Snapshot: Gospers Mountain Bushfire

The Gospers Mountain Bushfire was one of the largest fires during the 2019/2020 fire season. A snapshot of the number of children and young people affected by the Gospers Mountain is provided here.

Total population impacted by the Gospers Mountain bushfires

168,190

Number of children and young people impacted

52,800

The Gospers Mountain Bushfire was one of the largest fires during 2019-20 summer period, impacting over 160,000 individuals, out of whom approximately 30% were children and young people aged 0-24 years.

Demographic Profile of Children & Young People Impacted*



*Rounded to the nearest thousand

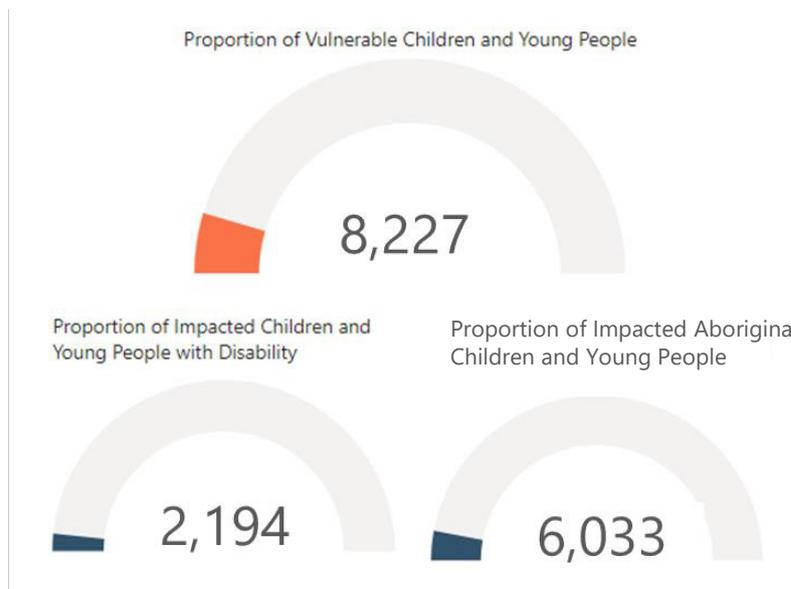
The demographic indicators of the areas impacted by the Gospers Mountain Bushfires indicate a relatively even split across gender and age cohort for children and young people.

Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Snapshot: Gospers Mountain Bushfire and vulnerable children and young people

A snapshot of the number of more vulnerable children and young people in the Gospers Mountain area is provided here

Vulnerable children and young people impacted in Gospers Mountain Bushfire



Approximately 9% of children and young people impacted by the Gospers Mountain Bushfire belonged to more vulnerable subset, which considers children with disability (3.3%), Aboriginal children and young people (5.8%). The overlap of vulnerability categories were not taken into account.

Vulnerability proportion derived from ABS (2016 Census of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples); ABS (2016 Census of People and Communities)

Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Snapshot: South Coast Bushfires

The South Coast Bushfires were also one of the largest fires during the 2019/2020 fire season. A snapshot of the number of children and young people affected by the South Coast bushfires is provided here.

Total population impacted by the south coast bushfires

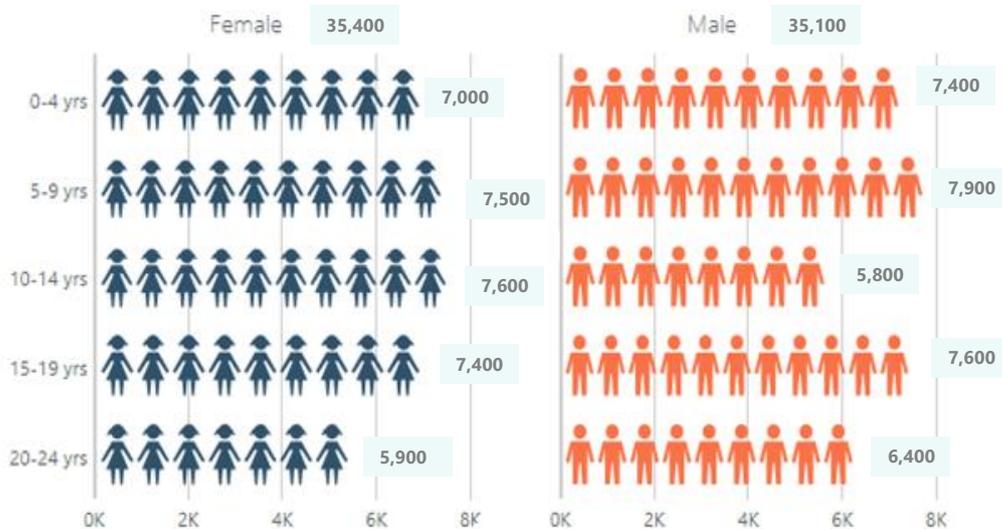
256,000

Number of children and young people impacted

72,000

The South Coast Bushfire was one of the largest fires in 2019-20 summer period, affecting over 250,000 individuals, out of which approximately 30% were children and young people aged 0-24 years.

Demographic Profile of Children & Young People Impacted*



*Rounded to the nearest thousand

The demographic indicators of the areas impacted by South Coast Bushfires indicate a relatively even split across gender and age cohort for children and young people.

ABS (Regional Population by Age and Sex, Australia, 2018); LGA Growth Rate: ABS (Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2018-19)

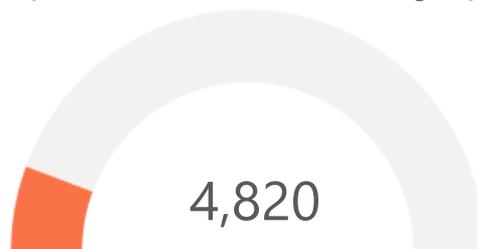
Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Snapshot: South Coast Bushfires and vulnerable children and young people

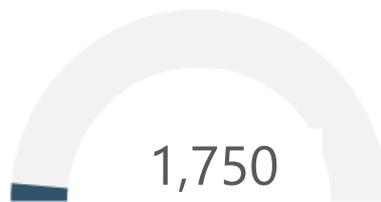
A snapshot of the number of more vulnerable children and young people in the South Coast area is provided here.

Vulnerable children and young people impacted by South Coast Bushfires

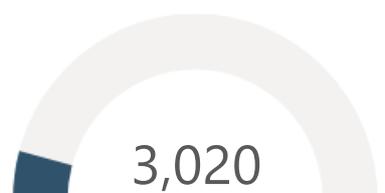
Proportion of Vulnerable Children and Young People



Proportion of Impacted Children and Young People with Disability



Proportion of Impacted Aboriginal Children and Young People



Approximately 11.5% of children and young people impacted by the South Coast Bushfire belonged to more vulnerable subset, which considers children with disability (3.1%), Aboriginal children and young people (8.4%). The overlap of vulnerability categories were not taken into account.

Vulnerability proportion derived from ABS (2016 Census of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples); ABS (2016 Census of People and Communities)

- contextualising disaster



Concurrently to the bushfires and drought, areas of NSW were experiencing significant flooding. From the period of 1 December 2019 to 29 February 2020, the State Emergency Service (SES) saw a significant deployment of volunteers for storm or flood related activities. In the figures the SES provided ACYP there were 4,624 volunteers who responded to a cumulative total of 58,324 jobs. Of the 4,624 volunteers 1,849 were under the age of 25.

The SES also provided ACYP with the Local Government Areas (LGA's) that were impacted by floods or storms in the above time period. Utilising population data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

for the 2016 census, ACYP estimated that approximately 2.06 million children and young people were affected by floods and storms. This figure is substantially higher than those affected by bushfires. Within this figure we acknowledge that some of these areas affected would have multiple concurrent or consecutive disasters.

Another potential reason why this figure would be higher than those solely affected by bushfires is that fires often affect rural communities and flooding can be coastal/metro which are usually more densely populated.

Previous Learnings

The reality of disaster events are something that NSW and more broadly Australia has faced in the past and will no doubt continue to face in the future.

Following many of these previous disaster events, various levels of Government, community and independent organisations have undertaken some form of inquiry or review into the causes, effects and response. Given NSW's susceptibility to extreme weather conditions and the increased occurrence of natural disasters, it is imperative that previous learning is taken from those with experience in planning for disaster preparedness and recovery.

The Bushfire and Natural Hazard Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) coordinates a national research effort into hazards and disasters. In the context of disasters, the CRC focuses on the needs of individual and community resilience before the disaster, during the disaster and through the short-term and longer-term recovery.¹⁰ This research is aimed at all spheres of the NGO and business sector alongside each level of government.

The CRC hosts a database of previous disaster and hazard inquiries at all levels of government from 1886 to 2017. From these inquiries it has categorised an immense amount of recommendations for all realms of society, from education to emergency management to inclusive recovery. These databases are a clear indication that there is significant learnings from previous disasters that can be taken into consideration in the preparedness, response, management and recovery of emergencies. As mentioned above, it is unfortunate that there is not an extensive amount of children and young people's experience and learnings from disaster. For example, within the Victorian Royal Commission that followed the events

of Black Saturday (VBRC), there was only one recommendations that related directly to children and young people. Recommendation 6 of the Final report stated that 'Victoria lead an initiative of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs to ensure that the national curriculum incorporates the history of bushfire in Australia and that existing curriculum areas such as geography, science and environmental studies include elements of bushfire education.'¹¹ To their credit, educational curriculum's around the country did respond, so that both the science and geography curriculum now include elements of bushfire education.

It is also important to acknowledge that many organisations have made significant changes to their practice in response to previous inquiries. For example, in response to the Black Saturday Bushfires, the RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW overhauled the way information is distributed to the public which resulted in initiatives like the Fires Near Me App. The recent disasters have highlighted the enormous work that many organisations undertake to be prepared for and respond to disasters and for this they should be commended. The need to engage in previous learning is in no way a reflection of their performance but simply a resource to further enhance their work.

In both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this project it has been made apparent that children and young people must be given the opportunity to contribute to and grow from this learning.

Key Findings

- key findings

Our consultations and research led to the following key findings on disaster impacts and recovery responses:

Social Infrastructure and Services

Mental Health Services



Disasters and the life changes that follow have significant impacts on mental wellbeing.

Children and young people experience post-traumatic stress, grief, loss, anxiety, depression and anger. These effects can last over the long term and reach clinical levels.

Targeted and tailored mental health interventions and strategies to support children and young people are required.

Education



Disasters can cause destruction and damage to schools, which impacts access to education, engagement, learning and academic achievement.

Disaster responses should include:

- Greater choice in schooling options including virtual schooling
- Mental health support to students facilitated in schools
- Greater understanding of the impacts of disaster between students and teachers
- Disaster education in schools.

Housing



Disasters can impact the housing stability of children and young people.

The impact of disasters on housing include:

- Destruction and damage to homes and farms
- Displacement and relocation
- Decrease in housing and rental affordability
- Overcrowding.

Responses should be centred on restoring a child or young person into their home and community to re-establish a sense of normalcy, identity and connection.

Youth Employment



Disasters can create youth unemployment, heavy workloads for children affected by the drought and other social and economic issues.

Children and young people require support post-disaster to handle job loss. Options might include subsidies and income support, training opportunities and broader economic strategies.

Family and Peers



Disasters have significant impacts on family life and the ability to connect with peers.

Effects of disasters include:

- Loss, separation and relocation of family members and friends
- Changes to parenting
- Secondary stressors that compound mental health issues, domestic and family violence and family breakdown.

Disaster responses should include, mental health check ins for families, parental education and training, broader social and financial support, domestic violence prevention and response.

Community Ties



Disasters impact the ability of children and young people to access and benefit from the community.

Disasters can lead to:

- Damage and destruction of arts, sporting and community infrastructure
- Reduced time and limited financial resources that enable access
- Significant impact on health and wellbeing.

Disaster recovery should prioritise community rebuild with innovative gap programs, sporting events, community grants, events and youth workers to enable participation.

Natural Environment & Neighbourhood



Disaster causes severe impacts on the natural environment and the ability of children and young people to connect with the land.

Disasters cause:

- Severe destruction to land and deterioration of air and water quality
- Water and food insecurity
- Emotional stress
- Loss of identity and disconnection with the land and environment.

Disaster responses should include youth participation in decision making, land care, and preserving Aboriginal sites.

Having a Voice

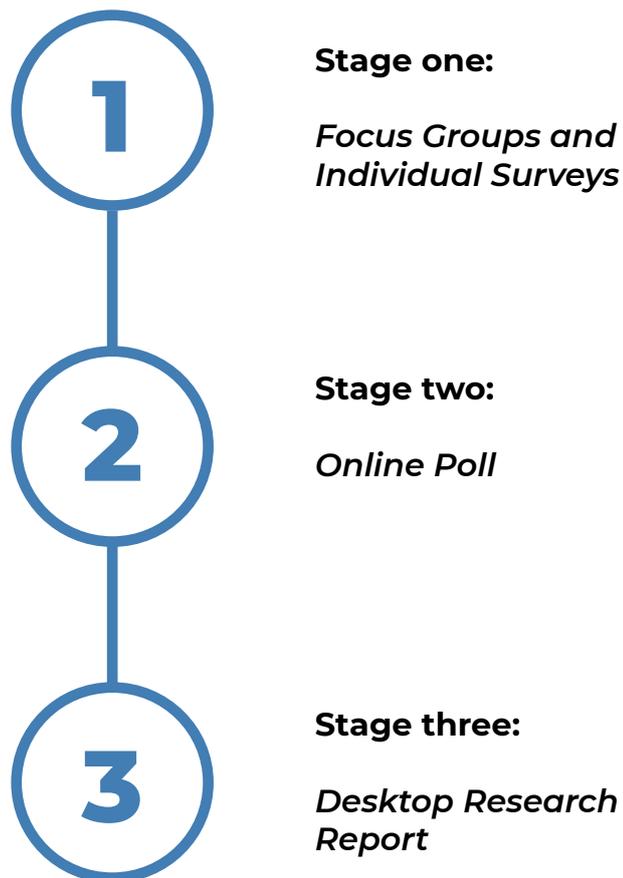


Children and young people can feel invisible, forgotten and unable to influence the world around them. They have their own perspectives and wish to have a voice and involvement in disaster recovery.

Responses should create platforms for children and young people to share their stories and participate in disaster recovery responses. Children and young people who must take on more responsibility in disaster recovery, should be supported to do so.

Methodology

ACYP adopted a three staged approach to gather the views of children and young people on disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery.



Stage 1: Focus Groups and Individual Surveys

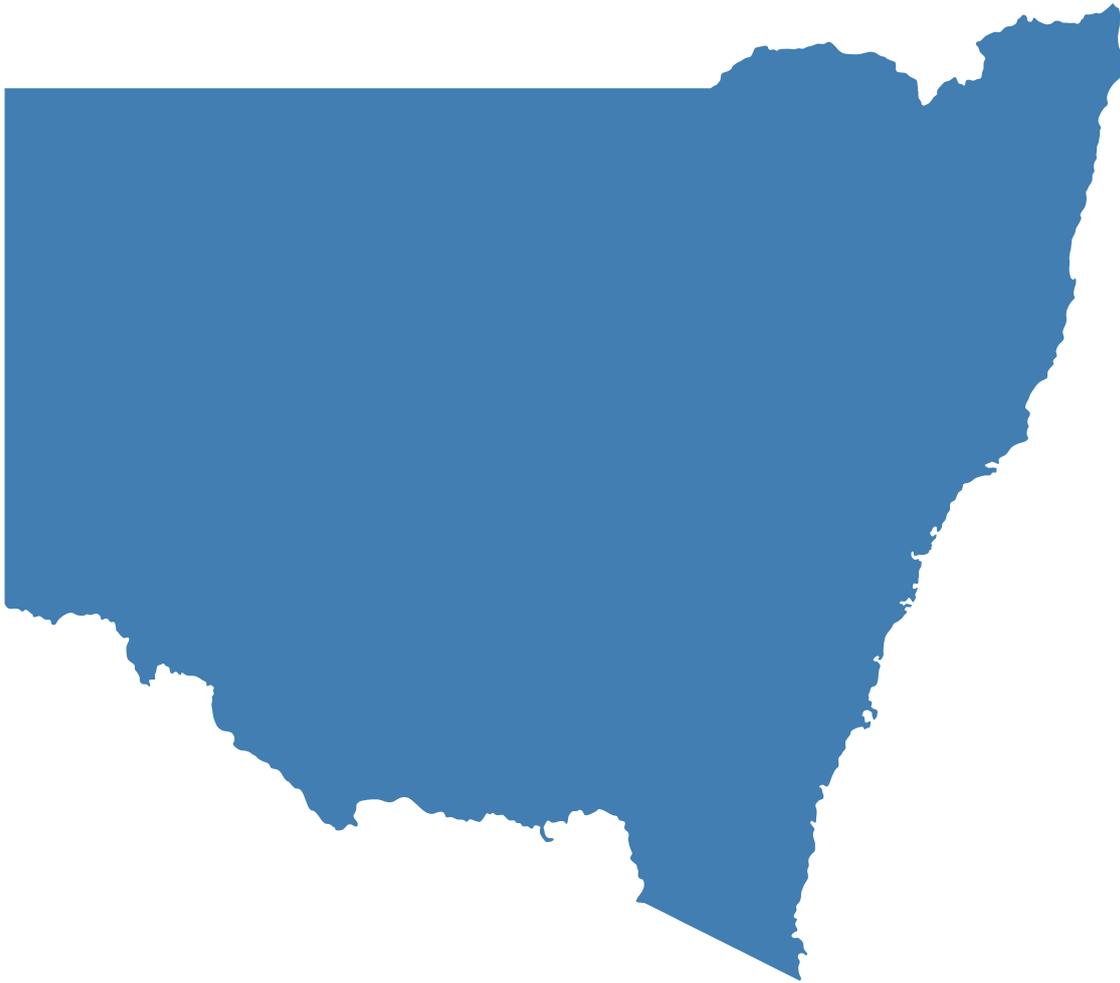
ACYP conducted face-to-face focus groups and administered individual surveys in 28 sites across NSW.

These included: Government, Independent and Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools; local youth councils; service providers for children and young people; and out of hour's school care settings in the following areas:

- Blue Mountains: Katoomba (2 sites); Winmalee; Wentworth Falls
- Hawkesbury: Freemans Reach; Windsor
- South East and Tablelands: Bega; Wingecarribee; Wollondilly (2 sites)
- Illawarra Shoalhaven: Shoalhaven
- North Coast: Coffs Harbour (2 sites); Bowraville; Port Macquarie (3 sites); Lismore (2 sites)
- Far West: Walgett
- Hunter: Paterson; Gloucester
- Central West and Orana: Lithgow (3 sites)
- New England and North West: Gunnedah; Manilla; Narrabri

Focus groups were arranged in an additional 14 sites; but it became necessary to cancel these as COVID-19 escalated and subsequent Public Health Orders precluded their occurrence:

- Central West and Orana: Dubbo (3 sites); Orange (1 site); Parkes (1 site); Cabonne (1 site)
- South East and Tablelands: Eurobodalla (2 sites); Snowy Mountains (1 site); Cooma (1 site); Nowra (3 sites) North Coast: Goonellabah (1 site)



Some of these locations had been planned for later in the consultation process as they had been the most greatly impacted by the 2019 bushfires and it was considered appropriate to give these children and young people more time and distance from the disasters before asking them to share their experiences, in line with best interests' principles.¹²

These locations were sent individual surveys of the focus group questions for children and young people to complete and were offered to have the focus groups conducted using online methods. To further accommodate those individuals,

schools and organisations that ACYP was unable to conduct face-to-face consultations with, ACYP also set up an online submission process for those that wished to make a submission.¹³

- methodology

In total, 404 children and young people aged 5-24 years took part in focus group consultations. Of those, 335 provided demographic information:

32.1%

were aged 5-11 years

52.5%

were aged 12-17 years

15.4%

were aged 18-24 years

56.3%

identified as female

42.6%

identified as male

1.1%

as a gender other than male or female

100%

resided outside of Sydney

16.3%

identified as Aboriginal

16.9%

were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)

7.4%

identified as living with disability.

Focus group participants discussed the following questions:

1

What is working well for children and young people?

2

What is not working so well now for children and young people?

3

When the recent drought/bushfire/floods first happened what was helpful for you, your family, friends, and other people in your community?

4

What are the things that you wish would have been around at the time of the disaster that would have been helpful to you, your family, friends, and other people in the community?

5

What do you think are the most important things that can help children and young people before; during; and after something like this happens?

6

What do you think the government and other decision-makers can do to better support children and young people when disasters such as these happen?

Focus group consultations were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Conscious that some children and young people may feel shy or uncomfortable sharing in a larger group context or that there will not always be complete agreement between group members, ACYP also placed the more targeted questions on individual surveys for respondents to complete during the group session.

This also allowed for more accurate data collection ensuring that we collected the individual views of participants.

Participants that completed individual surveys answered the following questions:

1

When the recent disaster that you've spoken about today was happening, what was helpful for you, your family, friends and community?

2

What do you think are the most important things that can help children and young people when something like this happens?

- a.** To feel prepared before a disaster?
- b.** To help during disaster?
- c.** To feel supported after a disaster has happened?

Following data collection; focus group transcriptions were read by multiple ACYP staff members with training in ACYP's participation methodology.

A coding framework was developed for analysis of the individual surveys and code frames were applied to results in order to draw out major themes that emerged. Results were coded by two staff members to increase data integrity.

Stage 2: Online Poll

In Stage 2, ACYP engaged Newgate Research to conduct an online poll of children and young people aged 12-24 years across NSW. 1,031 children and young people were recruited through a dedicated youth panel and completed a 15 minute online survey between 6 – 23 March 2020:

- **51.3%** were aged 12-17 years and **48.7%** were aged 18-24 years
- **73.7%** identified as female, **25.1%** as male and **1.2%** as a gender other than male or female
- **84.4%** lived in metropolitan areas and **15.6%** in regional areas
- **3.3%** identified as Aboriginal
- **30.0%** were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)
- **12.1%** identified as living with disability.

Data were weighted using 2016 ABS Census data to balance the demographic and locational splits with a margin of error of +/- 3.1% and a confidence level of 95%.

The questions undertaken in the survey were constructed following the findings of some of our earlier focus groups to ensure that they were reflective of the voice of children and young people and that our quantitative and qualitative data could be tested against each other. Participants answered the following questions:

1

Recently, many people across NSW have been impacted by different disasters, that is, events that have had a negative impact on a community or the wider NSW area. Over the last 12 months, how have you been affected by the following?

- a. Bushfires
- b. Droughts
- c. Floods

2

Are there any other disasters that have had a negative impact on your community or the wider NSW area in the past 12 months?

3

How have these recent natural disasters impacted your day-to-day life, or the life of other young people you know who have been directly impacted?

4

Do you think these natural disasters will have any long term impacts on young people in your area? If so, what would they be?

5

What, in your opinion, should be done to help people your age who have been impacted by the recent disasters in NSW?

6

Which of the following things should be the top priority for government to support people your age who have been impacted by disaster? (Respondents could select up to three from a list of possible priorities).

7

How should the government and communities be involving people of your age in helping prepare for any possible future natural disasters?

8

Next, we're going to focus on the recent bushfires in NSW. Here is a list of some of the impacts of the fires. Please have a look and select the three impacts that you're most concerned about. (Respondents were given a list of possible impacts to select from).

9

Now, we're going to discuss the ongoing drought in NSW. Here is a list of some of the impacts from the drought. Please have a look and select the three impacts that you're most concerned about. (Respondents were given a list of possible impacts to select from).

Stage 3: Desktop Research Report

ACYP commissioned Deloitte to undertake further quantitative and qualitative analysis focused on children and young people experience of disaster and their insights into disaster recovery. The work that Deloitte undertook was conducted in three phases.

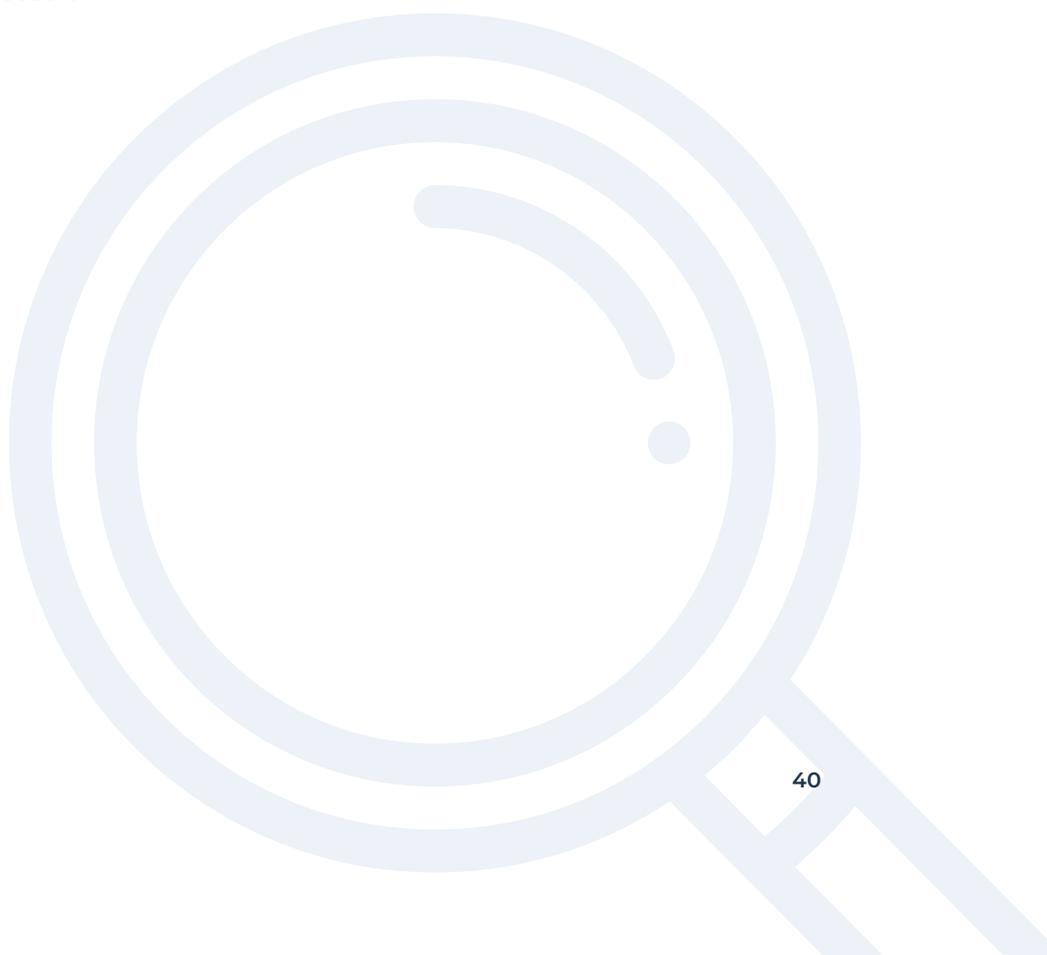
Phase one focus was a desktop research analysis of the views and impacts of previous disasters on children and young people. This included previous responses to disasters targeted towards children and young people.

Phase two was a quantitative analysis of the impacts and population profile of children and young people affected by the 2019/2020 NSW bushfires.

Phase three was focused on developing a child – focused recovery response to disaster through children and young people participating in a Human Centred Design Workshop and ideation session.

Combining the insights from these three phases with the consultation data collected by ACYP, a Disaster Resilience Framework was developed.

This framework became a key resource in understanding how disaster affects children and young people and how to design a recovery model that is both inclusive and responsive to their needs and concerns.



Disaster Resilience Framework

- Disaster Resilience Framework

To explore the impacts of disaster on children and young people, a Disaster Resilience Framework was developed. The Framework is an evidence-based framework designed from desktop research and consultations with children and young people.

In our consultations, children and young people spoke about the existence of many positive factors in their community. Many viewed these as sources of resilience for themselves, their peers, families and communities. They spoke about how they relied on them to get them through difficult times and as the community started to recover, they drew on them to rebuild their lives and restore a sense of normalcy.

This Framework is an important contribution to the broader government and community recovery from recent disasters and sets out a way to conceptualise learnings to better prepare in the event of future disasters. The Disaster Resilience Framework has been developed to structure and shape thinking about the importance and role of resilience in disaster preparedness and recovery for children and young people.

The Framework is a conceptual tool that can provide a common language to discuss disaster related impacts and how they are interrelated. The Disaster Resilience Framework links

emotional wellbeing factors and practical interventions. This is important because how interventions are done is just as important as what is done. Designing disaster responses to enable recovery from trauma requires considering emotional resilience factors that go to the heart of child agency.

The Framework identified six Resilience Building Factors that help build resilience in children and young people which promote good health and wellbeing as well as help produce a positive recovery from adverse events. These six factors should exist at all times. However, in the context of a disaster event it must be understood that these factors may be diminished by the disaster event and there must be an immediate focus in the recovery phase of strengthening or regaining these factors. Development of these six factors increases the agency of a child and young person which leads to better outcomes for the individual, community and more effective policy development and service delivery for organisations and Government. The Resilience Building Factors are:



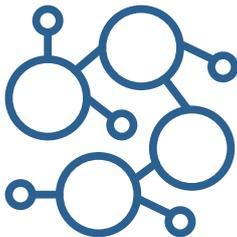
Empowerment



Children and young people are provided with the resources to empower them to reach the full potential of their agency. Arming them with information, skills and belief from wider society can facilitate agency.

Benefit: Children and young people can actively participate in the disaster preparation, response and recovery. They can help prepare their families and communities, inform their peers and provide proactive support throughout the disaster and feel a sense of responsibility within their community.

Choice



Children and young people are provided with choice in relation to services critical to their wellbeing, especially in circumstances of disaster recovery.

Benefit: We provide a suite of service and support to the children and young people to meet their individual needs, and we start to support and resolve the potential long term issues earlier. Choice enables the child or young person to have their needs met both during and post the disaster and increases efficacy and efficiency in service delivery.

Inclusion



Children and young people participate in decision making, disaster prevention, preparedness, recovery and broader social and economic strategies. Innovative and new perspectives from children and young people must be heard.

Benefit: Including children and young people early leads to better policy, procedure, and services that meet their needs, and is ultimately beneficial to them both now and in the future. It is also policy and procedure that can grow with and continue to support the child and young person as they grow in the community. Greater inclusion is an investment that will see reward for the community and individual socially, economically and culturally.

Visibility



The experiences of children and young people in disasters are communicated and they are identified as 'active agents' in the disaster recovery journey. Their contributions in prevention preparedness and recovery are seen and valued.

Benefit: If children and young people see their contributions implemented, it can become a positive, self-fulfilling cycle that sees children and young people engage more with policy development specific to their situation, contribute positively to the implementation and achieve better outcomes. It also creates a sense of ownership which supports policy makers during implementation and delivery.

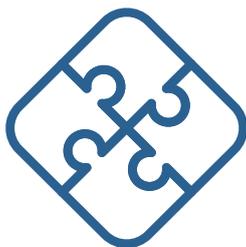
Identity



Children and young people are strengthened to maintain their identity post disaster. Their enabling environment is essential to who they are and who they want to be. Identity provides a pathway to agency.

Benefit: All children and young people should own their identity, their own experiences, their own needs and their own response to disaster. This enables them to engage with and design solutions that best support them. It promotes engagement with opportunities and proactively address their needs. It is also important as they are members of a family unit, a community and a greater eco-system, and their identity within that is important.

Connections



Children and young people are supported to connect with those who matter in their lives and with their wider community. Being connected in a time of disaster enables agency.

Benefit: Greater connection to community enhances resilience and increases access to supports and services. It promotes information sharing and collective responsibility to mitigate the negative impacts of disaster, whilst increasing the likelihood of timely recovery once the immediate effects of disaster are over, leading to restoration of independence and enhanced autonomy.

- Disaster Resilience Framework

The Disaster Resilience Framework has identified five Enabling Environments that are key to building resilience. In a similar manner to the Resilience Factors, these environments are key environments in the absence of a disaster event, they may be impacted by a disaster event and therefore there must be a focus in the recovery stage of maintaining and strengthening these environments. These environments are identified as:

Social Infrastructure & Services, Neighbourhood & Environment, Community Ties, Family & Peers, Having a Voice.



Disaster Resilience Framework

A summary of the Disaster Resilience Framework is presented in the table on the following page.

The following discussion will utilise the Enabling Environments of the Framework to analyse our findings from ACYP consultations, quantitative polling and desktop research.

Disaster Resilience Framework

Summary

Based on research, this table shows Resilience Building Factors, disaster impacts and responses within each Enabling Environment.

| Enabling Environment | Resilience Building Factors | Disaster Impacts | Disaster Responses |
|--|---|---|--|
| Social Infrastructure & Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Mental health services • Housing • Youth employment  | Social infrastructure promotes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning, growth and identity • Choice • Social connection and stability • Health, wellbeing and happiness • Shelter, financial stability • Empowerment, agency and ability to self-regulate and problem solve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of stabilising environment, educational and training outcomes • Loss of stability and connectedness • Decrease in mental health and wellbeing • Relocation and housing instability • Decrease of employment opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative educational arrangements • Peer to peer support mental health services • Short term emergency accommodation and housing support • Training and job opportunities in disaster recovery and rebuild • Income support |
| Family & Peers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Peers  | Family promotes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety, security and stability • Health wellbeing and happiness • Social connection and identity • Empowerment and agency • Inclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss, separation and relocation • Less time spent with family members • Changes to parenting • Increase risks of domestic violence, drugs and alcohol abuse • Increase exposure to parental mental illness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health services check ins for parents and families • Parental education and training • Domestic violence prevention and response • Broader social and economic supports |
| Community Ties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts, sporting and culture • Community events  | Community ties promotes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connection and stability • Learning, growth and identity • Community inclusion and visibility • Disaster preparedness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage and destruction of recreational activities • Loss of community connection • Exclusion • Slow to act and come together | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative sporting and recreational programs post disaster – and quick rebuild • Strong community leadership • Community events • Disaster emergency packs • Education in schools |
| Neighbourhood & Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural environment • Connection to land  | Neighbourhood & Environment promotes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connection and a place to go • Health, wellbeing and happiness • Cultural connection and identity • Empowerment, agency and ability to self-regulate and problem solve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage and destruction of public spaces and the natural environment • Damage and destruction to cultural significant sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in disaster decision making • Involvement in regrowth and regeneration activities • Preserving Aboriginal sites |
| Having a voice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Involvement  | Wider Society promotes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connectedness and inclusion • Visibility, learning, and growth • Health, wellbeing and happiness • Empowerment and agency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater need for child and youth voice in policy and disaster response • Greater need for listening and story telling • Greater need for involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted platforms and forums for receiving child and youth voice • Public forums for story telling • Youth volunteering or disaster response involvement |

Enabling Environment 1: *Social infrastructure & Services*

Enabling environment 1: Social infrastructure & Services is broken down into the following four sections:



Mental Health & Mental Health Services

Positive mental health enables children and young people to live full and creative lives and deal with life's challenges.

The absence of appropriate social supports to develop and maintain positive mental health presents an additional risk factor for children and young people in times of disaster.

Disasters have a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Research suggests individuals who have already experienced mental health issues are particularly vulnerable when disasters occur.¹⁴

The loss and damage to homes, assets, livelihoods, wildlife and the environment cause deep distress. Subsequent life changes that result from disasters can cause ongoing harm to mental health.¹⁵

Overall, research and children and young people themselves, reported increased feelings of grief, sadness, depression, anger and anxiety after disasters.¹⁶

Case study: Drought effects on Mental Health and Wellbeing

The effects of the drought have taken significant emotional toll on children and young people.

They report feelings of anxiety, depression, fatigue, sadness and anger as a result of the drought (UNICEF, 2019). Their mental health and wellbeing is impacted by:

1. Having to 'grow up quickly', witnessing the death and suffering of animals
2. The sight of barren lands as a reminder of struggles and loss
3. Worrying about parental mental health
4. Heavy workloads on the family farm
5. Financial hardship and feelings of guilt related to boarding and schools fees
6. Grief and loss for the future
7. Isolation and loneliness

(UNICEFa, 2019)

Dean & Stein (2010) conducted a study on adolescents (11-17 years) in rural schools in New South Wales. They found that adolescents living with prolonged drought reported significantly higher levels of emotional distress and behavioural difficulties. Twelve per cent of surveyed adolescents scored in the clinically significant range.

“In drought affected communities there are a lot of farmers knocking themselves off because they can’t afford to feed their kids or anything.”



Children and young people living in areas that had been experiencing prolonged drought discussed in our consultations the need for greater awareness about the importance of seeking mental health support, not just for children and young people but adults as well:

“In drought affected communities there are a lot of farmers knocking themselves off because they can’t afford to feed their kids or anything.”

Linked to this, there was some discussion about the lack of available mental health support in regional and rural NSW:

“And the rurals are struggling mentally between the age of 14 and 25. And that’s when you see a lot of suicides...all that kind of stuff because there’s just not enough support here.”

The impacts on mental health can appear in the short, medium and long term following disaster, suggesting responses need to accommodate impacts over time (VBRC, 2010). This research is supported by what ACYP heard within our consultations where mental health supports were needed during and post disaster.

Provide mental health support for children and young people during disaster

In ACYP's consultations, across all locations, children and young people discussed the impact of living through disasters on their mental health and wellbeing. For many, the actual witnessing of houses burning down; the red, orange and black skies and animals being burnt had left them feeling traumatised.

"It was quite sad to see half of my life gone."

"We saw the massive column of grey and black smoke. And it kept turning from red to orange and then back to grey and black and kept changing. And we were evacuated and went down to the bottom of the driveway. We could see the house burning down, not our house, [our] neighbour's house."

"They could see cows walking down the street on fire."

Others talked about feelings of isolation due to being separated from friends and family and not being able to socialise.

As a result, children and young people often raised the need for mental health supports at the time of disasters. For some, it was as simple as the adults in their lives reassuring them that things will be okay:

"I would say reassurance. Reassuring them that everything's going to be okay."

Several groups reported that their schools had provided additional mental health supports during the disasters. These included extra school counsellors; opportunities to talk to each other in special assemblies; and also identifying children and young people most

impacted by the disasters and offering them practical assistance and trauma support:

"When we did go back to school we had a big talk about it...we had a big assembly...we all went round saying what happened and if our house got damaged or anything. And if we wanted to say anything or not."

"We did have assemblies about the fires. It was pretty nice and all [they said] if you need any help, come speak to us."

ACYP acknowledged the steps that the Department of Education and Ministry of Health put in place to provide additional mental health supports for those schools and communities affected by the bushfires in the immediate aftermath of the fires.

A protective factor that children and young people identified as important was schools and teachers who focused on the welfare and wellbeing of students. This provided them with a sense of safety during a disaster, which led to them feeling supported. However, participants in our consultations reported wanting supports to be available constantly during disaster situations rather than having set times. The significant deployment of mental health staff and creation of additional mental health clinical positions must be sustained in the immediate and longer term.

“So more [support] people while it’s happening. Not just after it’s happened. Probably where you could go all the time. Not just certain hours.”

Children and young people identified a lack of supports in some schools had the potential to lead to a loss of opportunity for children and young people to access mental health supports. This lack of opportunity intensified mental health concerns during and post disaster, which had the potential to lead to increased suicides in the community.

Some young people also discussed the lack of mental health support available to the young volunteers and firefighters during the bushfire disaster:

“We have a lots of younger members who do participate in the fires after they turn 16 with parent permission. I feel like they actually need a lot more support than what they get...We talk about what’s happening in the fire season, how we feel about it but younger people tend to just shut themselves up. Now we have counselling support systems in Brigades but I feel like something else needs to be done. I’m just not sure what.”

It is important to acknowledge that the RFS Critical Incident Support Service (CISS) has introduced a comprehensive suite of resources for volunteers at a local brigade level called ‘Moving Towards Recovery.’ These resources include; common reactions to disaster, coping

strategies to reduce stress and mental health information and referral to appropriate services. Within these resources there are fact sheets specifically designed for young people. When children and young people did speak positively about mental health supports that were available during the disasters; they typically discussed peer to peer support. Children and young people reported that they liked having the opportunity to discuss things with their peers that were going through the same situation; as opposed to discussing their feelings with an adult stranger:

“I’ve tried 17 different counsellors and nothing was helping me, I went to Youth Insearch and I don’t know what it was but the peer-to-peer conversations that we have there is what made a lot of us more...”

Children and young people saw the value in speaking with peers who had gone through the same experiences as them and also wanted to know what to do to help their friends if needed:

“Talk to other people about what you experienced and try to find someone that has already experienced something like that and just tell them how you feel.”

***“I’ve tried
17 different
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nothing was
helping me, I went
to Youth Insearch
and I don’t know
what it was but
the peer-to-peer
conversations that
we have there is
what made a lot
of us more...”***

Other groups of children and young people that did not have similar support groups available in their areas reported they would have liked to have this option:

“I feel like it might be easier to talk about something that’s getting you down if there is something like that where you’ve got multiple people in the same situation.”

“I think there should be a service by kids for kids.”

“They have a part of their website where if you’re worried about something you can talk to them...it’s really nice to know that adults don’t just care about making money. They also care about, not even their own kids, just kids in general. I think that’s really nice.”

One group of children and young people spoke very positively about the free support service on the Behind The News website. Their school had made this available to them:



Provide mental health support for children and young people post disaster

In our consultations, it was widely agreed that mental health support needs to be provided to children and young people long after a disaster has ended. Children and young people expressed that the trauma still continues without the disaster being active:

“Emotional support...even the impact afterwards. People are still stressed about it today. There’s still a large impact on them.”

Children and young people were very clear that mental health supports should be available free of charge after a disaster event. Some suggested that all children and young people that have experienced a disaster should attend a mental health session to normalise the process of everyone:

“Free counselling sessions or everyone goes to a session so no one feels left out or embarrassed.”

Respondents to our quantitative polling expressed similar opinions as those in the face-to-face consultations that mental health support for children and young people affected by disasters should be free of charge:

“Support services for people who have been affected should have low or no cost.”

Linked to the idea of normalising help-seeking, some children and young people suggested that there should be awareness campaigns after a disaster to make getting help seem “normal”.

Others thought that services could proactively check-in with children and young people to see how they are feeling:

“Groups or facilities catering specifically for checking on the wellbeing of young people.”

Some groups of children and young people spoke very positively about mental health support services they had come into contact with post-disaster events. They reported that mental health services such as Headspace had received additional funding to provide outreach clinical support to young people in bushfire affected towns. They said that young people who called Headspace and mentioned the bushfires were given priority:

“It was also helpful to talk to someone that had experienced something scary to know how to react or know how they felt.”

Post disaster there are a myriad of responses to mental health that Government and community organisations can employ including school based mental health services, peer to peer programs, community mental health initiatives and social media campaigns.

In our research, children and young people were asked to create a model of what mental health services may look like for them. For them, mental health needed to be provided immediately following a disaster to both equip young people with training to help their peers but also to provide them with a channel of communication to ensure their feelings of isolation can be minimised.

This service should be provided by recognised mental health providers and organisations. It should be available in both larger groups at evacuation or community centres or smaller groups or individual counselling for those that preferred that method of support. Providing both these methods would allow the counselor and recipient to build rapport and trust. This service should continue for an agreed upon time between both parties and could potentially involve checking in with the recipient at intervals in the future.

The benefit of this service would allow young people to learn and grow from what they have experienced, develop techniques to overcome grief, build resilience and support their peers. In the longer term, this service could also lead to decreased rates of depression and anxiety.

Linked to the provision of mental health supports during and post a disaster to reduce the anxiety felt by children and young people was the provision of continuing and accurate information.

Children and young people reported that the provision of information in the lead up to the disaster helped to reduce anxiety and reassure people:

“Something that really helped our family in keeping calm was actually social media...the RFS App even, was keeping tabs on where it was and like, ‘Keep calm. You don’t have to leave your house yet’.”

Children and young people that had lived through previous bushfires discussed that the provision of information this time around was better than before:

“This time we definitely had more information...so more live information this time actually coming from the fires who were there.”

Many spoke favourably about the various channels through which they had accessed information. These included all forms of media: social media; television and radio news and newspapers; text messages; the NSW Rural Fire Service Fires Near Me App and website; the Bureau of Meteorology website, the Floods Near Me App as well as face to face community meetings:

“I really like how they’ve got all the different Apps and things that you get an idea of where all the fires and stuff are, just to know if you need to evacuate or not, or if you should prepare or anything like that. Just to be warned or help others.”

“Community gatherings and seminars, we had the authorities coming in telling people what they need to do to prepare their house, what you should be preparing for.”

Other children and young people felt that the provision of information prior to disasters reaching their communities could have been more accurate and up to date. Sometimes this was attributed to technological issues when information was being accessed digitally. This was especially relevant for young people living in more remote areas:

“A friend of mine...he lost everything...he has a phone, but he didn't have the ability to download the App and get help.”

“The App was not always accurate...it wasn't always correct. It wasn't updated for a couple of hours.”

Some children and young people felt that the NSW Rural Fire Service could have communicated with people in the direct line of the fires better than they did:

“We knew where the fires were and how big they were but we didn't really know anything about what direction it was travelling or if there were certain spots that were bigger hotspots than others...especially when fires were heading towards houses.”

Many also believed that the information should have been made available earlier than it was to give people more time to prepare to evacuate their homes:

“We kept the Fires Near Me App on all the time and then the radio was on and they'd say, 'Evacuate if you're in this area now.' They told us a little bit too late I guess.”

Some young people raised the importance of being able to access accurate and current information particularly for those young people that live on their own. Mostly they agreed that social media or an

App just for young people was the best way for them to receive this information:

“Even if there's an App that young people can download that just has alerts...just something that we have. So we just know that instead of going home and then looking at the telly and then looking outside and seeing red sky, black...so just something that we had like some type of notification.”

Other young people said they would have preferred more face-to-face meetings in the lead up to the disaster. Those that had experienced these reported finding community leaders very helpful in keeping people informed and maintaining a sense of calm:

“More meetings with like, 'This is what we expect to happen', maybe having, 'this is what you can do if you have to stay at home or you're caught out in it'.”

The findings of our consultations were consistent with polling results. For those who experienced bushfire and drought, the third highest response when they were asked about how natural disasters impacted their daily lives, they responded with 'felt mentally unwell, stressed or traumatised or had others experience this.' This response also scored highly with those who had experienced flooding.

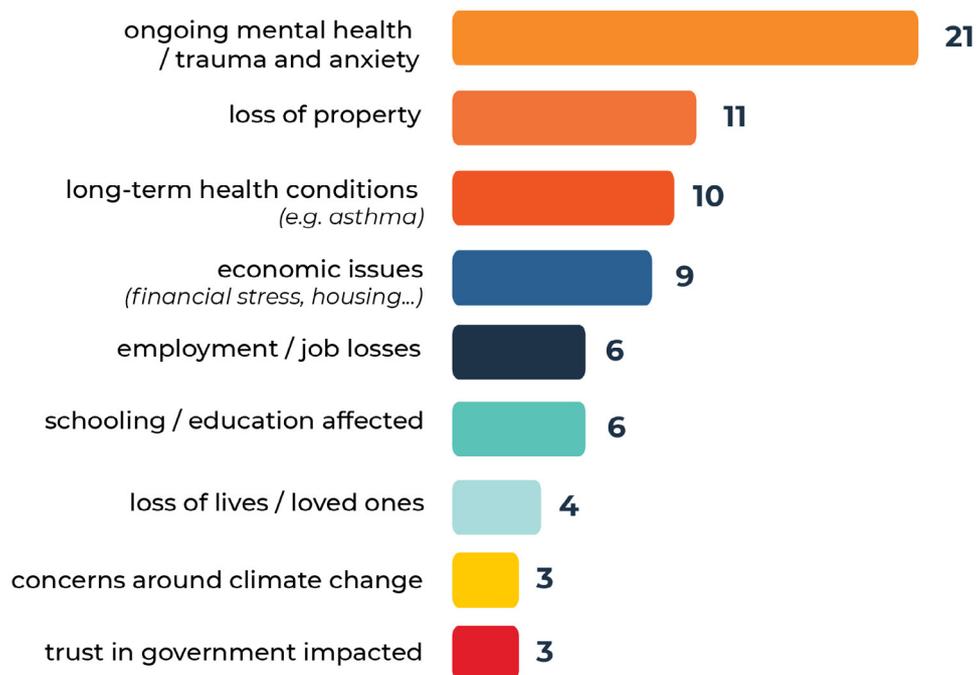
How natural disasters impacted their daily lives

% who mentioned by disaster type

| | bushfires | drought | floods |
|---|-----------|---------|--------|
| Had irritated eyes, throat or lungs from bushfire smoke | 60 | 57 | 58 |
| Changed usual routine in some way | 58 | 55 | 56 |
| Felt mentally unwell, stressed or traumatised or had others experience this | 49 | 47 | 49 |

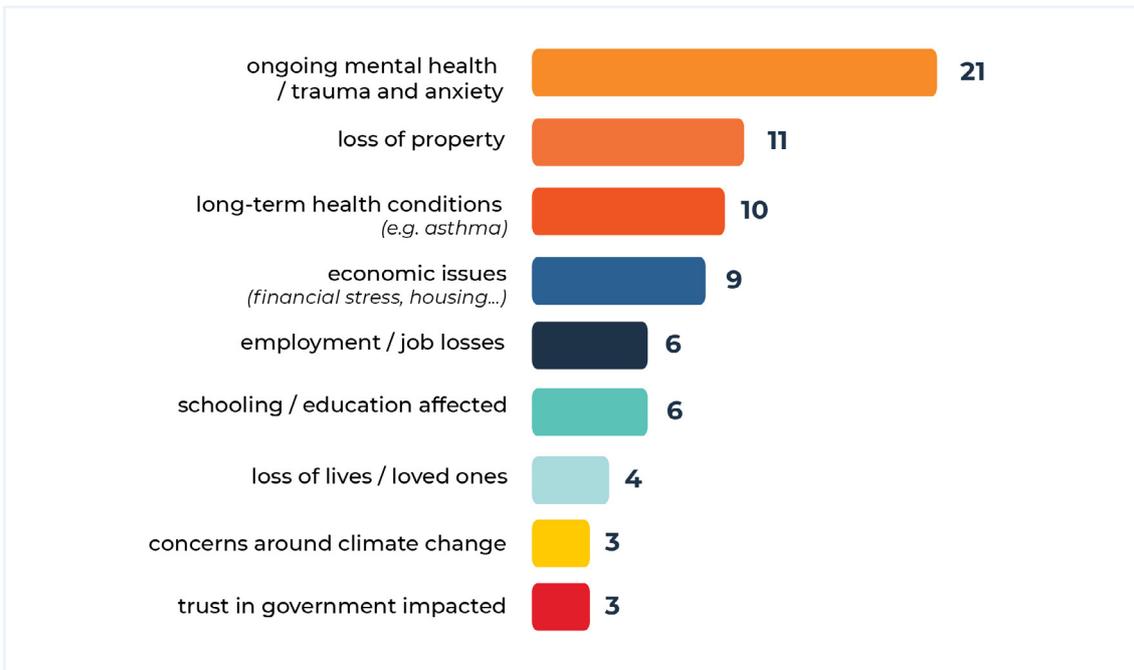
Likewise, trauma and ongoing mental health issues was the most frequently mentioned long-term concern.

Long term impacts of natural disasters on (%)

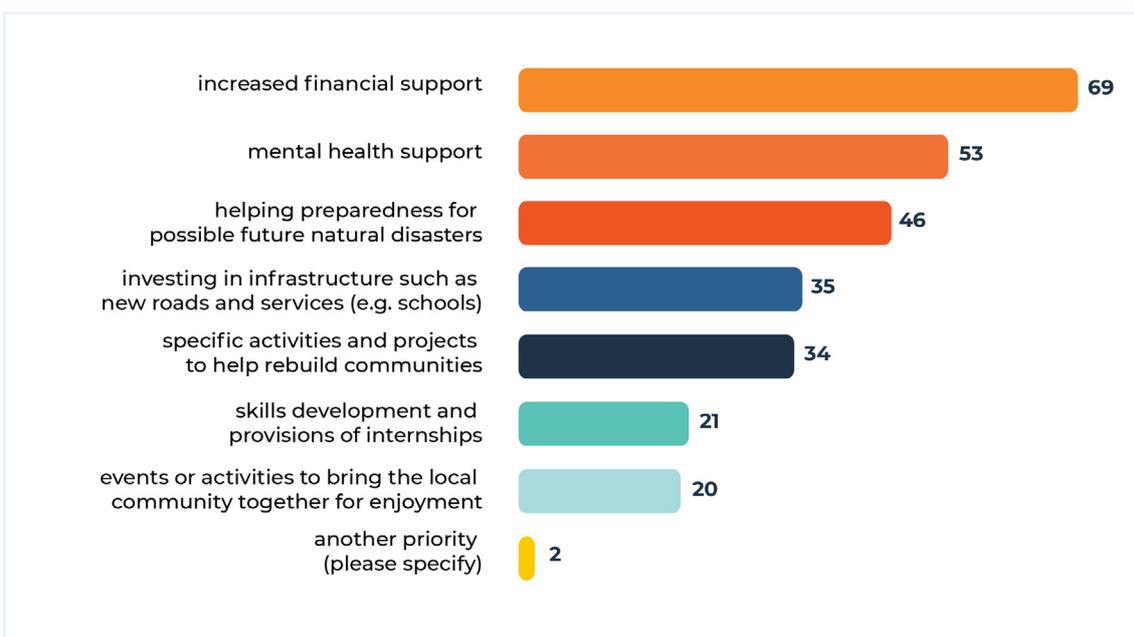


Children and young people involved in our quantitative polling, placed their need for mental health services during disaster and the need for Government to prioritise mental health services high up in their responses to those questions.

Long term impacts of natural disasters on (%)

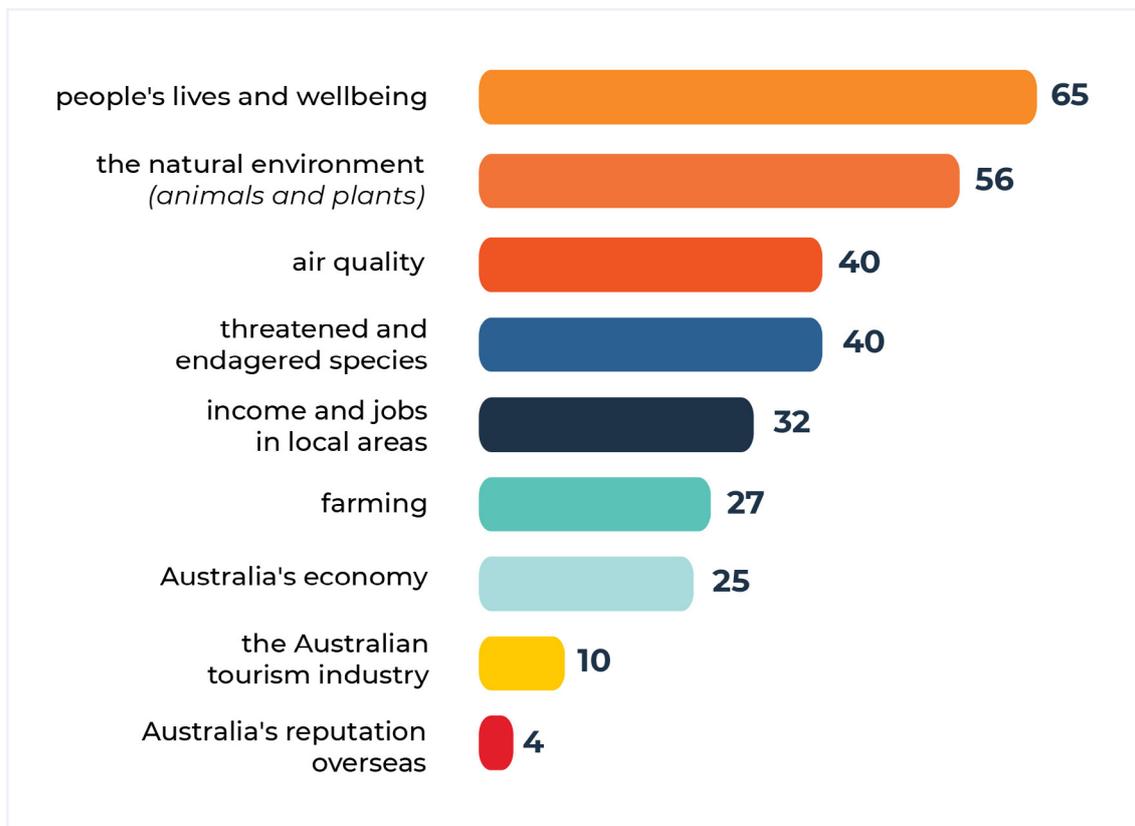


Top three priorities for government to support young people impacted by disasters (%)

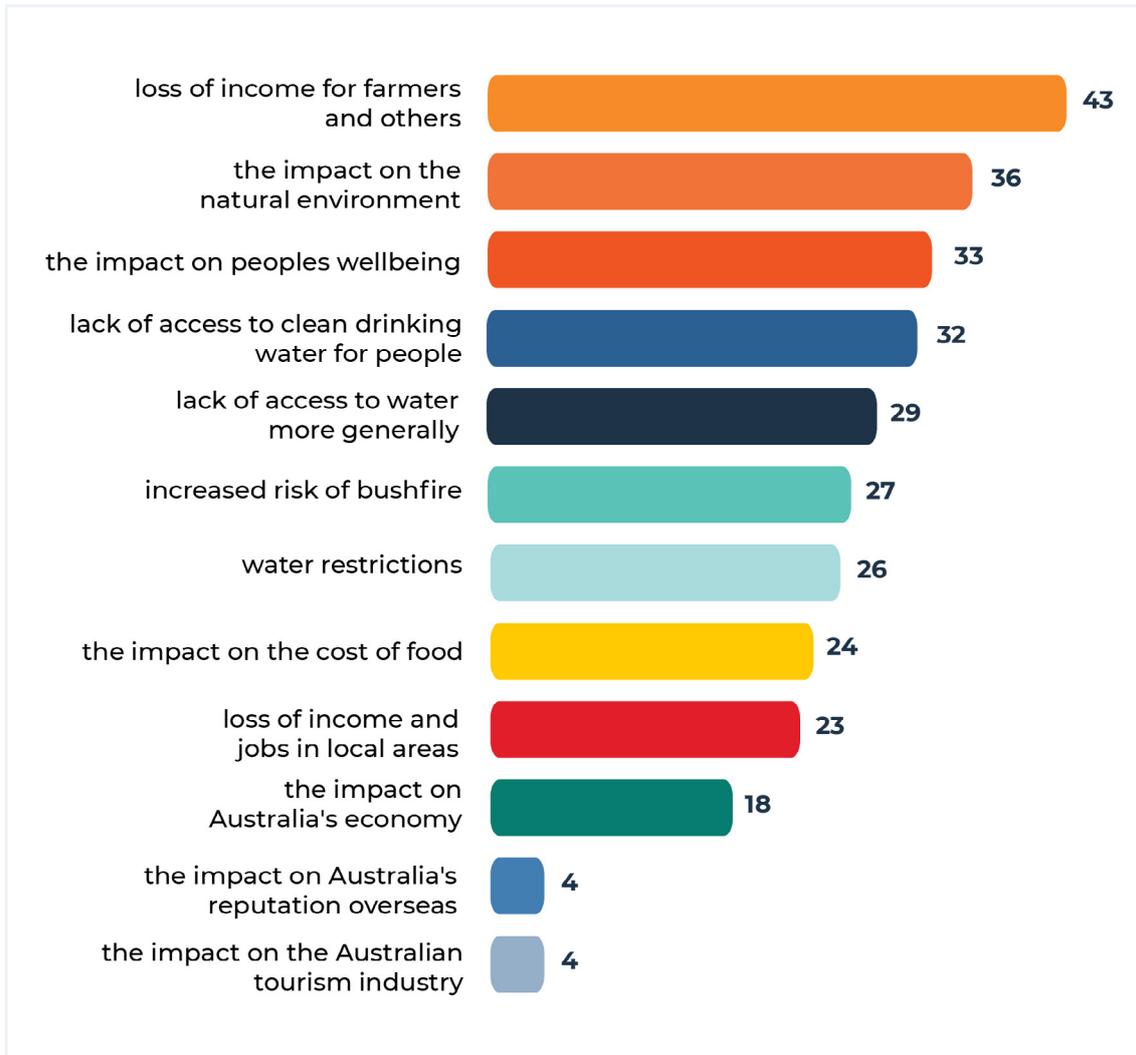


When children and young people were surveyed about their main concerns about bushfires and drought, as two separate events, the impact on people's wellbeing ranked second and third, respectively.

Three main concerns about bushfires impact on (%)



Three main concerns about drought (%)



Education

Education plays a key role in a child's wellbeing and development. Quality of education has significant impacts on the social and economic outcomes of the individual and community.

Children and young people who are not able to access high quality schooling miss out on opportunities to build resilience in a safe environment and are more likely to be more vulnerable to adverse impacts in disasters.

In our research, schools play critical roles in a child or young person's experience of disaster. Schools provide:

- Emergency response: acting as evacuation points/centres and accommodation
- Support services, including mental health services
- Disaster preparation and education.

Disasters have a significant impact on education for children and young people as well as their communities.

These impacts include:

- Destruction and damage to schools.

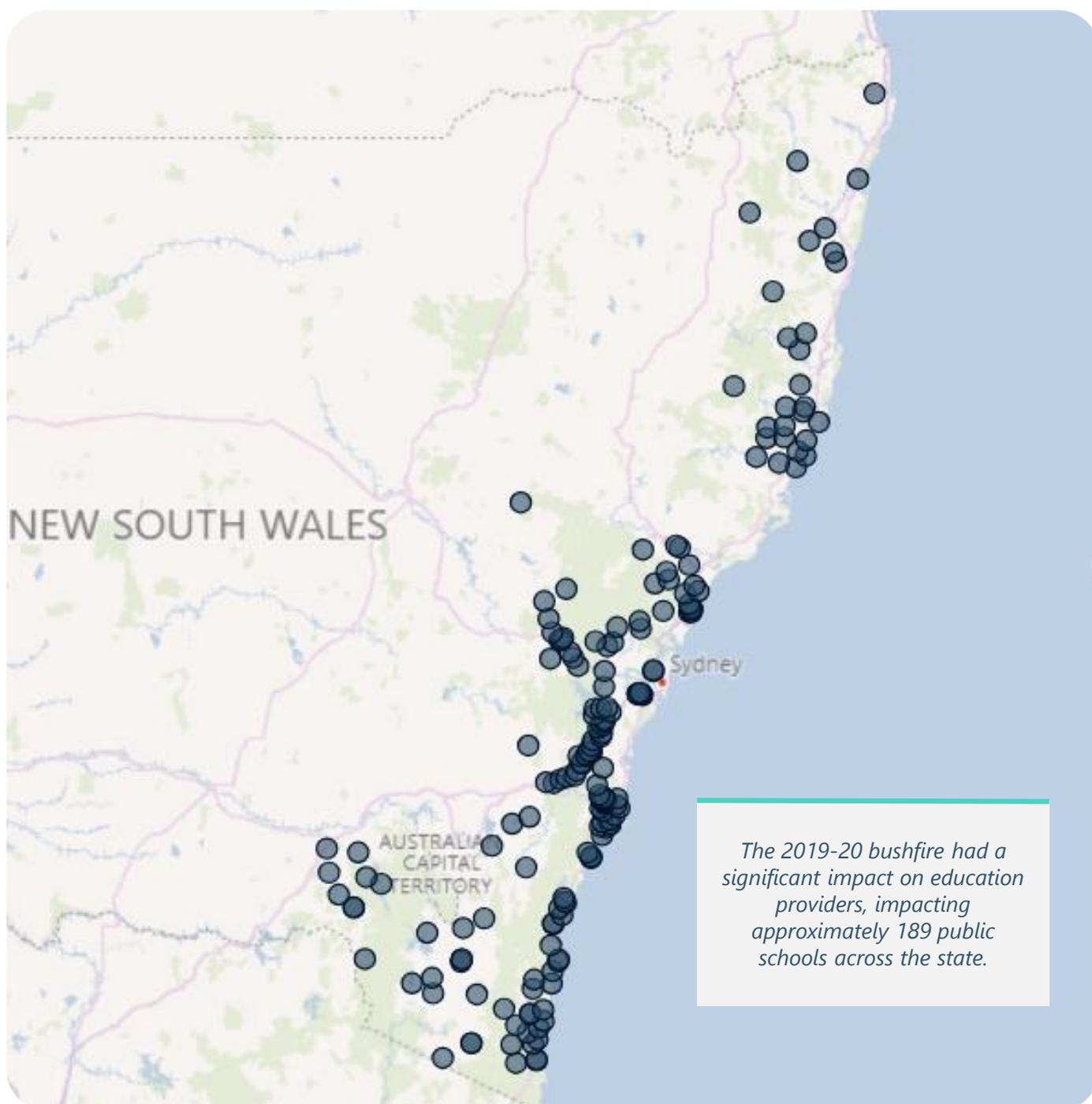
For example, in the Black Saturday Bushfires, three schools were destroyed with a further 47 schools being significantly damaged. Natural disasters also have the added challenge of destroying local infrastructure integral to children and young people accessing education such as transport. In the most recent fires, 189 public schools were impacted by disasters, impacting approximately 47,742 enrolled students.



Case Study: Recent NSW Bushfires

Below is a snapshot of the educational institutions (public primary and high schools) impacted by the 2019/2020 NSW Bushfires. A list of their names are provided on the next page.

189 Public Schools Impacted



A potential solution to providing infrastructure and resources to schools post disaster is the co-location or site sharing of schools and shift sharing where the school day is compressed and split between two schools on the same site. Both these techniques were used following the Christchurch Earthquake, granted with mixed results.

Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes and Co-location of Schooling

After the Christchurch Earthquake, co-location systems were introduced to return students back into schooling.

Two methods were used:

- Site sharing: Two schools on the same site
- Shift sharing: The school day was compressed and split between two schools.

A study observed the effectiveness of co-location and its aid in recovery. The findings suggested that this method exacerbated stress for children and young people through:

- Adjustment: to new school environments, travel routes and timetables
- Cost: Parents reported having to pay more for public transport
- Curriculum: Anxiety about national exams and less time to prepare
- Hours: Teachers worked longer hours due to administrative and timetable changes.

However, schools did report co-locations were an opportunity to build relationships with other schools and the educational community (Ham et al).

Another alternative which we have seen rise to prominence during COVID-19 is the use of virtual schooling. Within our research, virtual schooling had the added benefit of providing an alternative to those students who did not wish to return to school immediately following a disaster because they wanted to remain to support their families.

Some young people spoke about having to choose between remaining at home and returning to school where they may not be able to afford the transport or educational resources post disaster. Providing virtual schooling mitigates these risks and continues to meet the educational needs of children and young people. As one student in our consultations stated:

“When there are really severe fire warnings or active fires going on, people often leave their homes so that they can go somewhere safe, in this process, people my age will not be able to attend school putting them behind in their studies. For this reason, I believe that students should have a device so that even when they are away from school or home, they would still be able to learn and work towards their goals.”

Participants to our research acknowledged that virtual schooling and the technology required to undertake it may not be available to all families so they suggested the work be sent out to affected families.

We acknowledge that virtual schooling is offered as a disaster response for keeping children and young people connected to schooling. Evidence suggests that not all children and young people have access to good internet, quality laptops or access to a parent or guardian who are able to guide them through their lessons. Application of the Framework would suggest that on its own, virtual schooling does not fully facilitate inclusion, other options are required.

In addition, schooling is not just about learning but connecting with peers. Application of the Framework would require consideration as to how virtual schooling can facilitate adequate connection for school students. It is the resulting inclusion and connection that will drive resilience and the effectiveness of the virtual school response.

Schools repurposed as evacuation centres

Within our consultations, schools were identified as appropriate evacuations centres because they were a familiar environment for many children and young people with familiar personnel and many were already resourced with activities for children and young people. Children and young people had several recommendations that were specific to evacuation centres that were accessed during the most recent bushfire disasters, which schools were uniquely positioned to meet. These were around the need for evacuation centres to be safe and child and youth friendly; supervision and support for children and young people in evacuation centres and the physical comfort provided in the centres.

Children and young people reported that the idea of having to leave your home and stay in a centre with many other people is quite daunting, thus providing a familiar environment and personnel was important:

“I can imagine that it can be quite scary for young kids and young people. I’ve never been to one of those centres. I hope I don’t have to.”

- Disaster Resilience Framework

As a result, they discussed the need for evacuation centres to be child and youth friendly. This included having activities to keep occupied; making supports available; physical comforts and being able to keep pets with families in the centres. There was also discussion around the need for more psychological support to be accessible in the centres as people often entered evacuation centres in shock and distressed:

“I think it would be nice if...they had a centre or something, like a building where you could just go if you had to be evacuated...and there be a whole bunch of activities and things that you could do; and talk to people as well about how you feel.”

“Maybe something like a yoga mat to sleep on because apparently you had to sleep on the floor.”

In some locations, children and young people also discussed the need for more evacuation centres to be available. These children and young people described situations where the centres were filling up quickly and people were panicking that they would have nowhere to stay.

Drop in academic achievement

Psychological impacts post disaster impede a child’s ability to engage with academic content. Grief, trauma and PTSD from a disaster can reduce levels of concentration and reduce motivation to learn.

Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes Effects on Mental Health & Wellbeing

Residents of Christchurch including children and young people were deeply affected by the earthquakes.

In the period immediately after the disaster, parents, doctors and teachers reported increased behavioural issues, and problems relating to stress, anxiety and depression in children and young people.

Long term effects were also apparent. Children were displaying symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, increase in learning difficulties and behavioural problems (Child Poverty Action Group, 2014).

The CERA Youth Wellbeing Survey (2013), found the majority of participants (94%) had experienced stress in the last twelve months which had a negative affect on them. 27% reported experiencing stress always or most of the time during that twelve-month period. In a measure of emotional wellbeing, 35% had a score below 13, indicating a risk of poor mental health.

Case Study: Black Saturday Bushfires Effects on Education

Black Saturday Bushfires had significant impacts on the education of children and young people in bushfire affected areas.

A study from the University of Melbourne measured the impact of the Black Saturday Bushfires on school progression. The comparison was made between primary school children in high, medium and low disaster affected schools.

NAPLAN scores were recorded 2-4 years after the disaster and showed:

- Within reading and numeracy, the expected gains in academic scores were reduced for those with higher bushfire impact
- The most negative impact was shown in subjects which require the highest level of concentration
- Whereas arts-based subjects became easier; possibly, due to a shift in children's priorities and other social and emotional factors.

(Gibbs et al, 2019).

After the Christchurch Earthquake, school rolls in high impact zones reduced to as low as 82% two years after the earthquakes. As well as this, students leaving school before age 17 varied between 20-23% in high impact zones, which is significantly higher than low impact zones which varied between 17-21%.¹⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen the delivery of education and attendance at education facilities change significantly.

This is in addition to many children and young people's schooling being disrupted during the bushfire season and ongoing drought challenges. It will be in the longer term that we see whether this had a significant impact on the academic outcomes of students.

Affordability of schooling

The impacts of the drought on the financial resources of rural and remote families mean families are less able to afford the significant costs that accompany boarding schools and city based universities.

In the UNICEF Call to Action participants stated that the costs of quality education for drought affected families were prohibitive. In addition, the absence of transitional support arrangements were causing country children and young people to drop out due to the multiple pressures they face.¹⁸

In response to the financial challenges families may face post disaster a number of initiatives have been used in other jurisdictions following previous disasters. These have included child care assistance, higher education scholarships which were introduced following Black Saturday. Children and young people have also suggested a HECS style payment system for families affected by drought to cover the costs of attending secondary schools.

Educate Children and Young People about Disaster

In our consultations, many children and young people discussed the need to learn about different disasters and what to do in disaster situations. They agreed that school was an ideal setting for this to occur. Children and young people reported that this education would not only assist them with knowing what they should do; it would also help them remain calm when faced with a disaster situation:

“Something along the lines of what they do in the old PE classes, how there’s sex education, do like a

bushfire education or something. Or disaster relief education. It’s common in Australia and I’m shocked there isn’t a course in the curriculum already.”

“They could just educate them. So it’s not so scary. You just know how bad it can be and what to do.”

Children and young people spoke about wanting both practical knowledge about how to respond in an emergency as well as a deeper knowledge about how disasters occur:

“I think before, people should be taught how to use a pump and whatnot. Water hose and pump, so preparation and learning because if there are no firefighters and you’ve got to combat it, and you don’t know how to use it.”

“There should be people that come to the school and make sure kids know what their fire plan is.”

“I was never really taught about droughts...so being taught about what’s really going on, what can happen from such natural things. So, education.”

Some children and young people reported that they were receiving education around the ongoing drought in NSW and spoke positively about this:

“In class time, after the drought and stuff has been happening, we’ve been learning about it and coming up with ideas how maybe we could fix it in the future and stuff. That was nice.”

“Something along the lines of what they do in the old PE classes, how there’s sex education, do like a bushfire education or something.

Or disaster relief education. It’s common in Australia and I’m shocked there isn’t a course in the curriculum already.”

Provide Greater Schools Supports during and post disaster

Some consultation groups reported wanting their schools to be more supportive than they were during the disasters.

Specific things mentioned were: more assistance for the students impacted the most; providing regular mental health check-ins with students; and more understanding and leniency from teachers and compensation for HSC students, including lowering university entrance marks for young people that had suffered trauma during the disasters.

Other children and young people expressed frustration at having to keep coming to school during the disasters, either because of health hazards or they were concerned about leaving their families:

“You always have the fact that while they’re at school, they also have no idea what’s happening back at home. What’s going to happen? Should I be there or not?”

“Our entire town was covered in smoke, the Department of Education rather than keeping schools open, maybe close them so students don’t have to go to school and have to walk around with shirts over their mouths trying not to choke on the smoke.”

Students that attended schools that had given students time off expressed appreciation for this:

“The school gave us the day out of school because school wasn’t the priority; the priority was about our safety.”

However, there were also senior high school students that underwent school closures and were upset that they had not been provided with an alternative given that they missed out on valuable learning time:

“They could have done something where they provided schools, at least their senior years with a gas mask or something. Or they could have made an online option for all the kids because there was a lots of kids all over Australia missing out on that very important time.”

These senior students felt significant school-related stress with the disasters causing disruptions to schooling:

“We need alternatives to shutting down school. We had the smoke and we missed almost a month of our Year 11.”

Also raised by children and young people was the need for government to provide additional assistance for children and young people to continue their schooling after disaster events. This was especially the case for children and young people that had lost their homes and all their possessions:

“Help with school supplies...make sure they have transport to school.”

“Helping those that lost housing and school stuff; providing free school items for those affected.”

When children and young people spoke positively about school support at the time of the disasters, they discussed liking it when teachers provided students with relevant information and attempted to reassure students and calm them down:

“I really just like the school support...it was like the sky was orange, it was all red and the teachers would just calm you down because no one knew what was happening.”

Some children and young people also reported that school provided a place of normalcy. The routine and structure helped them to focus on life outside

the crisis at the time. Our findings within our consultations were backed up with those of our quantitative polling.

Within our quantitative polling, the daily impacts of disaster included a significant proportion of respondents missing school or having their school closed.

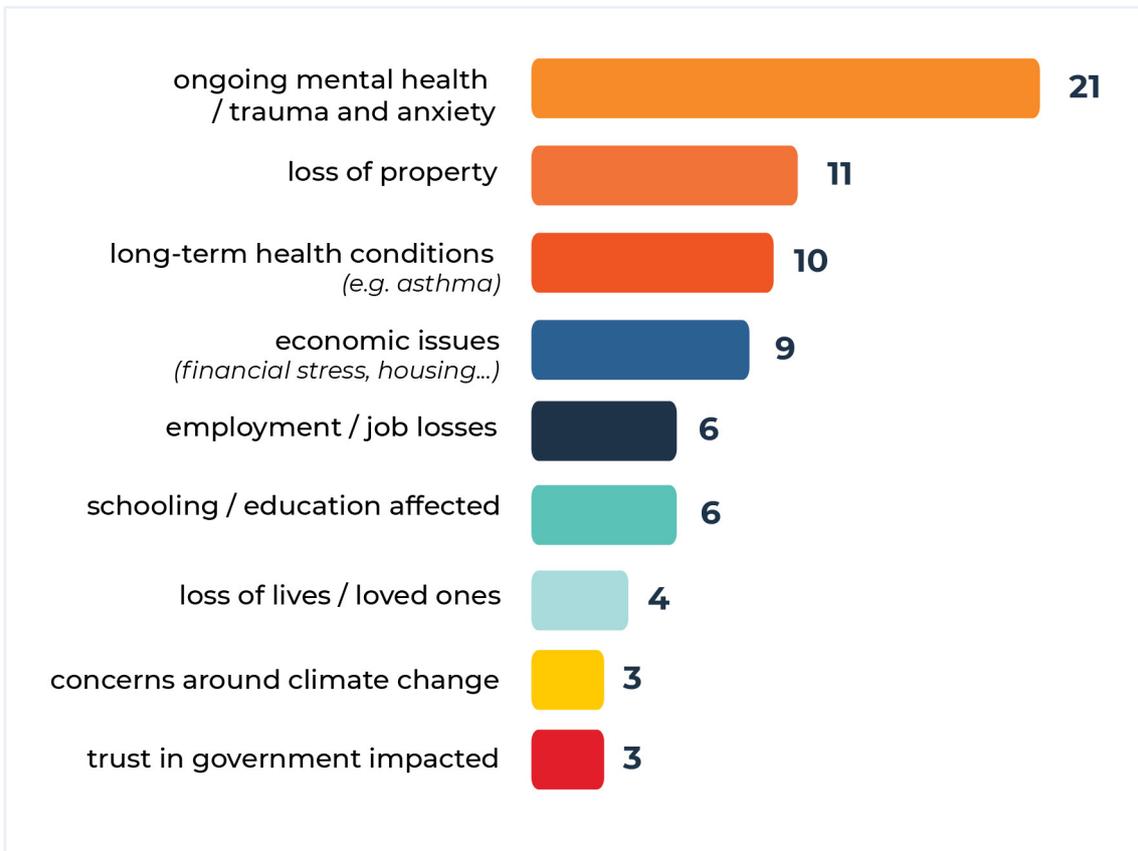
How natural disasters impacted their daily lives

% who mentioned by disaster type

| | bushfires | drought | floods |
|--|-----------|---------|--------|
| Missed work or school | 45 | 43 | 50 |
| Usual place of business, education or recreation was closed due to the bushfires | 21 | 19 | 26 |
| Usual place of business, education or recreation was closed due to the floods | 13 | 14 | 20 |
| Another day-to-day impact <i>(these included not seeing parents for extended periods of time, not having electricity, work and school closing due to severe storms)</i> | 5 | 5 | 3 |

In our Polling, Education was raised as a concern in regards to the longer term impacts of disaster.

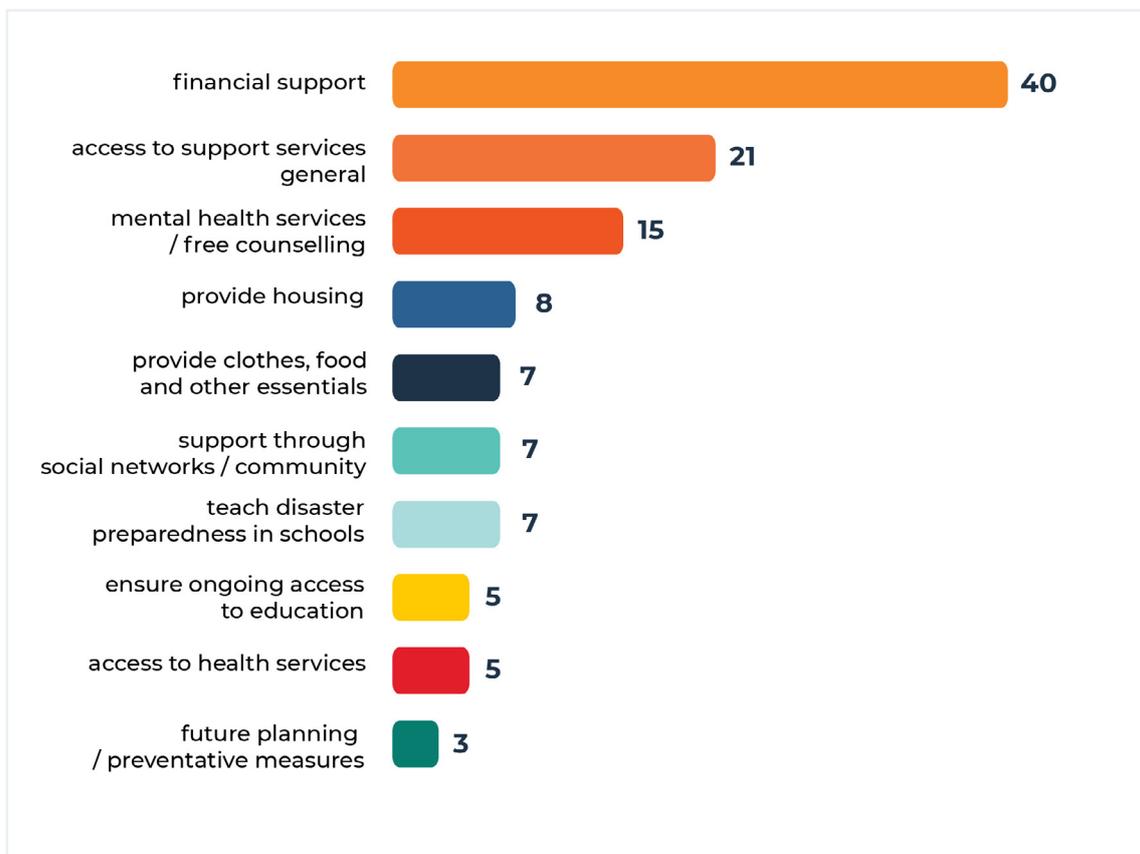
Long-term impacts of natural disasters (%)



- Disaster Resilience Framework

There was consistency across our consultations and quantitative research around the need for educating children and young people on disaster preparedness and ensuring ongoing education during disasters.

What should be done to help young people your age who have been impacted by recent disasters in NSW? (%)



Housing

Housing plays a key role in a child or young person’s life and is a basic human need. Access to good housing contributes to strong and resilient communities.

Impacts of disaster on housing can include the following:

Destruction and damage to homes, leading to displacement

In the Black Saturday Bushfires, 2000 homes were lost.¹⁹ In the 2019/2020 Bushfire season, it is estimated that over 3000 houses were destroyed.²⁰ The destruction, damage and displacement of residents have direct impacts on physical and mental wellbeing.



In our quantitative polling when discussing how natural disasters had impacted daily life, having property that was threatened or destroyed was raised across all three disaster types.

How natural disasters impacted their daily lives

% who mentioned by disaster type

| | bushfires | drought | floods |
|---|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Had property that was directly threatened | 26 | 21 | 31 |
| Suffered a major loss <i>(of property, people or something else)</i> | 17 | 14 | 20 |

- Disaster Resilience Framework

In our consultations, children and young people frequently raised the overwhelming practical assistance that had been provided to those most directly affected by the disasters. This included the provision of emergency accommodation to families.

However, not all children and young people had experienced this support. Some reported having nowhere fixed to stay during the disaster:

“So after the Monday we moved about three times that week. And then ended up moving about seven times throughout those holidays. To get a safe spot, a proper house you could stay in for a while.”

Loss of the family farm

The prospect of losing the farm is a source of grief, loss and worry for children and young people affected by the drought.

In Carnie et al (2010), young people expressed concern about whether the farm would survive and uncertainty about their future.²¹ One student told researchers she had chosen agricultural subjects but was unsure whether to continue if they had no farm. This is particularly a concern where practical subjects that allow children and young people to be in the outside often see a rise in participation following a disaster.

Increase in housing and rental prices

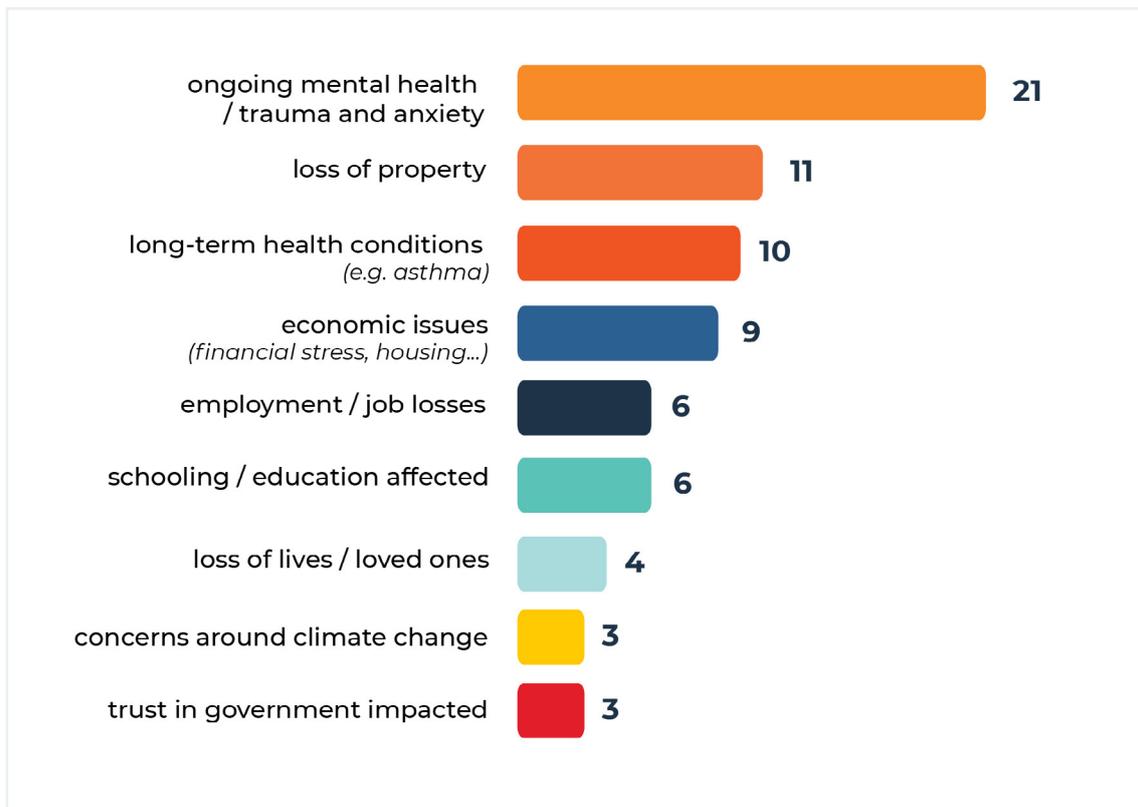
Disasters can lead to increased housing prices. During the Christchurch earthquake, rental prices increased due to higher demand. There was an increase of 37% in weekly mean rent between 2010 and 2015.

Young people living out of home rely on the affordability of the rental market. The quantity of low-cost, private rental accommodation reduces after a disaster, leaving young people particularly vulnerable.²²

In our quantitative research one of the areas of concern raised in response to the longer term impacts of disaster was loss of property and economic issues, which included financial stress, increased cost of essential items and housing affordability, whether this be their own property or short and medium term accommodation during and post recovery.



Long term impacts of natural disaster on (%)



Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes on Housing

In addition to the damage and destruction to homes, the Christchurch Earthquake affected housing affordability. A year later, children and young people were still impacted by the quality and availability of housing.

As a result of the Christchurch Earthquakes, over 167,000 properties were damaged. The number of people displaced from their homes reached its peak in September 2012. In that period, over 6,800 households were receiving payments for temporary accommodation (18,000 people).

For children and young people, the 2013 Youth Wellbeing Survey reported that:

- 39% of participants experienced living day to day in a damaged home as a result of the earthquakes
- 38% had to move home permanently or for some period of time
- 37% stated they were having difficulty finding a place to rent
- 26% reported living in a house that was too small for the number of people in the household.

- Disaster Resilience Framework

Poor living conditions, overcrowding and delayed access to family home.

Many families are forced to live in damaged housing or move in with others. Damaged housing can cause health concerns such as rheumatic fever and other poverty related diseases. 26% of participants in the Christchurch Youth Wellbeing Survey reported living in a house that was too small for the number of people in the household.

In our consultations, children and young people spoke about the delay in being able to access their homes or improve their living conditions either through delayed clearing of their land or through limited access to assistance such as insurance companies.

In our consultations, some children and young people reported that insurance companies were not providing sufficient support to families. They spoke about insurance companies making people wait eight days for insurance policies to come into effect. As a result, some children and young people reported that their families' insurance claims were not being accepted or processed. Other young people raised the fact that insurance is not affordable for everyone:

“Some places, people didn't have insurance, some people couldn't afford it.”

In the Victorian Royal Commission, participants raised similar experiences with companies. In order for them to make a

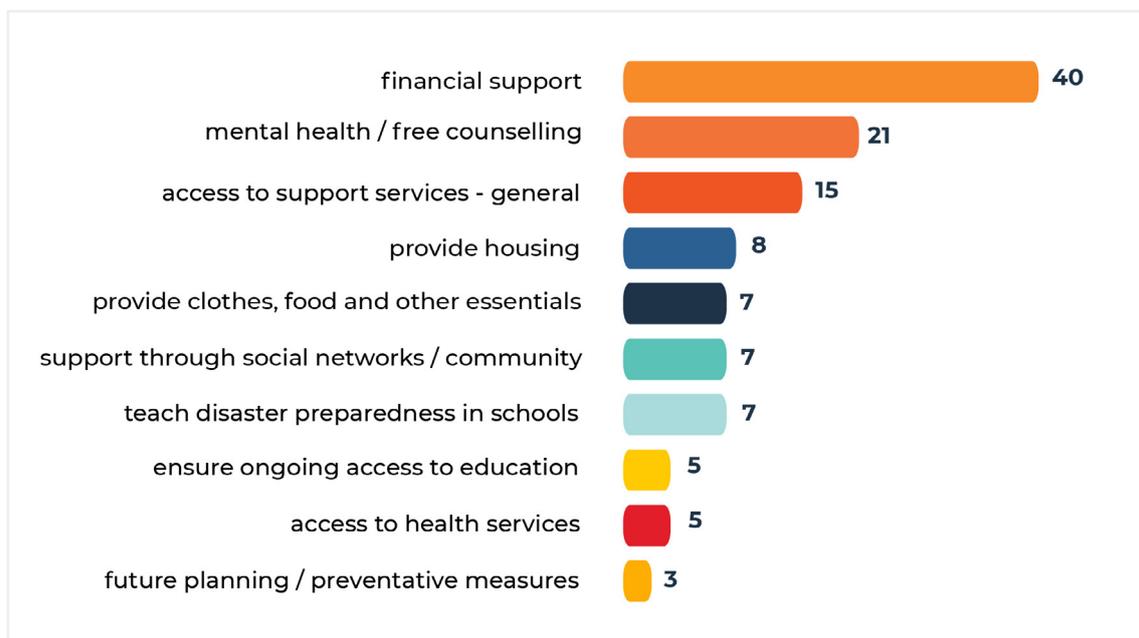
claim as easily as possible, when companies and the Government are assessing need they should ensure the process is processed in a timely way, without undue delay, conducted in the least onerous and intrusive way possible (e.g. only requesting information if it is strictly relevant to the claim), conducted fairly and transparently, and giving reasons for decisions; and in a manner that ensures adequate support is provided for insureds, in particular for vulnerable consumers.

While this is possibly a parental concern, it has been witnessed by children and young people. The fact that it has filtered down to be a concern by proxy of children and young people speaks to the unnecessary and undue stress that children and young people are seeing in their parents as a result of their challenges with insurance companies, which may have led to increased anxiety in the children around them leading them to express such concerns.

On the subject of access to the family home, some children and young people raised the trauma they experienced through seeing their houses burn in the media before they knew what had happened. Many raised frustration or anger at the fact that the media had been allowed onto their land before they had been made aware of the situation.

In our quantitative polling, the need to provide adequate and sustained housing was identified as a key need identified by young people.

What should be done to help young people your age who have been impacted by recent disasters in NSW? (%)



Youth Employment

Youth employment has direct impacts on wellbeing and resilience of young people and the community. Access to employment opportunities are important in developing mental health recovery and economic recovery post disaster.

The impacts of disasters on youth unemployment go beyond financial hardship. Children and young people affected by the drought also experience effects on their working life. For example, prolonged drought has required many children and young people to join the family workforce to ensure the survival of the farm.²³

In our consultations, it was evident that young people living on farms feel the stress of the family business and their parents' work in ways that other young people do not. They relayed their daily lives involved making their own way to and from school; going straight from school to

their casual jobs; doing homework; and looking after the livestock. These children and young people had a deep understanding of the impact of drought and bushfires on their lives. Even the younger children knew a great deal about the workings of their families' farming businesses, including the price of stock, water and feed and water management practices:

“You go home, get out of your school clothes, get into your work clothes and water and feed the cattle, change the irrigation, get back home when it's dark, have dinner go to bed. Get up, feed the cows in the morning and go to school.”

Case Study: Drought on Youth Employment

Prolonged drought has increased workload of children and young people on farms and conversely reduced employment opportunities in town.

Children and young people become a vital part of the family workforce, helping parents to ensure their farms stay afloat. Children reported waking up at 5am to work, going to school, working until late in the evening and then doing homework. Days were described as long and difficult.

As an effect of the increased workloads, UNICEF reported children and young people were forced to take time off school, were less focused during school, had less time to socialise with friends and

participate in recreational activities and experienced fatigue, stress and anxiety.

Carnie et al (2011) reported on adult perceptions of the impact on young people as well as views of young people themselves. Adults reported that young people had few job opportunities and difficulty accessing youth allowance. In some cases, young people had withdrawn from school due to financial problems and the need to undertake work on the farm.

- Disaster Resilience Framework

In our quantitative polling impacts on daily life included, closure of workplaces, loss of income directly or indirectly related to the disaster and increased work hours and workloads.

How natural disasters impacted their daily lives

% who mentioned by disaster type

| | bushfires | drought | floods |
|---|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Missed work or school | 45 | 43 | 50 |
| Usual place of business, education or recreation was closed due to the bushfires | 21 | 19 | 26 |
| Lost household income due to a general impact on local economy | 20 | 19 | 25 |
| Usual place of business, education or recreation was closed due to the floods | 13 | 14 | 20 |
| Working longer hours to accommodate for impact on work or business | 13 | 15 | 17 |
| Lost household income due to impacts on farming | 8 | 11 | 10 |
| Lost household income due to impacts on tourism | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Another day-to-day impact | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| <i>(these included not seeing parents for extended periods of time, not having electricity, work and school closing due to severe storms)</i> | | | |

Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment and underemployment following the economic downturn that results from a disaster. This may be because they do not yet have the experience or skills of the older population, or as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, they make up a large part of the casual and part-time workforce in industries most hit by the disaster.

Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes on Youth Employment

The Christchurch Earthquakes resulted in significant job loss among young people. This progressively improved as disaster recovery and rebuilding brought more opportunities.

The sectors hit the hardest were the retail, accommodation and food sectors. As a result, part time, youth and female employment were impacted the worst. At that time, young people made up 40% of the of the retail and accommodation industry.

In Christchurch, the youth unemployment rate or 15-19 years, had reached 40.2% by December 2012. By March 2013, this rate had reduced to 25.6%. For young people aged 20-24 years, the

unemployment rate decreased by 69% over 2012-2013.

As recovery and rebuild of the city commenced, opportunities for employment grew. In the initial years, employment opportunities favoured males and older people in the construction industry. By 2015, indicators were showing young people were benefiting significantly from training and employment opportunities.

The Christchurch Earthquake provides an example of the application of the Disaster Resilience Framework. The Earthquake recovery led to employment opportunities in the construction and trade industries, which invariably favoured males. Older men were coming off benefits more so than older women. Young males were coming off benefits more so than young women.

The Framework requires you to consider the six resilience building factors when considering disaster responses in employment. Application

of the Framework, in particular inclusion, would highlight the need for employment opportunities post disaster to include those usually excluded such as women.

In our consultations children and young people saw the recovery phase following a disaster as an opportunity for young people to upskill or to develop new skills. This may include training and learning opportunities which upskill certain segments of the population, as we have seen with TAFE NSW during the COVID- 19 pandemic.

- Disaster Resilience Framework

These courses may also focus on upskilling or deploying young people with specific trades into the disaster recovery zone, as we have seen with the NSW Procurement Strategy used with the bushfire rebuild services, which must use local businesses within communities impacted by disaster.

A scalable program that the NSW Government could implement in disaster recovery zones is a program based off the Illawarra YES (Youth Employment Strategy).

The program, which is funded by the NSW Government and delivered by the Illawarra Business Chamber, involves a coordinator working with employers, training providers and young people to address skill shortage areas identified by employers and delivering pathways to employment for young people.

It achieves these aims through developing and delivering work readiness programs. These programs include a skill set of competency units delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with a short work placement with local employers combined with mentoring and support to develop a pool of work ready young people well positioned to fill the identified vacancies.

Research by the Illawarra Business Chamber has identified that the YES Program could be implemented within disaster affected areas by:

- Supporting employers to source work-ready people for entry level positions. Such positions include many of the roles required in the rebuilding phase following the disaster such as land clearing and apprenticeships for rebuilding of infrastructure and residential or commercial premises;

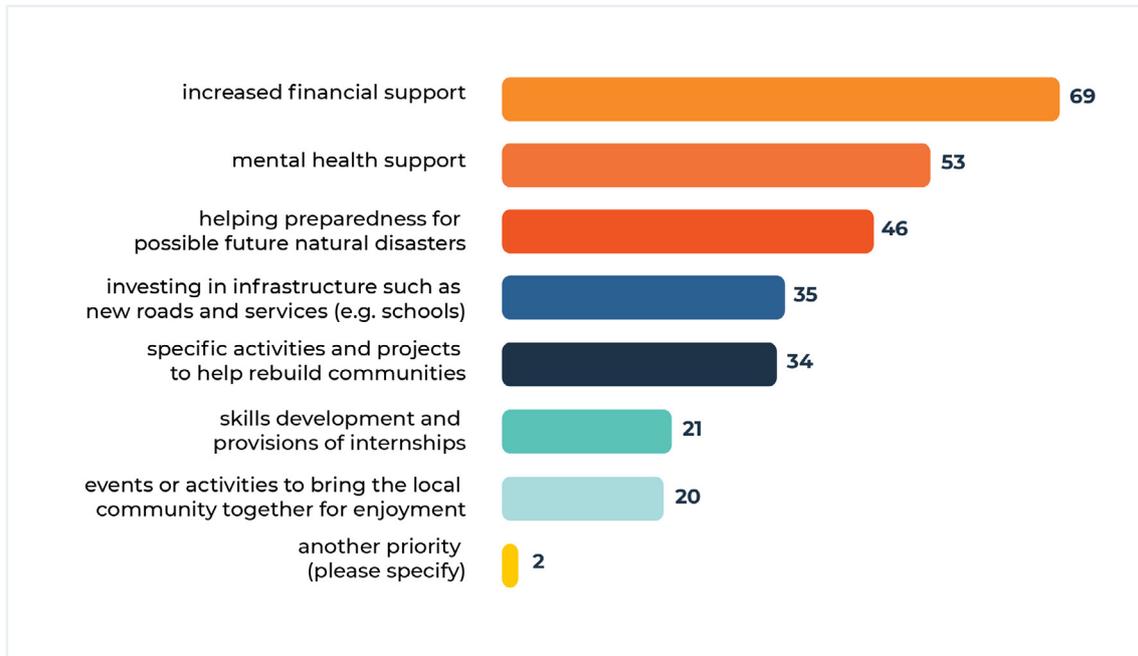
- Supporting community rebuilding activities; and
- Providing employment opportunities for young people who, with usually lower levels of training and experience, face a very difficult path to employment.

The programs will need to be more flexible to cope with smaller class sizes and take into account local characteristics and constraints. The YES Coordinator will need to consider the number of particular jobs required, the qualifications and skills needed, the training available through RTOs, the method to deliver that training (online, blended or workplace-based), the employment options (location, type of work, number of jobs available and the skill set of local people.)

A YES Coordinator in disaster-hit areas would bring local knowledge and connections to be able to develop the unique programs essential in these smaller regional areas, to meet local needs, and provide employment to locals where they live. Implementing a program similar to this would also assist the government in meeting its obligation under the 'Work Ready' Pillar within the Regional Youth Strategy.

The opportunity for skills development and the provision of internships in the recovery phase was also identified strongly in our quantitative polling.

Top 3 priorities for government to support young people impacted by disasters (%)



An alternative to providing skills development programs would be to ensure subsidies such as Job Seeker and Job Keeper and welfare supports such as Youth Allowance are maintained at their current levels to ensure that they accurately reflect the cost of living.



Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes

The New Zealand Government adopted a variety of subsidies and investment in training and redeployment of youth. Disaster recovery became an opportunity for increased employment of young people.

In the immediate aftermaths of the Christchurch Earthquake, the government set up the Earthquake Support Subsidy. This supported businesses to continue to pay their employees when they were unable to operate. Partly due to these measures fewer people moved to unemployment benefits.

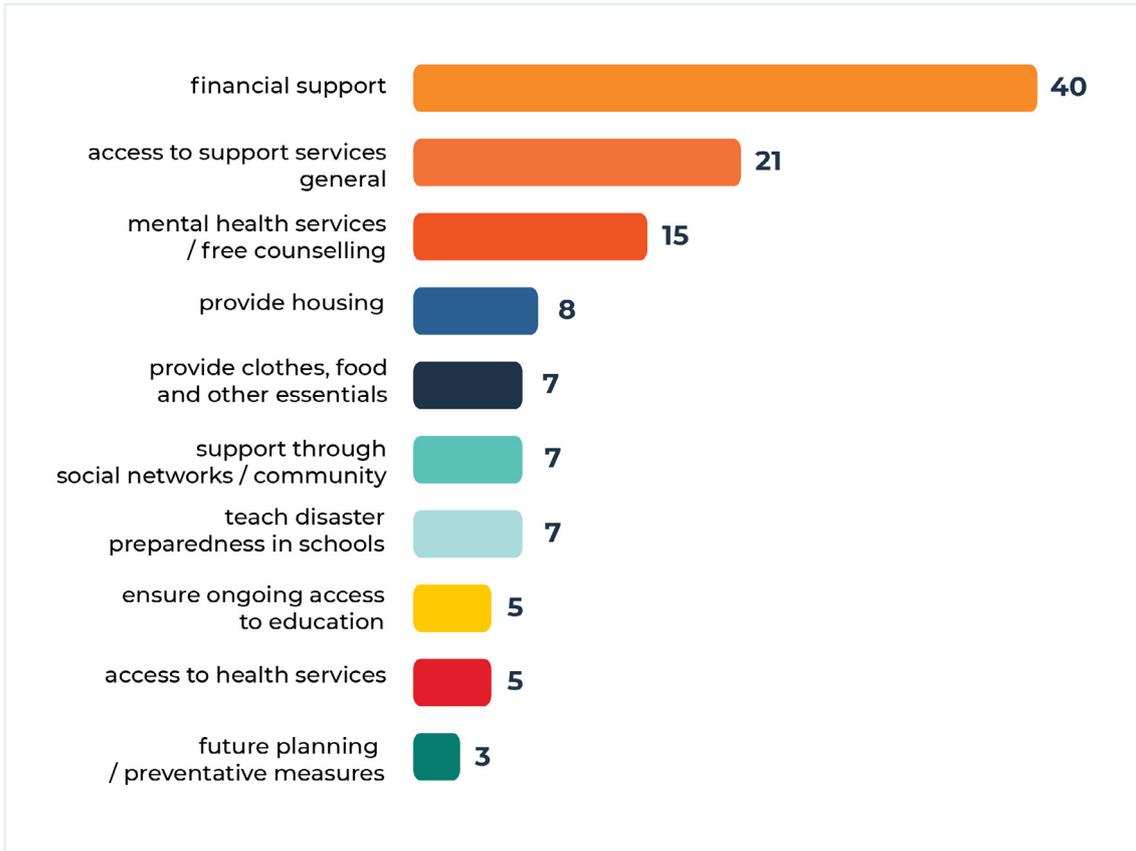
By November 2012, the government had invested over \$70 million in training for tradespeople to capitalise in rebuild opportunities. The government also announced significant investment in training opportunities: 10,000 new

apprenticeships and 300 further places through the He Toki kite Rika Maori trades training initiatives.

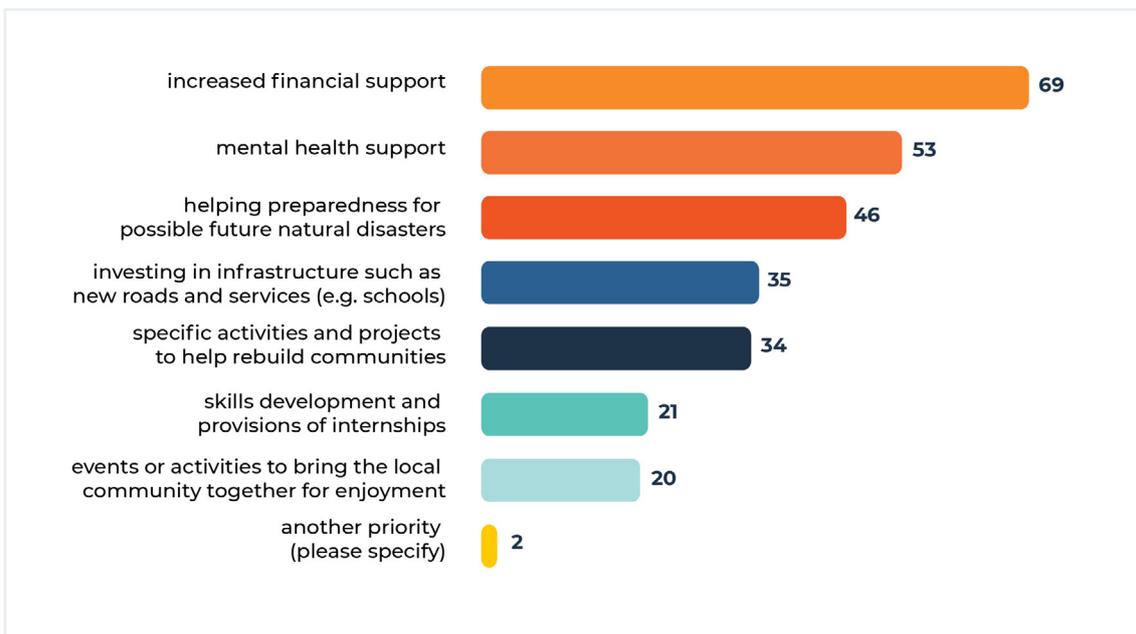
From 2014, 1000 people living outside Christchurch area were able to apply for a one-off payment of \$3000 to help relocate if they had a confirmed full-time job in the region. The payment was available to all ages, however the initiative was targeted to young people aged 18-24 years as the rebuild would offer opportunities to skill up. They accounted for one third of the payments.

The need to provide financial assistance to young people impacted by disaster was raised in both prompted and unprompted questions in our quantitative polling as a thing that would help the most.

What should be done to help young people your age who have been impacted by recent disasters in NSW? (%)



Top 3 priorities for government to support young people impacted by disasters (%)



Enabling Environment 2: *Family and Peers*

Close and caring relationships with family and friends play a critical role in the lives of children and young people. Disasters have significant impacts on family life and peer relationships, affecting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Case Study: Drought, Families and Peers

Children and young people affected by the prolonged droughts tended to put their needs aside and focus on their parents' and family's wellbeing. They described their families as being in 'survival mode.'

Impacts on children and young people impacted by drought include:

- Spending less time socialising with peers leading to isolation
- Taking on stressors placed on families to maintain farms (Dean & Stein, 2010)
- Feeling guilt over school fees (Carnie, Louise, Blinkhorn & Hart, 2011)
- Less family time, with parents attending to livestock and crops
- For some, family meals were described as a rarity and some did not see their families during the day (UNICEF, 2019)
- Separation of families forced to live elsewhere to access employment
- Increased conflict and divorce
- Worrying about the uncertainty of drought and its impact on their parents' mental health (UNICEF, 2019)
- Extra time working and connecting with their parents and siblings on the farm (UNICEF, 2019).

The effects on children and young people include:

Loss of family and friends

Case Study: Black Saturday Bushfires and Family Relationships

Children and young people in the Black Saturday Bushfires experienced loss and separation from their families. Parenting situations also changed post disaster.

Of the 173 people who died in the Black Saturday Bushfires, 23 were children. An additional 20 children under 18 lost one or both their parents. This will have lasting impacts on children and young people (VBRC, 2009).

Of the 1,056 participants in the Beyond Bushfires survey, 56% reported being separated from close loved ones during the fires. Of those, 30% did not know the fate of a loved one for 24 hours or longer. The report stated that separation from close loved ones is a risk factor for mental health problems for people who tend to feel anxious about their relationships (Beyond Bushfires, 2016).

Parents in the Beyond Bushfires study reported parenting situations that they never expected to face. They had to find ways of managing their children's trauma, which required new skills, techniques and strategies. They reported parenting values such as patience, tolerance or having answers in difficult times, were compromised by the demands of rebuild and recovery (Beyond Bushfires, 2016).

This is unfortunately something that many families have had to face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent bushfire seasons. As we begin to move through the process of returning to 'normalcy' it is imperative that the necessary and appropriate supports are provided to those families and especially, the children and young people in them.

Separation from family and friends during and following the disaster

In our quantitative polling, in responses to the question of how the disaster has impacted on their daily lives, children and young people raised being separated from parents.

| How natural disaster impacted their daily lives | % who mentioned by disaster type | | |
|--|---|----------------|---------------|
| | bushfires | drought | floods |
| Another day-to-day impact (these included not seeing parents for extended periods of time, not having electricity, work and school closing due to severe storms) | 5 | 5 | 3 |

Separation from family was discussed more frequently in the face-to-face consultations than appears in the poll. This is also most likely due to the fact that almost all children and young people consulted with face-to-face had been directly impacted by the recent disasters.

reinforces the notion that spending time together is critical for re-building identity and forging connection. Creating a variety of activities or services that are aimed at bringing family and peer groups together will be more effective in reducing trauma and other disaster impact.

In our consultations, many children and young people reported wanting time with their families to reconnect. They discussed not having seen their parents and other family members for many weeks either due to family members volunteering, or being separated in different evacuation sites and homes:

“Just spending time with their family that they haven’t seen...their dads were...some of them didn’t see them for 50 days straight.”

In our research, Children and young people reported being separated from or having less time to spend with family and peers during disasters including the drought. Application of the Framework



“Just spending time with their family that they haven’t seen...their dads were... some of them didn’t see them for 50 days straight”

Additional stresses to family such as financial, with secondary impacts for children and young people.

Within our consultations, it was acknowledged that the aftermath of disaster may also bring compounded stresses for families as they process the loss of property, livestock and income. The need to provide financial assistance to families from government and in the form of donations; and the provision of material things such as food, household items, feed for stock and water was raised frequently in our consultations.

“Water trucks gave out free water, which is very important in this area because we don’t all have town water.”

“It was good that people were delivering food to people that didn’t have food, or had stock and it all died...OzHarvest.”

Many children and young people spoke about the need for families to receive long-term economic and financial support. Specific areas they raised were: the need for ongoing financial support until people ‘get back on their feet’; more transparent and equitable allocation of existing recovery funds, resources and donations.

Other children and young people called for the government to provide low interest loans to help farmers rebuild after the drought and financial assistance through either cash payments or grants for farmers to purchase things like feed. Those in drought areas emphasised that even after the rain, the drought will affect areas for many years to come. Therefore a long-term plan is for continued economic support:

“Helping support family and community with resources and interest free loans and drought assistance as most pressure is on young people due to pressure from family they are worried about.”

Young people in drought affected areas spoke positively about the farmer’s aid and drought relief assistance provided by the government that enabled families to buy food, general house supplies and feed for stock. These young people also reported that there was a community aid program that sent trucks with food to give drought affected farms.

Others thought that financial assistance from the government should have been provided earlier to affected communities:

“Funding as soon as it started, that was a big issue. Because it’s not different for Australia to have bushfires, it’s not like out of the ordinary. But with how bad they were, and we’ve been in a drought for so many years, it was devastating. It hit us hard.”

Children and young people also felt that more transparency and equity is needed in the allocation of recovery funds, resources and donations:

“I would really like it if our government could put more input into allocating funds specifically, not just chucking money everywhere and anywhere.”

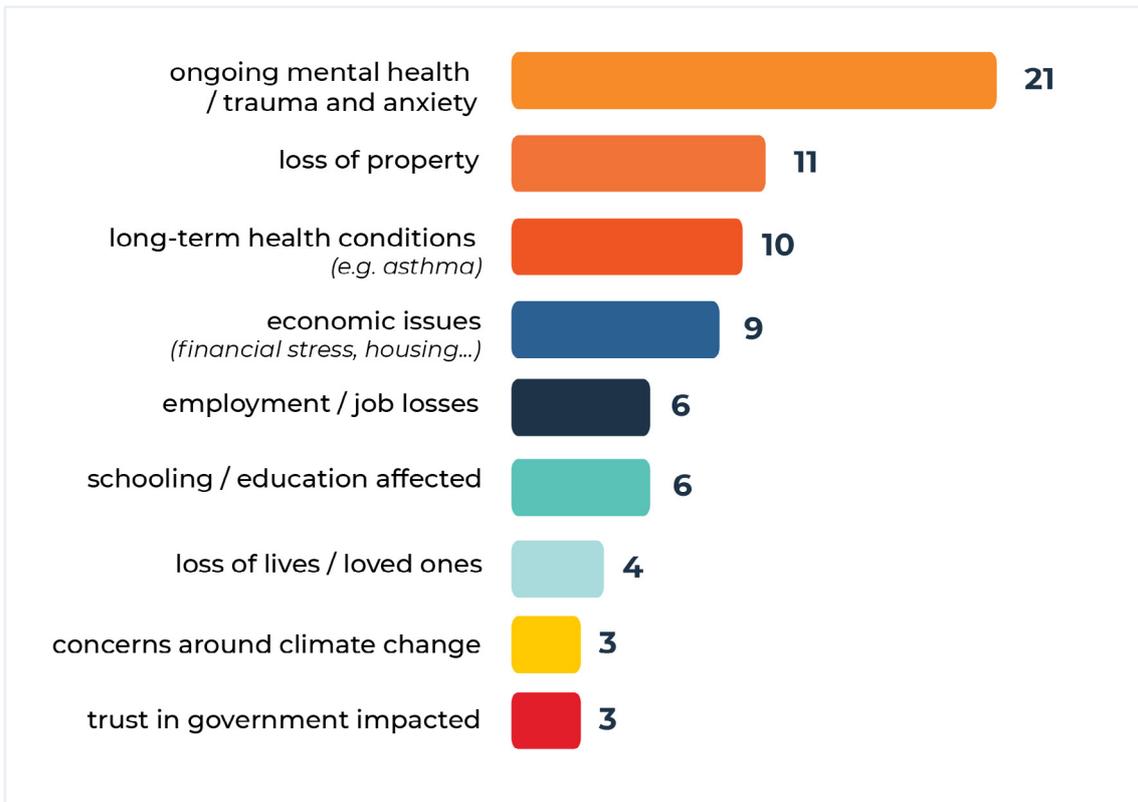
For example, one group of children and young people discussed the allocation of hay bales and reported that the distribution of these currently favours small farms over large farms. Another group talked about the lack

- Disaster Resilience Framework

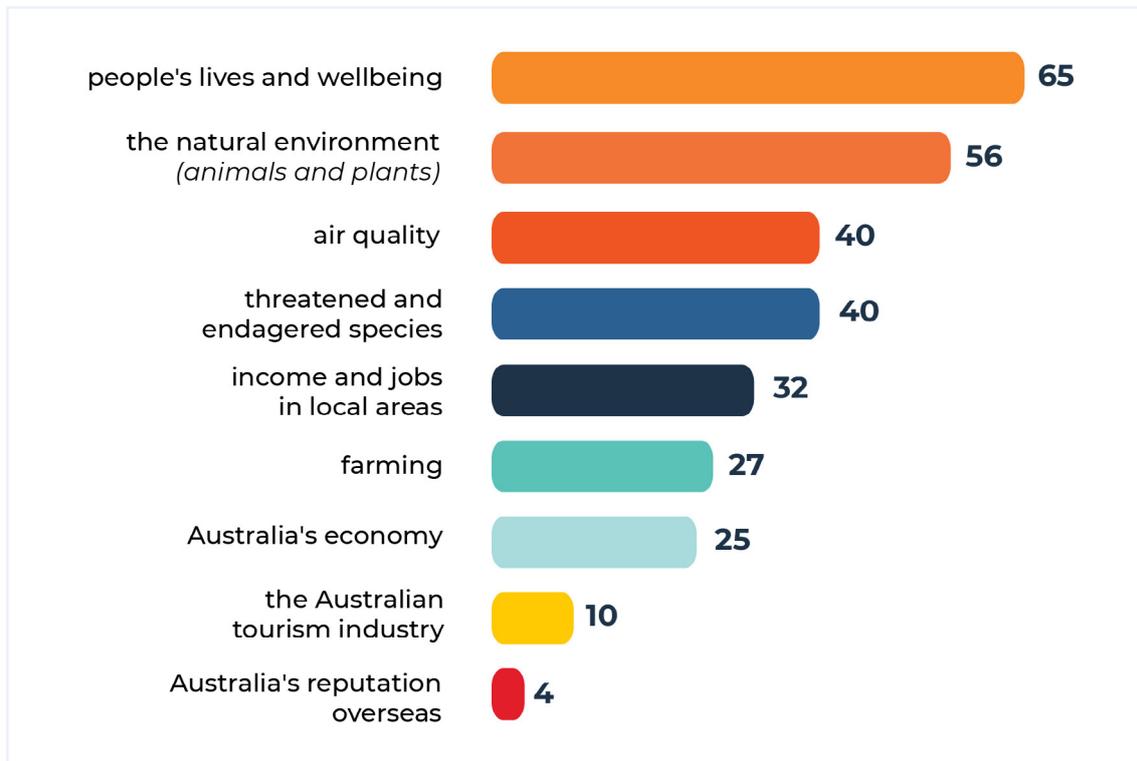
of resources for regional firefighters compared with firefighters in Sydney.

Similarly within our quantitative polling, the effects on employment and job losses and financial stress for families, communities and the broader economy was raised as long term impact of disaster, alongside drought and bushfires specifically. The societal effects of job loss was discussed more frequently in the face- to-face consultations than appears in the poll. This is also most likely due to the fact that almost all children and young people consulted with face-to-face had been directly impacted by the recent disasters.

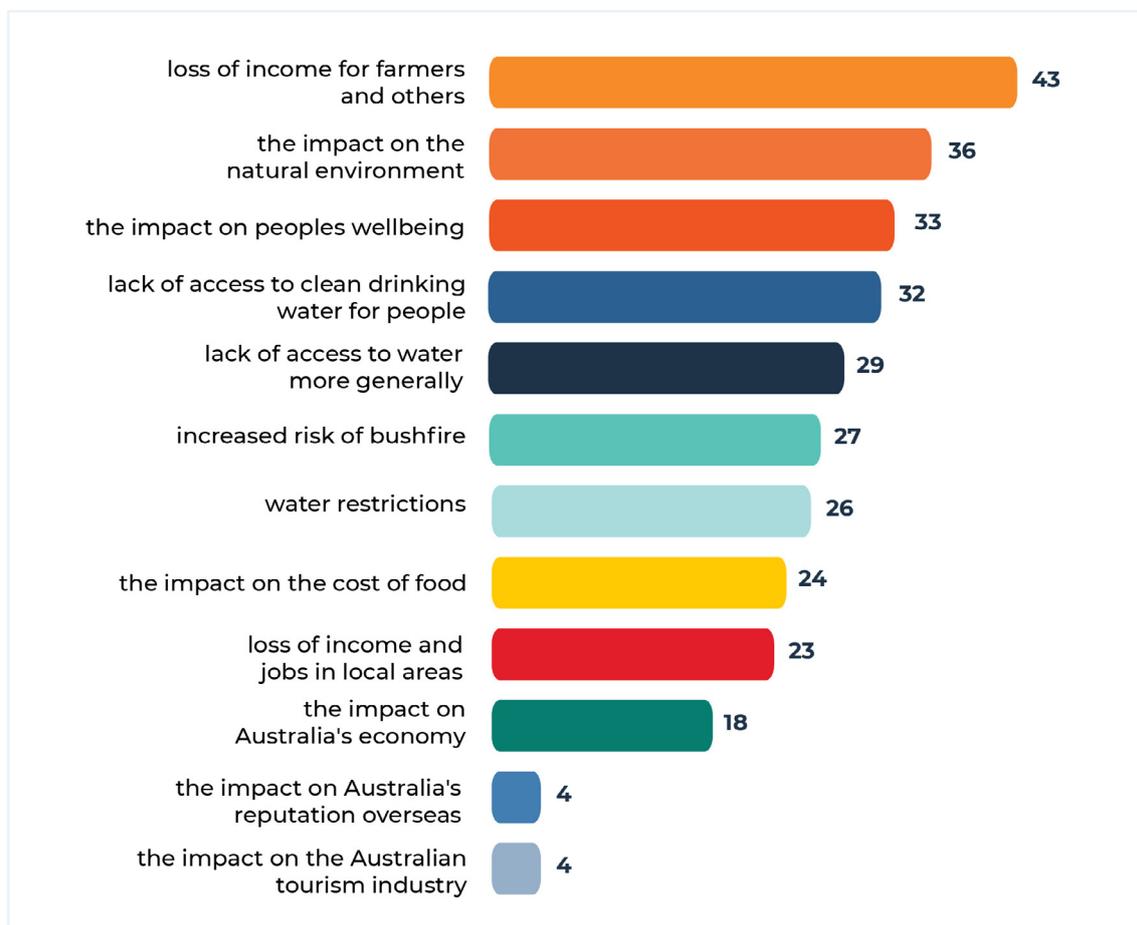
Long term impacts of natural disaster on (%)



Three main concerns about bushfires (%)



Three main concerns about drought (%)



“During such a big event I think children needed a lot more support than they were getting, because adults were just freaking out about what was going on and they weren’t listening. And they were more frantic, and their kids were clearly upset and stressed.”

Participants in our research, spoke about how observing stressors in their parents was leading to their own anxiety. They developed a model where mental health services pro-actively reached out to parents to reduce the burden young people placed on themselves having to support both their parent's mental health and their own.

This model would be conducted by qualified mental health practitioners and services contracted by government to deliver free of charge mental health services. Given that there is no universal treatment for mental health, families would have to be contacted individually to seek their interest in the service and to develop a mental health plan. This plan would include frequency of check ins with a baseline of weekly check in for three months following the disaster.

The benefit of a service such as this is that the mental health responsibility will be shared by family members and mental health professionals, decreasing burden on children and young people.

Family as a Support Mechanism.

Within our consultations, children and young people also acknowledged that family can be a support network for them in times of disaster. For this to occur, they acknowledged that families need to be provided with information and opportunities to plan for and respond to disaster. There was widespread agreement across children and young people that families need to have disaster plans in place to know exactly what they are going to do in case a disaster hits. This included knowing how to protect their homes and properties; at what stage they would need to leave their homes; where they would go and what and how many of their belongings they would take with them.

An example of an existing resource that could assist with this is the Rural Fire Service's Bushfire Survival Plan, which has been widely promoted, but perhaps not adopted as extensively as required within homes or discussed with children and young people to sufficient levels.

"A plan! Being entirely informed and aware of what actions to take i.e. fire evacuation plan, lock down plan."

"This isn't just for young people, but I think they need to know the fire plans. Because there were a lot of people who did not have a fire plan and were just panicking."

Some children and young people suggested that disaster information packs should be prepared by government and delivered to every household so that people can be prepared. They discussed that there should be online and hardcopy versions and that it should include what to do in different disaster situations; if you need to evacuate what documents to take with you and what clothes are important to pack:

"Things like information packs that you can get...if it gets dropped in every single mailbox then that way everyone's got the information... what to prep if you aren't in immediate danger. If you're in immediate danger what to do."

- Disaster Resilience Framework

“Even if you have two options...an electronic version...and if you want a physical version...we’ll deliver it to you, but this is your electronic version...knowing teenagers, we’re going to lose it.”

One group had the idea of creating another book in the “Dummies” series:

“A dumbed down version of everything. If there was like...You know those for dummies books?” This group also identified the importance of any emergency information pack being accessible to all people:

“There should be options as well for culturally and linguistically diverse people...able to change the online version of the information. Able to change the language and stuff on it.”

Children and young people were particularly concerned about not wanting to lose things that were most valuable to them and their families. Having a disaster plan in place meant being able to save precious items:

“It’s really sad if your house burnt down and you have really special memories in there that you can’t replace, because you can’t buy back the memories.”

While it was acknowledged that families do provide support to children and young people, in our consultations, there were children and young people that felt the adults in their lives could have been more supportive and provided them with the reassurance they were seeking:

“During such a big event I think children needed a lot more support than they were getting, because adults were just freaking out about what was going on and they weren’t listening. And they were more frantic, and their kids were clearly upset and stressed.”

In addition to support in the form of reassurance, children and young people also wanted adults to support them by giving them accurate information in a calm manner:

“I think having someone there that you can talk to...and tell you the proper thing, but without the panicked view of it.”

In ACYP consultations, children and young people made it clear that during and after a disaster the government needed to prioritise ensuring the support networks around a young person, including their family and peers had adequate support.

Across all locations, children and young people discussed the enormous stress they experienced during the various disaster situations. Some reported seeing their parents, teachers and neighbours panicking; which heightened their own anxiety:

“It would have been helpful if people weren’t screaming as much in my street.”

“My mum and Dad are not together anymore...my mum couldn’t really hold it all together...with my Pop not being there when he’s fighting the fires and I really want my Dad to be there.”

- Disaster Resilience Framework

It is therefore not surprising that children and young people spoke of a wide variety of supports that were helpful to them during the disasters or that they would have liked to have available to them. Children and young people expressed gratitude for support they had received from a wide range of people including their parents and wider family; friends; volunteers; rescue services; celebrities and the world in general:

“Parents were probably the most useful source.”

“Mostly our best friends were very supportive.”

“Firefighters...monitoring the area all day long everyday...all night long...they were excellent. They did a really good job.”

“These kids from other countries and schools around the world that sent messages wishing us the best and hoping we were all okay. It made me feel safe and feeling like we’ve been looked after.”

Once a disaster occurs, access to support networks was identified, in our quantitative research as the most important thing for children and young people (42.7%). Most commonly reported were access to support from parents and wider family members; community support; emergency services support (fire fighters, SES etc.); support from friends; support in the form of donations and fundraising; and reassurance from adults that it will be okay.

Increase in domestic and family violence

Following the Christchurch Earthquakes, NZ police reported a 53% increase in domestic violence callouts in the weekend of the Earthquake in 2010.²⁴ The Christchurch Women’s Refuge (Aviva) reported a 50% increase in family violence service requests after the February 2011 earthquakes.²⁵ Research after Black Saturday Bushfires showed an increase in domestic violence cases in communities impacted by bushfires.

While there is evidently research to support the claim that disasters can cause an increase in the rates of domestic violence, it would be inaccurate and in fact a distortion of the research to say that the disaster event was the single factor in the increase being seen. Such a statement would fail to consider the broader psychosocial and socio-economic circumstances that may have been occurring in that community or family. What this research does point to is the need to ensure those involved and affected by the disasters are provided with the adequate and appropriate supports for them to process their trauma in a safe and productive manner.

Enabling Environment 3: *Community Ties*

Children and young people regularly participate in social and cultural activities. These activities include the arts, sports and community events. Children and young people also utilise civic spaces such as parks, gardens, skate parks, courtyards, and community gardens for socialisation.

Disasters impact the ability of communities to come together to participate in arts, sports, culture and community events and diminishes community cohesion, potentially leading to collective trauma. Collective trauma occurs when an unexpected event damages the ties that bind community members together. It is easy to see how a disaster might have this effect. Not only are communities physically destroyed, but the social ties that bind them together are also

damaged. The Framework recognises both the individual trauma experienced post disaster but it also highlights and works for the recovery of collective trauma experienced by communities post disaster.

Some of the impacts of disaster on community are:

Loss and damage to community infrastructure and cancelation of activities

Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes on Community Ties

The earthquake had a devastating effect on the arts infrastructure in greater Christchurch at both the professional and community levels. Arts, music and sporting venues were lost or damaged.

In the Youth Wellbeing Survey 2013, of all 17 issues presented to participants, the 'loss of places you used to go such as cafes, restaurants, places of worship, marae, arts and cultural centres, had the greatest significance to children and young people (25%).

73% of young people in the survey experienced a loss of places they used to go. The more likely to experience moderate or major impacts were aged 19-24, living with a health condition or disability lasting more than six months.

In relation to the loss of sports and recreation facilities, such as swimming pools and sports fields, 63% of participants stated they had experienced loss as a result of the earthquakes. This indicator rated fourth among the 17 issues. For 18% of participants, this was having a moderate or major negative impact on their lives.

“When there was lots of smoke we weren’t allowed outside. I think it would have been nice if we had somewhere where we could do PE during school that was safe for us to be.”

Provide activities for children and young people

When children and young people were asked what could help them during a disaster event they identified the need for activities to both distract children and young people and relieve boredom.

The desire for activities and things to do during disaster situations was widely discussed among groups of children and young people. The availability of activities was said to serve several purposes; including providing a distraction from the disaster; relieving boredom and promoting community togetherness. In one drought affected area, young people spoke about the benefits they gained from participating in a local concert:

“We performed at the Blast for our concert and Hartley Under the Stars, which are both for the drought and that just made us feel better in the time that it was happening. It just gave us a bit of leeway and we were able to just be happy and perform with each other.”

Children and young people in several locations reported the Drought Break Program funded by the Office of Regional Youth as working well in their communities. Some of these children and young people had enjoyed free entry to their local swimming pool; others had been on sport and recreation camps free of charge and funded through this initiative.

Children and young people in bushfire affected areas reported that they would have liked alternative sporting and other activities to be available when the smoke precluded them from being outdoors:

“When there was lots of smoke we weren’t allowed outside. I think it would have been nice if we had somewhere where we could do PE during school that was safe for us to be.”

Some children and young people also reported needing safe play spaces as their usual play areas had been burnt down:

“Somewhere to play while building a house or whatever has been damaged and is getting built.”

Others spoke about the need for activities to distract children and young people and calm them down during a disaster:

“Take your kids to the movies so they’re out of the smoke but still they’re not thinking about it.”

Some other ideas for activities put forward by children and young people were that youth groups could take children away for a while; using local youth centres as a place for young people to have a break or time out; and holding more community events and fundraisers.

Limited opportunity and exclusion from community activities and public spaces decrease the ability of children and young people to reap benefits and remain resilient in times of disasters. Community cohesion, including family, friends and the wider community, was identified as a protector factor by children and young people. This assisted them with the provision of supports during and disaster and in the recovery and rebuilding of community. A lack of community cohesion not only

- Disaster Resilience Framework

provides a lack of support but it also means children and young people do not feel communities can work together to tackle the crisis.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that children and young people impacted by the 2019 floods and bushfires and ongoing drought had little opportunity to recover before COVID-19 hit and all community events, sports and activities were cancelled indefinitely. The negative impact on children and young people of these back to back disasters with no opportunity for community healing cannot be underestimated.

Providing access to sports and recreational activities is important for children and young people during and post disaster because it can act as a distraction, lead to greater connection with peers and reduce social isolation.

Loss of community activities decreasing resilience

Children and young people spoke about simply wanting to have fun after the disasters had passed. The arranging of community events and activities that bring people together to support each other in informal ways was seen by young people as vital to improving the sense of wellbeing and resilience in the community:

“Activities, carnivals - bring community together.”

“A concert, like a disaster aid or whatever...when kids are down, some kids don’t speak. Because they don’t really want to. So maybe if they want to go and have a good time and listen to music. Some arts and crafts. Just spend time with friends.”

Children and young people also reported wanting similar events and activity days at their schools as a way to support each other and restore a sense of normalcy.

Children and young people said that they wanted the focus of community events to be on strength and resilience, not just about victims. Those that had experienced the bushfires firsthand reported that such events could give back a little of the “summer feeling” they had missed out on.

One group of children and young people suggested a local public holiday when people did not have to go to work or school. The purpose was to acknowledge how stressful the summer had been and how hard everyone had to work without having a break. They suggested that community events could be held on this the holidays.

Decrease in participation due to competing obligations

Case Study: Drought on Community Ties

Across drought affected communities, some children and young people had almost no time for play, sport or other recreational activities due to changed priorities.

Sports teachers reported significant drops in participation in organised sports. Events in town were sparsely attended and some were called off altogether. One child told UNICEF (2019) that people could not get away from farms because they were out feeding cattle.

Carnie et al (2010) echoes these findings reporting that young people felt the loss of friends and of opportunities to participate in community activities. With obligations to work on the farm, many had no time for recreation

or socialising. In the study, adults noticed that young people lost friends and support people.

Not all children, young people and families are effected by the drought in the same way. Families forced to de-stock or who were unable to plant crops may not have diminished time in the same way. Some communities reported a large increase in the attendance of children and families at sporting events over the year as a welcome distraction from worries (UNICEF, 2019).

Literature highlighted the significance of community activities for children and young people, however children affected by the drought stated they did not have the time to participate in arts, culture and sporting activities. They had competing priorities. Application of the Framework reiterates that these activities are critical to re-building identity especially in rural and regional areas and that offering choice, including programs that are designed and run by children, enables children to see their community as vibrant and recovering.

Innovative solutions and investment must be undertaken by the government, business and community sector in recovery to restore loss of arts and sporting events alongside social cultural and community events. These avenues of play, connection and expression are critical for the recovery of children and young people after and during prolonged disaster. In designing and implementing these solutions that sector should look at appointing a youth development office or the like, to engage children and young people in the programs. These may include, local festivals and events, school holiday programs, such as PCYC's 'Fit for Life' programs and community art spaces.

Case Study: Christchurch Earthquakes

The recovery of arts and cultural sectors were driven by local and central government, local communities and practitioners themselves.

Some of the initiatives that occurred included:

- Innovative art spaces and "gap fillers," including community-led projects to harness street art in suburbs
- Festivals and events including Christchurch's Winter Chill Events, entailing 60 social events, such as music gigs
- Memory projects to help survivors move forward and honour those who lost family and land.

In relation to sports and recreation, initiatives included:

- Small localised and larger community events, such as fun runs and mud runs
- School based programmes, such as sports competitions were supported in the worst affected areas
- Three temporary pools were established to increase capacity for those learning to swim.

The Canterbury Wellbeing Index reported that schools played a significant role in providing sporting and recreational opportunities during 2011 and 2012 (CERA, 2016).

Decrease in community cohesion and breakdown of essential communication

In our consultations, communities were seen as an important support network for children and young people during and post disaster. Across almost all locations, children and young people discussed the way communities came together to provide unconditional support to each other:

“Just seeing the posts on Facebook about the families going out to communities affected by bushfires. Really cool, I tried not to cry.”

“It’s just that sense of community...I know it’s really bad here, when we have all these natural disasters, but at the same time you can also see the community coming together.”

Unfortunately in more isolated communities, some young people felt that they were not afforded the support they would have liked from nearby towns:

“It was like one town was struggling and the other town was like ‘That’s not us so we don’t have to worry about it!’”

Children and young people in communities that were struggling were much more likely to speak about pre-existing challenges which they felt compounded their experiences of the disasters. They described the vulnerabilities in their communities that were exposed and amplified as a result of the disaster. Some children and young people spoke about the impact of multiple, sustained disasters on the overall resilience and capacity for their communities to bounce back.

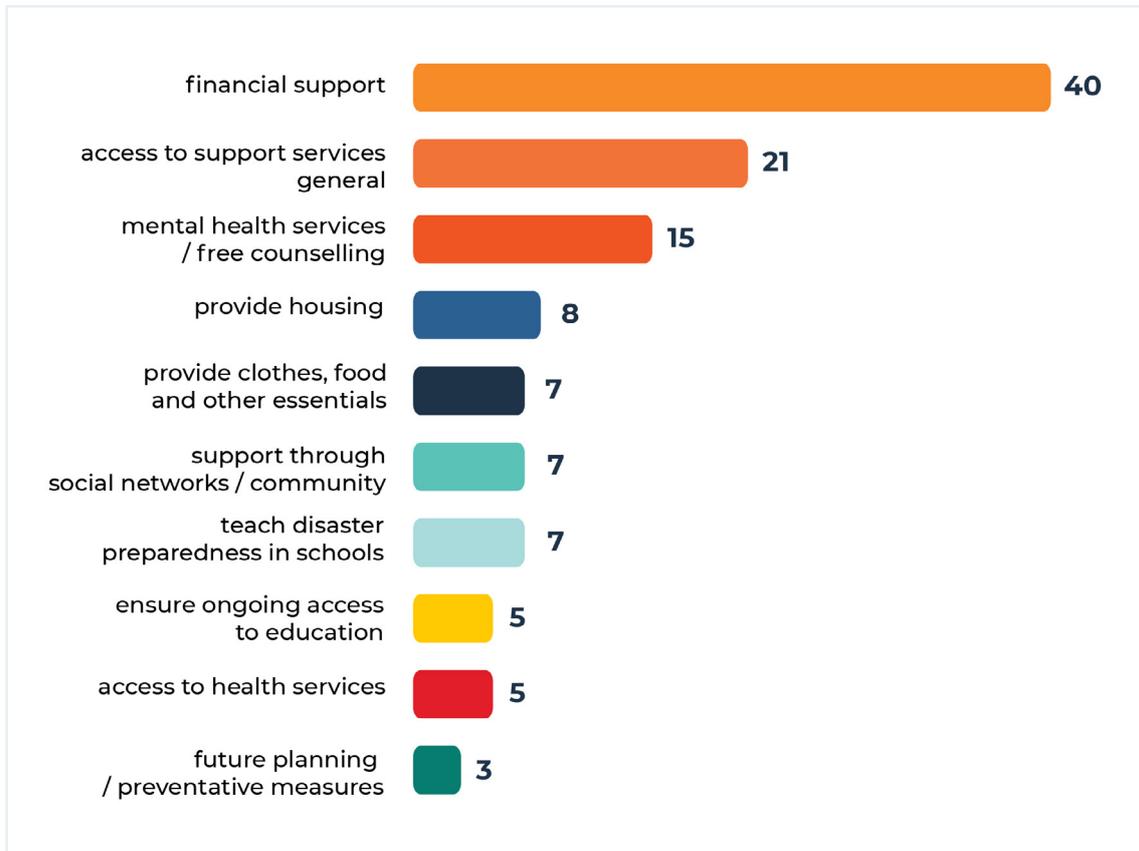
Children and young people in these communities discussed the aspects of social exclusion they already experienced and their fears about being left further behind as their community tackled the impact of the disasters. They expressed a clear view that for recovery efforts to have long term success, these broader systemic issues within in their communities need to be addressed.

“More needs to be done for the communities that suffer every year to make ends meet and continue to be ignored. It’s not fair and it’s not right.”

Participants in our quantitative polling recognised the importance of community supports during and post a disaster. In response to how children and young people can be better supported, many respondents raised ‘support through social and community networks’ unprompted.



What should be done to help young people your age who have been impacted by recent disasters in NSW? (%)



Another community aspect that emerged in our consultations was the lack of communication between residents of the community and evacuation personnel in terms of what was going on during evacuation. Participants voiced a need for social cohesion in disaster response to ensure that everyone is working together.

The group emphasised that it was critical post disaster to have phone access to a real human with live disaster information. This was to ensure consistent information dissemination within the community. The model that participants decided on 24/7 advice and direction post disaster helpline.

Within this model, the government could contract an organisation run the live chat or hotline service. Alternatively, all the information and resources could be placed on a specific landing page for children and young people on Service NSW. The ability to call or live chat with a disaster response coordinator who has accurate, streamlined information available to support people in making immediate decisions. This service could integrate with geolocation tagging on a mobile device to allow coordinators to provide personal and accurate directions.

A service like this would empower children, young people, families and communities to make informed decision in disaster situations.

Communities as an Mechanism for Recovery

Children and young people also discussed a desire for recovery and rebuilding efforts to be led by communities themselves, rather than directed by centralised part of government located in the metropolitan area. They were clear that individual communities knew what would work best for their members and should be allowed to develop their own solutions:

“The community, government and individuals working together to help each other.”

“More communication between public about future plans in their community and getting their opinion.”

For some children and young people, it was important to raise their own money to do their bit for their community:

“My mum and me made cakes and we went to...Tamworth...and we took our cakes with us and we started selling them. We were raising money and we got \$365 and we gave it to charity.”

Linked to the desire for community control over recovery and rebuilding, there were children and young people that expressed frustration at the length of time it was taking government to allow communities to clean up after the bushfires.

Young people spoke about not being permitted to clean up their properties until the correct clean up bins were delivered. Others reported waiting months for necessary equipment to be delivered:

“My pop, he requested some equipment and it was eight weeks before you got an answer, and even then he didn’t get it, so maybe just more availability.”

“They weren’t even allowed to do any work, moving or anything. All they were allowed to do was pick up some of the stuff that was spilling over everything.”

Another aspect of community control during and post disasters raised by children and young people was ensuring communities needed to have enough emergency supplies to be prepared for disasters. Some discussed running out of food, water and fuel. Those in bushfire affected areas often raised the need for enough masks to be distributed to children and young people:

“There wasn’t really any masks available for people that had asthma at the schools. Some of the days were very smoky.”

“And the government wasn’t really providing good quality masks for the fires...there were people donating some. The government could put more money into that.”

“We ran out of diesel and no one could use their cars for several weeks...store fuel I guess for disasters.”

Children and young people stressed the importance of communities and government taking time to learn from the disaster experience and putting things in place to prevent similar disasters from occurring in the future:

- Disaster Resilience Framework

“To acknowledge what went wrong and try and solve what more needs to be done.”

“They [government] can help and reflect on the events that just occurred the rundown of the process and reflection on how we can be better prepared.”

“Taking time to look back on the situation rather than just jumping back to a normal life. Evaluate the disaster.”

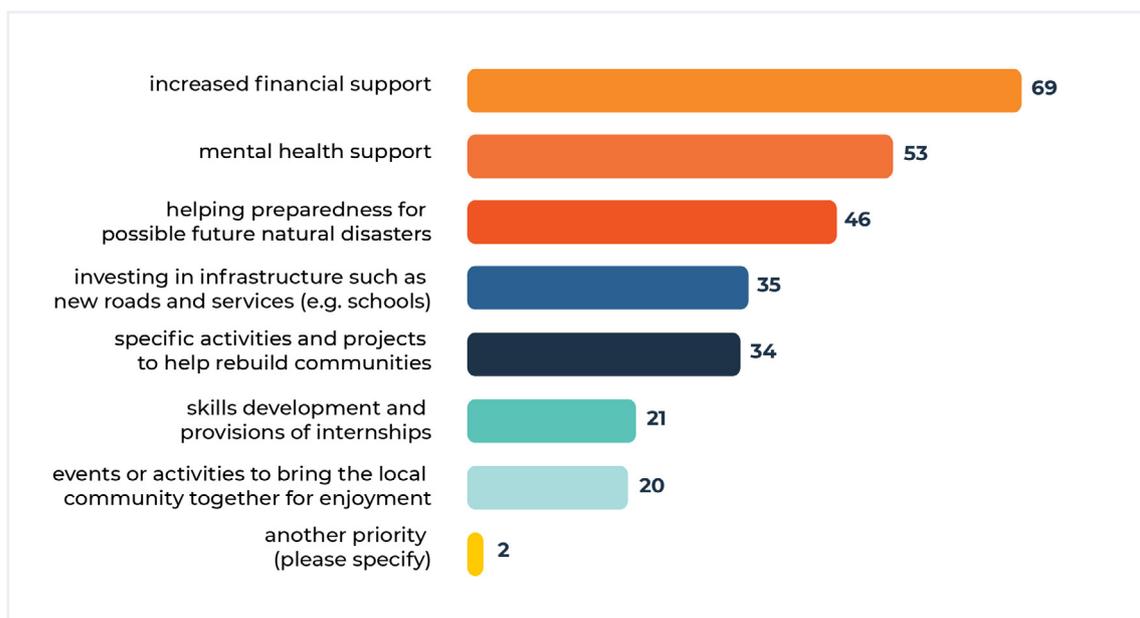
The need to allow time for communities and families to heal, reflect and learn from their experiences was frequently mentioned by children and young people. Children and young people reported wanting time for them and their communities to process the traumas experienced. Some felt that the experience of back to back disasters had prevented them from being able to do this:

“Because of the Coronavirus everyone has had to move on to the next thing...we just had fires, then floods, the drought and then straight into this coronavirus so we haven’t had a chance to stop and breathe and reflect.”

“I think the floods decimated the community ... we just hit rock bottom and haven’t recovered yet.”

Aligning with these findings, our quantitative polling when asked what would help children and young people impacted by disaster, the need for specific activities and projects to help communities rebuild and increase community cohesion was raised as a priority.

Top 3 priorities for government to support young people impacted by disasters (%)



“Because of the Coronavirus everyone has had to move on to the next thing...we just had fires, then floods, the drought and then straight into this coronavirus so we haven’t had a chance to stop and breathe and reflect.”

- Disaster Resilience Framework

Another aspect of community recovery that was raised by children and young people was the role the media could play in raising the profile of communities affected by the disaster.

In some locations, children and young people discussed the need for the media to raise the profile of their communities in disaster. They felt that people living in Sydney, in particular, did not have an understanding of how dire the situation is for many living in rural areas during disaster events. This conversation highlights the sentiment that young people in rural NSW often feel less important than those in city areas:

“There’s no real way for us to make [people] aware of the severity.”

“Just once again, we get little to no recognition of our area.”

“Those areas that aren’t really affected like us, they’re getting more support and recognition. And small areas like us...that are actually on fire.”

One group of children and young people living with prolonged drought suggested that there should be an initiative where people from the city visit drought affected communities to witness firsthand what is going on:

“Having the city people come out and look what is going on.”

“I think funding, even to do an exchange, get some city kids to come out and we can go there.”



Enabling Environment 4: *Neighbourhood & Environment*

Enabling Environment 4: Neighbourhood
& Environment is broken up into two sections:



The Natural
Environment



Connection to Land
and Culture

Natural Environment

The natural environment provides an opportunity for children and young people to connect with nature and gain an essential appreciation for the environment. The environment can also play an important role in the prevention of disasters when managed appropriately.

The natural environment extends to the land, nature parks, mountains, beaches and rivers. It also encompasses wildlife, climate, quality of air and water essential for everyday living.

Impacts on the environment that disaster may include:

Destruction of land and wildlife and its ongoing maintenance

Disasters cause destruction of the natural environment inhibiting the ability of children and young people to live, play and enjoy the land on which they have grown up on. Being unable to access these environments diminishes these opportunities and may remove activities that are of low cost or no cost.

Access to the natural environment not only provides activities to distract children and young people but can provide significant benefits to their mental health and broader wellbeing.

The sight of barren and desolate land in drought-stricken areas, and destruction in bushfires, causes great emotional stress and is a constant reminder of the traumatic event.²⁶ Children and young people can be re-triggered by the lingering signs of disaster.

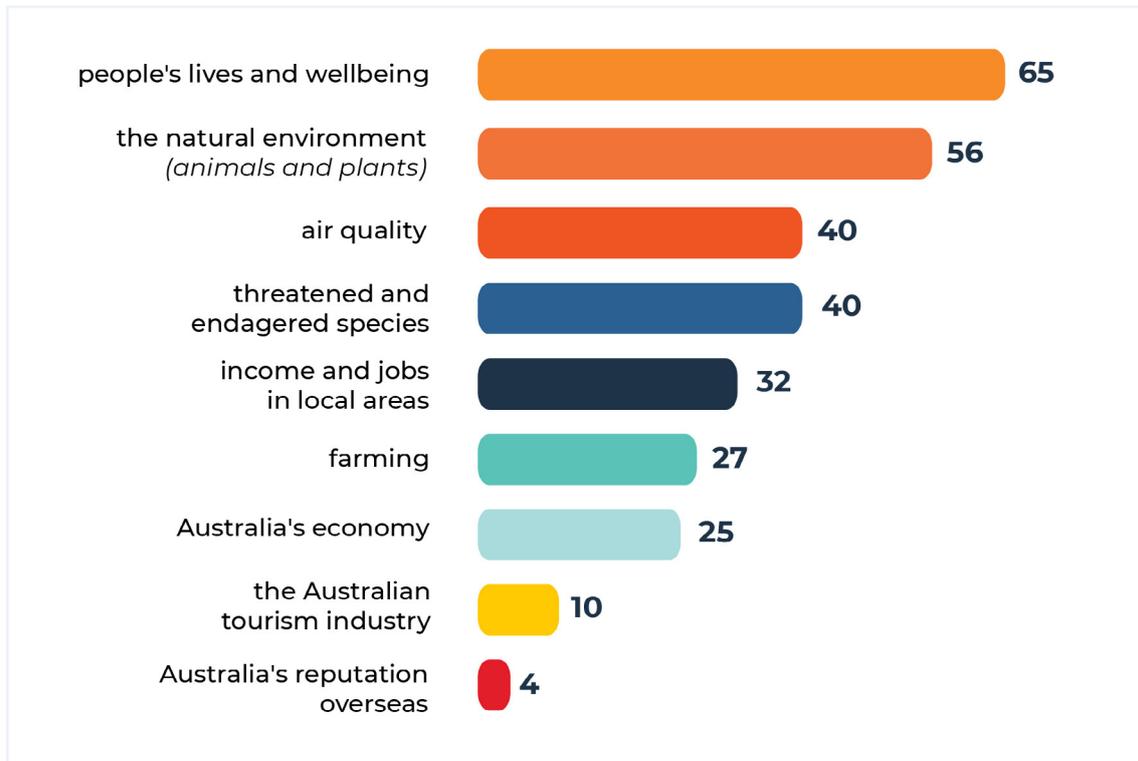
This is particularly heightened for children and young people living in rural and farming communities who have a deep connection and strong affinity to the land.²⁷

Black Saturday Bushfires also saw the destruction to 70 national parks, 450,000 hectares of land burned²⁸ and 11,000 farm animals and habitats of 40 species destroyed.

As a result of the 2019/2020 bushfires: 200 national parks were destroyed, 46 million acres of land were burnt and there were significant losses to agricultural crops and livestock. As we have previously stated in the 'contextualising disaster' section, the severity of this bushfire season saw significant tracks of land and infrastructure destroyed.

Within our quantitative polling, the destruction of wildlife was the second highest concern when discussing the main concerns of the bushfires. 56% of respondents selected this answer. This was closely followed by the impact on threatened and endangered species in the third positions with 40% of respondents selecting it.

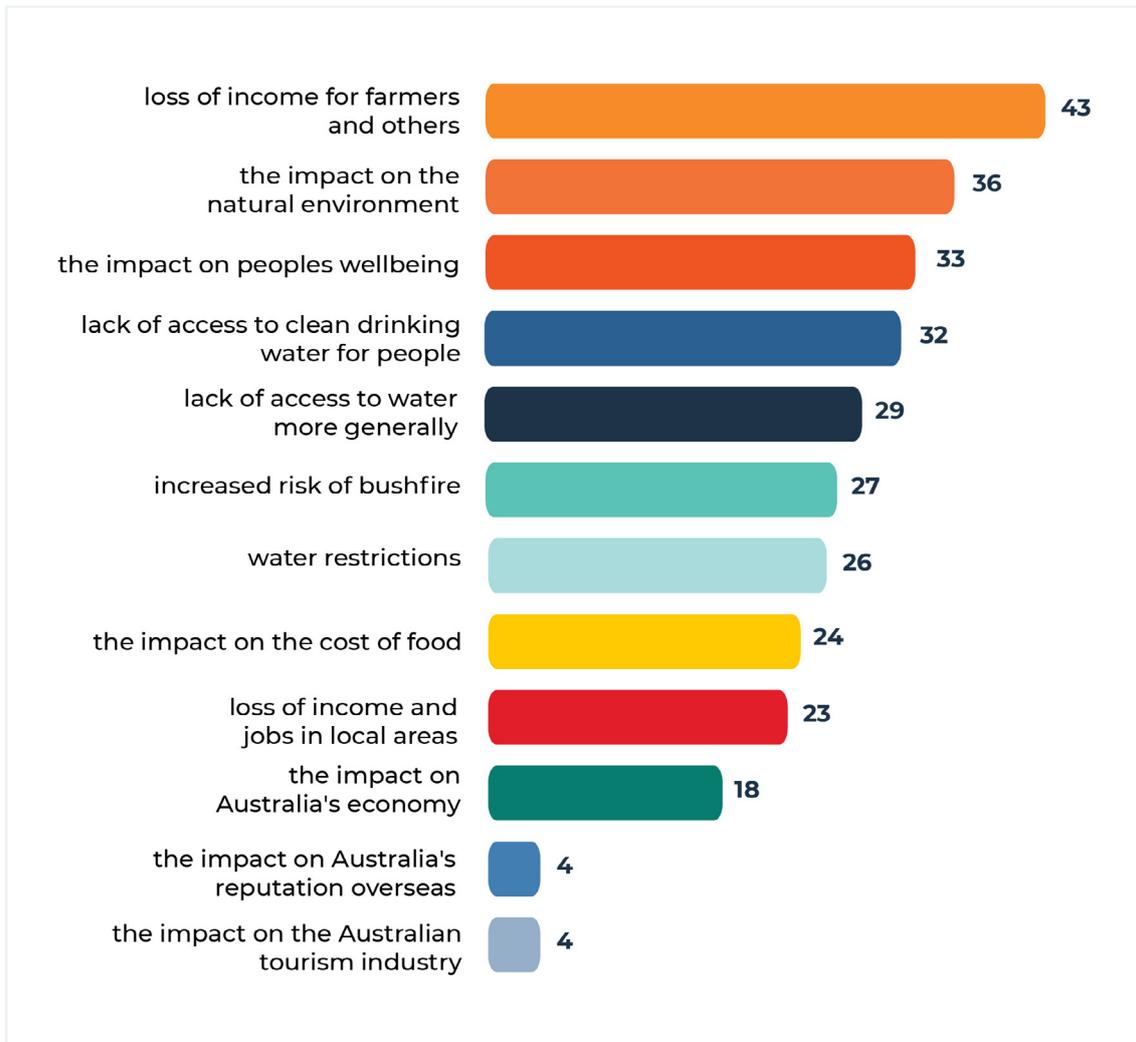
Three main concerns about bushfires (%)



In a similar manner, the second highest concern for respondents when asked about their main concerns about the drought, was the impact on the natural environment with 37%.



Three main concerns about drought (%)



In an effort to maintain the land, children and young people in our consultations raised, in terms of prevention of disasters, in particular drought, the importance of teaching sustainable agricultural practices. These included strategies such as rotating stock to keep grass growing back and water management practices.

Air pollution

Case Study: 2019/2020 NSW Bushfires

Air quality greatly deteriorated as a result of the bushfires.

Australia's clear air standard is PM2.5 level of eight micrograms per cubic metre. Readings in Sydney got as high as 734 micrograms, during the 2019/2020 bushfires, which is the equivalent of smoking 37 cigarettes (BBC, 2020).

Poor air quality impacts health significantly, especially with small particles irritating eyes and causing coughing spells. For children with asthma and other respiratory issues, these particles can cause difficulty in breathing and chest tightness.

A study published in 2020 after the bushfires suggested that smoke could have been the cause of:

- 417 deaths
- 1124 cardiovascular, 2027 respiratory related and 1305 asthma related admissions.

(Nicolas Borchers Arriagafa et al, 2020).

Due to the health concerns, the NSW Government strongly encouraged the community to stay indoors. This prevented children and young people from interacting with the natural environment and public spaces (NSW Health, 2020.) Many schools also opted to keep children indoors during lunchtimes and breaks.



- Disaster Resilience Framework

Within our quantitative research the effects of the smoke arising from the bushfires came up repeatedly when discussing the impact on the daily lives of children and young people. Those who experienced bushfires and drought most frequently experienced irritation from bushfire smoke with those who experienced flooding also rating it highly with 60%, 57% and 58% respectively.

Another daily impact that existed for those who had a serious health condition which was exacerbated by the bushfire smoke. For those who experienced the bushfires, 21% said they had an existing health condition exacerbated, with those who experienced the drought had

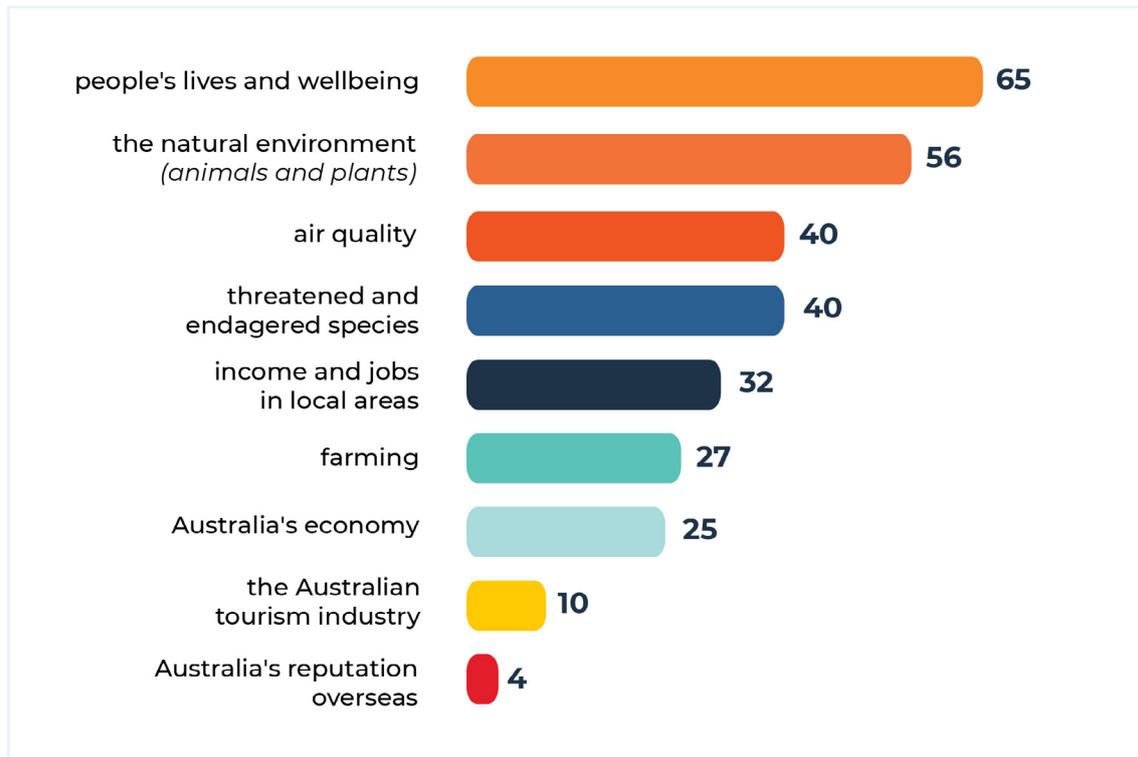
the figure at 20% and for those who experienced the subsequent floods 23% mentioned having an existing health condition exacerbated by the bushfire smoke.

Slightly lower numbers had their daily lives impacted by the development of a serious health illness due to the bushfire smoke. Those that experienced the fire had 11% of respondents say they developed a serious health concern, for those who experienced the drought 12% attributed the development of serious a health condition to the bushfire smoke and for those who experienced the floods, 15% stated they had developed a serious health condition as a result of the smoke.

| How natural disaster impacted their daily lives | | <i>% who mentioned by disaster type</i> | | |
|--|------------------|---|---------------|--|
| | bushfires | drought | floods | |
| Had irritated eyes, throat or lungs from bushfire smoke | 60 | 57 | 58 | |
| Had a serious health condition exacerbated by bushfire smoke | 21 | 20 | 23 | |
| Had a serious health condition develop from bushfire smoke | 11 | 12 | 15 | |

Within our quantitative polling, the impact on air quality was the third highest concern when discussing the main concerns of the bushfires. 40% of respondents selected this answer.

Three main concerns about bushfires (%)



Within the community meeting that Professor O’Kane and Former Commissioner Owens undertook for the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, the topic of air pollution came up from a young person in the context of back burning. The conversation centred on how previous inquiries had made significant recommendations into controlled and maintained back burning as a preventative strategy and to minimise prolonged air pollution.

Many participants expressed they did not see those recommendations being implemented and there is significant concern within the community that lessons will not be taken from this bushfire season.

Water and food insecurity.

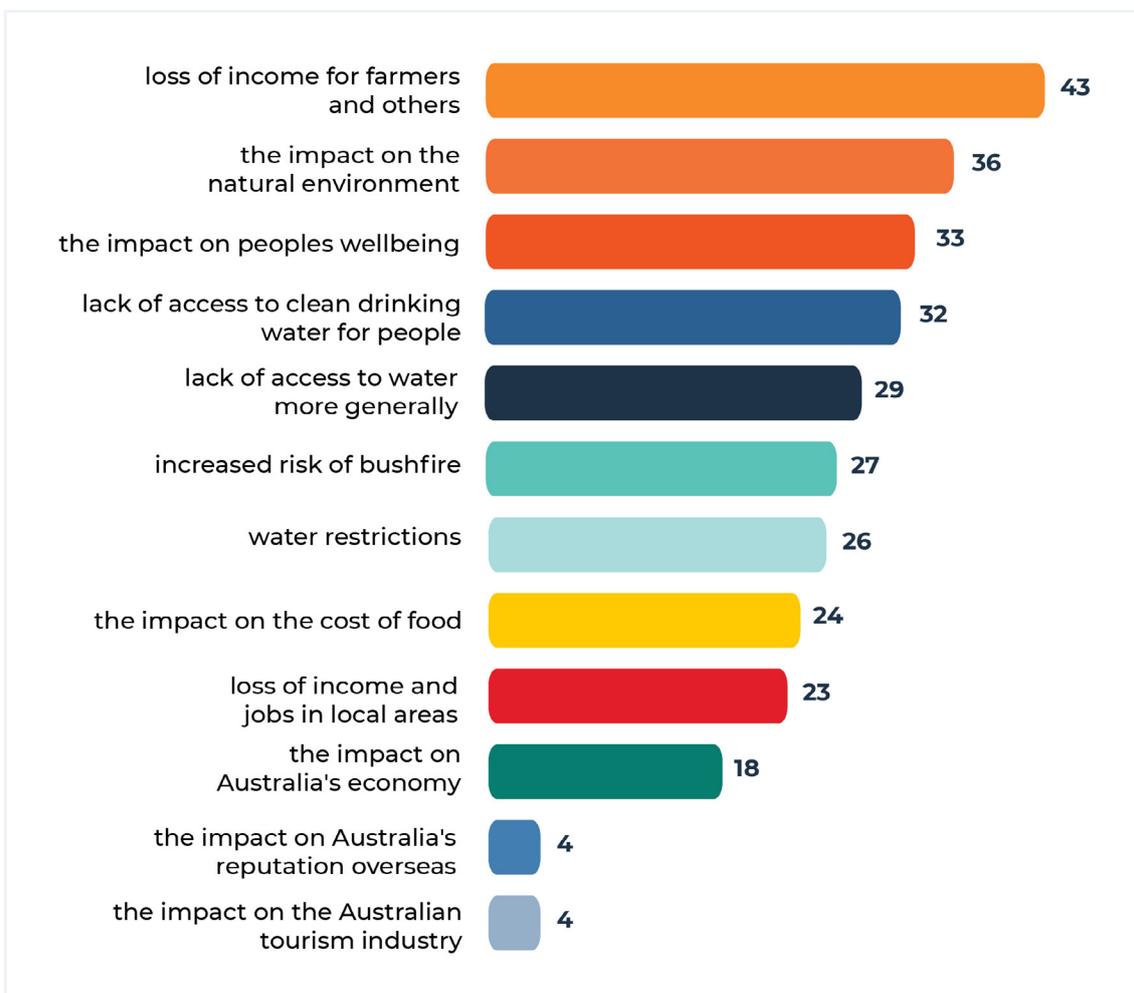
Bushfires impact food and water security. Children and young people expressed concern over water within the UNICEF(2019) report.

“We urgently need an honest national conversation about water security. Without this, our primary industries and our economies face a certain failure. Drought will eventually affect our food security, eco-systems, and eventually our cities.”²⁹

Within our quantitative polling, lack of access to clean drinking water, and access to water more generally ranked highly when respondents were asked about their main concerns about the drought, garnering 32% and 29% respectively. Water restrictions were also raised as a concern by 26% of respondents.

Within our qualitative research, participants have suggested that water relief is sent to farmers when the rain reaches a certain point, prior to the drought becoming substantive.

Three main concerns about drought (%)



Act to Prevent Disasters

In terms of prevention; children and young people discussed issues related to back-burning, water restrictions and management, acknowledging of Indigenous land practices and teaching sustainable agricultural practices to address the drought.

For children and young people that had been affected by bushfires; there was a great deal of discussion around back-burning and in particular that many landowners had not been permitted to clear away their land:

“If a landholder wanted to prevent an area from being burned, they couldn’t, because the government was saying no, so it was a bit annoying.”

“If we did more back-burning before the fires came, that would have helped to decrease the amount of devastation that actually happened.”

Other young people discussed the reasons as to why back-burning was not always allowed; with the potential for catastrophic effects:

“We were in a drought, so they thought that if we back-burnt something, that something may go wrong and we don’t have any water to fix it. So they had a lot to chew on.”

Children and young people in drought affected areas raised the importance of water restrictions and water management; expressing frustration at those who did not take these seriously:

“People need to be taught how to act. If you’re in a drought, you can’t really be having showers that last 10 minutes...but...people come to school and go like, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m going to go have a 40 minute shower.’ I’m like, ‘We’re in a drought!’”

Some children and young people in smaller towns felt like this was particularly applicable to those in larger towns with access to more water supplies and asked for information nights to educate people about water restrictions. These children and young people discussed the anxiety caused by the fast escalation in restrictions in their towns, fearing that they would run out of water:

“We went from no water restrictions to Level 2, then in a short period of time to Level 4 and Level 5 quite abruptly.”

In terms of prevention of disasters, in particular drought, some children and young people raised the importance of teaching sustainable agricultural practices. These included strategies such as rotating stock to keep grass growing back and water management practices.

“If we did more back-burning before the fires came, that would have helped to decrease the amount of devastation that actually happened.”

Connection to Land and Culture

Aboriginal people have profound spiritual connection to land. Their land is intertwined Aboriginal law and sustains spiritual, physical, social and cultural aspects of life. Aboriginal children and young people are the custodians of the land.³⁰ Connection to land provides connection to culture. Connection to culture can provide strong support networks during a disaster.

Involvement in caring for the land allows for children and young people to build skills and connection essential to their culture and overall resilience. Aboriginal children and young people who are not part of caring for land are more at risk of the impacts of disasters.

The drought has had significant impacts on the ability of Aboriginal children and young people to connect with the land. Some of these impacts have included, a loss of culture, displacement from the land and significant grief over lost land.

In the UNICEF Call to Action (2019), Aboriginal children and young people stated:

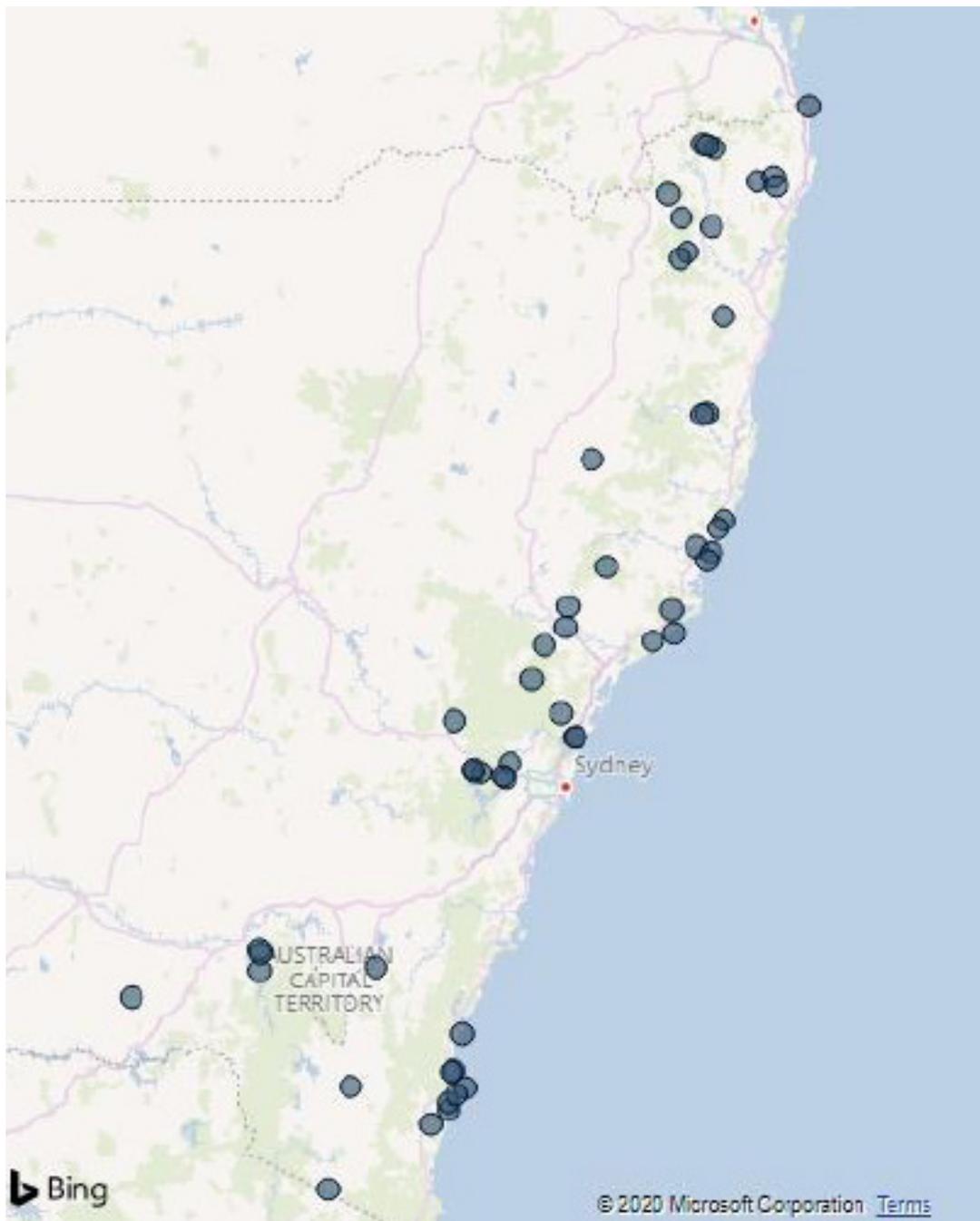
“We are concerned about the impact the drought has on our culture. For us, the river is more than just a water source. It is a source of spirituality and connection to country. The river is the blood of our people. Our ancestors have been the custodians of the environment for thousands of years. If we fail to continue nurturing our lands, we not only make it impossible for future generations to practice their cultures, but we also disrespect our ancestors’ legacy. We need you to know that the drought is affecting the wellbeing and mental health of Aboriginal people.”³¹

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research found that one-tenth of children in the 2019/2020 bushfire-affected areas were Indigenous. More specifically, 11.1% of infants and pre-school aged children and 10.2% of children aged 5–14 years were Indigenous. Proportionately, this is higher than within the general population.

This bushfire season was also a horrific occurrence in its devastation to Aboriginal Sacred Sites.



Aboriginal heritage sites impacted by the bushfires



In the NSW community of Mogo, the bushfires destroyed the land council office which was the cultural heart of the Aboriginal community. The office provided housing, art and caring for country in its Ranger Program.

The Yuin people in NSW lost hundreds of sites, male ceremony places and sites on the Sacred Mountain (Allam 2020).

Integrating Aboriginal practices into land management is key to building more resilient communities. It is important that children and young people are provided with opportunity to learn from their Elders in how to care for land. This is true for both Indigenous and Non-Aboriginal children and young people. As mentioned above, within our consultations there were calls for greater use of Aboriginal burning practices as a prevention to future bushfires seasons. This could be enacted through greater employment of Aboriginal people in the fire services or a pilot program similar to that of the Aboriginal Ranger Program in Queensland

Case Study: Aboriginal Ranger Program Queensland

The Aboriginal Ranger program is a program entailing the cultural maintenance, management, monitoring, animal control and fire management of heritage sites. The program is led by Aboriginal people, providing jobs and funding to care for land.

There are currently 101 Queensland State positions, which have contributed to reducing poverty through economic opportunity and building leadership in regional communities.

This leadership has been key in educating children and young people in land management.

“For us, it’s about meaningful employment for our young people including training and opportunities to develop a career. The program not only benefits the individual but is significant for their families and the wider community. Benefits are not only employment but also physical, mental and spiritual health, and pride in our culture and country.”

Gerry Turpin, a Mbarbaram man from Northern Queensland and ethnobotanist at the Queensland Herbarium, (Macquarie University 2017).

Enabling Environment 5: *Having a Voice*

Children and young people are powerful in society as they provide insight into a community's needs and are creative in designing service responses. Children and young people who are not involved and included in their societies are more likely to feel adverse impacts of disasters and feel more disconnected. This is because service responses would not have been designed to their needs.

Many children and young people reported feeling unheard and not having opportunities to participate in disaster management and response.

Impacts of disasters include:

Children and young people feeling invisible

Giving children and young people opportunities to have a voice in their communities, lead to them feeling valued and that they can contribute to disaster prevention, preparedness and to community recovery and rebuilding post disaster. Not providing these opportunities led to children feeling marginalised and alienated, pre,

during and post disaster.

In our consultations, many children and young people reported that their ideas were typically disregarded simply due to their age:

***"They don't really listen to us in the community because we're young."
"The government needs to know that we have views and emotions too. And we know how to speak too. And we should be recognised as human beings as well."***

"That's why most of the time young people don't speak up, it's because we get told, and 'You don't know what you're talking about!'"



“That’s why most of the time young people don’t speak up, it’s because we get told, and ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about’.”

Provide a voice to children and young people during disaster

The desire to have their views, ideas and concerns heard by adults was repeatedly raised by children and young people across all locations. It was clear from group discussions that children and young people had their own ideas with regards to disaster prevention and what they wanted in order to feel prepared for a disaster; although they felt that government and others do not give them opportunities to voice these:

“I think children have more passionate... and fresh ideas.”

Some children and young people were involved in youth-driven projects and spoke very positively about these. For example, one group discussed their involvement in sustainability initiatives at their school that was being run by students as a way of addressing the broader issue of climate change. Another group spoke about their class discussions to think of ways to address the ongoing drought.

It was very clear from the group discussions that children and young people were not only asking for their own voices to be heard. Rather, they wanted government and other decision-makers to be listening to their entire communities with regards to the best action to take to prevent a disaster or to be prepared. Their conversations were very much around what was best for their community as a whole, not just for children and young people:

“We could use our skills together, their skills of business and how things operate and we have the knowledge of the younger generation’s opinions and voice.”

“It’s literally as simple as asking. I’m sick of people making decisions about people that they aren’t....Just ask. Literally, just ask.”

Children and young people were very clear that they wanted opportunities to voice their ideas and concerns in the aftermath of a disaster. In particular, they reported that the government should talk to and hear the advice of children and young people that have experienced disaster events firsthand. This included being able to sit and talk about what happened and what will work for them moving forward:

“Let young people do the planning for helping other young people.”

Children and young people also discussed wanting to be involved in the recovery and rebuilding of their communities. Some had ideas for community redesign:

“Something that would make it look like the disaster was never there. Beautifying it.”

“We need a wildlife centre...we don’t have one of those...because there was nowhere for wildlife to go.”

Once again, children and young people also demonstrated that they think about their whole communities by recommending that government provides opportunities to hear from all local people, especially the older generation as they have lived through similar disaster events in the past and have a great deal of knowledge about what to do.

***“It’s literally
as simple
as asking.
I’m sick of
people making
decisions
about people
that they
aren’t....Just
ask. Literally,
just ask.”***

Provide Children and Young People with the Opportunity to Volunteer

Children and young people highlighted the lack of volunteering opportunities available to them during disaster events. It was clearly evident from their conversations that they would really like to be able to help out their own or other communities in need to lessen their sense of helplessness or anxiety:

“People always want to feel needed, right? So, actually letting people know what they can do to help.”

A few children and young people described positive volunteering experiences they had during the recent disasters:

“I went to the university where some of the firies were staying on campus and we just put a whole lunch thing out for them. It was really nice to see people actually helping them as well, as well as them helping us.”

Children and young people also suggested some other ways that they could volunteer and help out those in need:

“In your local community, if these families need help...they give you a list, you do the shopping and you give it to them.”

“High school students to come together and say, ‘this is what we’re going to do as a collective to work with the firefighters’.”

“Farmhand volunteers to help out farmers that can’t afford to pay farmhands.”



A need for sharing stories and finding common understanding.

Case Study: Hi Viz TV Series- Christchurch Earthquake

After a disaster, children and young people have a need to talk about their shared experiences of a disaster. This is an important part of the recovery process, especially to assist with mental health rehabilitation.

After a disaster, children and young have a need to talk about their shared experiences of a disaster. This is an important part of the recovery process, especially to assist with mental health rehabilitation.

To aid recovery, Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) developed a six-part TV series made by children for children called Hi Viz. The series takes on a news segment style with children interviewing experts and community leaders on recovery issues. They are also given the platform to share their stories, in a light-hearted humorous tone.

The series follows a format of what happened, to what the current proceedings are to what the future of Christchurch looks like. Some topics included creativity, rebuild and restoration of the city (EQ Recover Learning, 2016).

Effectiveness:

- Allowed children to engage with the restoration of Christchurch
- Allowed children to be included in questioning and decision making
- Allowed children to share their stories and connect with other young people.

In our consultations, children and young people spoke about the importance of having opportunities to share their stories with peers and the broader community. Creating these mechanisms either through Youth Liaison Officers within local government or platforms utilising technology such as Facebook Live are easy but effective ways to ensure the voices of children of young people are heard.

Recommendations

- Recommendations

Children and young people's experience of disaster can be vastly different and unique compared with those of adults; and these experiences can have a profound impact of them in both the short and long-term.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable in times of disaster, however they are also 'active agents' on the road to recovery.

As experts in their own lives, children and young people have the right to participate in all aspects of disaster preparedness and recovery. Past disasters show that priority needs to be given to the voice of children and young people during the recovery process.

Arising directly from both our quantitative and qualitative research, these recommendations explore how government and non-government organisations can both incorporate children and young people in disaster preparedness and recovery and support them during and after disaster events.

It is important to acknowledge that the recommendations from children and young people express their needs and views as expressed to ACYP. It is not to say that Government and non-government organisations did not take nor continue to undertake significant work in disaster preparedness, prevention and recovery.

It is how children and young people perceived and experienced those actions; it is the truth according to them. It is an overarching principle governing the Advocate's work to reflect that truth. Now it is our collective responsibility as a society to explore how these truths manifest themselves practically.'



1. Raising awareness

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1.1 Schools introduce a student exchange program or explore other creative options for partnerships between metropolitan and rural schools to raise the profile of communities in disaster. (e.g. “A day in the life of a young person living in drought”)</p> | <p>1.2 Support for Youth Insearch programs in schools that encourage Peer to Peer support and training for children and young people.</p> <p>1.3 Support for rural and regional programs such as “Buy Regional” and “Buy from the Bush.”</p> <p>1.4 Re-explore and reinvigorate the City Country Alliance in schools.</p> | <p><i>“Having the city people come out and look what is going on.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think funding, even to do an exchange, get some city kids to come out and we can go there.”</i></p> |

2. Disaster preparedness and information provision

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|---|---|--|
| <p>2.1 The NSW Government introduces “disaster information packs” in bushfire, drought and flood prone areas, but also makes them available online. These packs inform individuals on what they need to do to prepare for a disaster. <i>(step by step – what to pack, where to go etc...)</i></p> | <p>2.2 Resilience NSW to increase awareness of and coordinate development and delivery of survival kit training in schools and community meetings, such as the Get Ready NSW Program.</p> <p>2.3 Develop a dedicated children and young people platform or landing page that provides and promotes information specifically for and to children and young people via NSW Government websites or apps and include list of other recommended resources on Government webpages.</p> <p>2.4 The NSW Government harness the potential of Our Local and Digital Lunchbreak to highlight services that provide physical, financial, mental and social supports to young people following a disaster.</p> <p>2.5 The NSW Government should engage with recognised Aboriginal cultural fire management practitioners on ways to integrate cultural burning into bushfire preparation, response and recovery.</p> | <p><i>“Things like information packs that you can get... if it gets dropped in every single mailbox then that way everyone’s got the information...what to prep if you aren’t in immediate danger. If you’re in immediate danger what to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“Even if there’s an App that young people can download that just has alerts...just something that we have. SO we just know that instead of going home and then looking at the telly and then looking outside and seeing red sky, black... so just something that we had like some type of notification.”</i></p> |

3. Activities and programs for children and young people

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|---|--|---|
| <p>3.1 The NSW Government provides free or affordable structured programs and recreational activities for children and young people during and after disaster events (example, ORY Drought Break Program) to provide both a distraction from the disaster that has unfolded as well as an opportunity to connect with their peers.</p> | <p>3.2 Children and Young People in NSW designed Our Local and Digital Lunchbreak. NSW Government should utilise these sites and work with community and NGO's to provide up to date activities.</p> <p>3.3 Further resourcing for children and youth centres, libraries or other community spaces to offer programs and activities, connection to supportive adults and access to physically and emotionally safe spaces during or following disaster, especially for those children and young people whose families may be struggling and unable to offer that kind of support at home.</p> <p>3.4 Strengthening partnerships with local and community based NGO's who have designed and implemented programs that support children and young people in evacuation and recovery centres. Examples include:</p> <p><i>Examples include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save the Children Child Friendly Spaces • PCYC "Fit for Life" programs • Mission Australia's support programs in evacuation centres • Playgroup NSW programs. | <p><i>"It doesn't even have to be something big. It can be a game of chess or something."</i></p> |

4. Evacuation centres

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|--|--|---|
| <p>4.1 Evacuation centres during disaster events are child and youth friendly (in terms of safety, supervision, things to do, allowing family pets, screening of people in the centres).</p> | <p>4.2 Potential for Save the Children's Child Friendly Spaces or similar infrastructure to be further incorporated in evacuation and recovery centres.</p> <p>4.3 Working with evacuation and alternative safe places to enable families and companion animals to evacuate together where possible. These centres should also, where possible, remain open for extended hours to further support communities.</p> <p>4.4 NSW Police should work with the Department of Communities and Justice to ensure that children and young people are not placed in dangerous situations when being placed in evacuation centres, such as AVO or DV breaches.</p> | <p><i>"Somewhere to play while building a house or whatever has been damaged and is getting built."</i></p> <p><i>"There was a couple [of evacuation centres] but they wouldn't really let animals in."</i></p> |

5. Community recovery

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|--|---|---|
| <p>5.1 The NSW Government, organisations and communities identify meaningful opportunities for children and young people to contribute to and be actively involved in the rebuilding of their communities.</p> <p>5.2 Explore opportunities for children and young people, particularly those who are unemployed or disengaged from the education system, to be trained in skills which can be utilised in recovery efforts with pathways to work experience, apprenticeships, or employment in local communities.</p> | <p>5.3 In any subsequent inquiry, commission or investigation clear mechanisms are created for children and young people to contribute such as ACYP, YAC, RYTF.</p> <p>5.4 A specific taskforce or element of every inquiry focusses on the needs of children and young people, as individuals. For example holding specific information sessions for children and young people.</p> <p>5.5 Support be offered to local businesses to increase training and work opportunities for local young people, especially in areas of hospitality, tourism, retail, trades or other industries which traditionally provide employment for young people.</p> <p>5.6 Enable established programs such as PCYC's "Fit for Work" and "Fit to Volunteer" program to continue to run in a community.</p> <p>5.7 The NSW Government developes a recovery employment framework which creates job opportunities for young people in disaster recovery areas. The Illawarra Yes Program, developed and run by the Illawarra Business Chamber and PCYC's Fit For Work program are two examples of existing programs that could be leveraged.</p> <p>5.8 Partnering with TAFE, eligible young people who may have disengaged from education are provided employment and qualification opportunities e.g. tree felling.</p> <p>5.9 Implement the requirement for youth employment in the procurement process.</p> | <p><i>"Allowing us to have a voice in decisions that are made, especially on climate strategy and the redevelopment of affected areas to ensure that they are more sustainable and are able to withstand future natural disasters."</i></p> <p><i>"Get us involved in rebuilding the community after disaster."</i></p> |

5. Community recovery - continued

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|--|---|---|
| <p>5.10 The NSW Government and local Councils allocate resources to encourage community led and youth led events that celebrate community resilience, strength, and connection. The emphasis should be on creating opportunities for involving children and young people in the design and delivery of these events including through skills training, volunteering and employment options</p> <p>5.11 When developing community recovery strategies, give consideration to the experiences of children and young people living in smaller towns outside regional centres to ensure resources are allocated to address their needs at a local level.</p> | <p>5.12 The government could consider resourcing young people to facilitate "Vivid in the Bush". Like Newcastle's annual "This is Not Art" festival, this cultural festival could offer a range of professional development opportunities for those interested in a career in the arts, entertainment or event planning industries. It would also drive tourism toward the regions and stimulate local economies.</p> <p>5.13 Modelling on local youth councils, LGA's should form disaster recovery councils with children and young people from the surroundings areas to ensure a whole of community response.</p> <p>5.14 Utilising the Human Services Dataset, community recovery and rebuilding efforts prioritise communities that have been identified as areas where children and young people were already doing it tough before the disaster, formulating a comprehensive plan that addresses the full spectrum of children and young people's lives including mental health and wellbeing, education, income support, housing stability, family resilience, connection to supports and programs, access to infrastructure, and opportunities for meaningful engagement in their communities to ensure these children and young people do not become more socially excluded as a result of the disaster.</p> <p>5.15 Allocation of resources to Aboriginal owned and controlled organisations to provide a range of cultural support and healing initiatives for Aboriginal children and young people in communities affected by disasters.</p> <p>5.16 Modelling off the CFA concept of 'Bushfire Safety System' following the Royal Commission, Resilience NSW should work with the community to further develop a NSW equivalent, with a specific focus on vulnerable groups, including children and young people.</p> | <p><i>"We performed at the Blast for our concert and Hartley Under the Stars, which are both for the drought and that just made us feel better in the time that it was happening. It just gave us a bit of leeway and we were able to just be happy and perform with each other."</i></p> <p><i>"We went from no water restrictions to Level 2, then in a short period of time to Level 4 and Level 5 quite abruptly."</i></p> <p><i>"More needs to be done for the communities that suffer every year to make ends meet and continue to be ignored. It's not fair and it's not right."</i></p> |

6. Access to infrastructure

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|--|---|---|
| <p>6.1 To ensure continued communication and information provision during and post disaster, consideration should be given to ensuring children and young people have access to low cost or free reliable WIFI either in their own homes or through areas in the community, such as libraries.</p> <p>6.2 Priority be given to rebuilding community infrastructure destroyed by disasters that is identified by children and young people within a community as crucial to their quality of life. This could include schools or education institutions, roads or transport routes leading to schools, food/grocery shops and open spaces such as parks or playgrounds.</p> | <p>6.3 The Department of Communities and Justice should work with NGOs and telecommunication companies to ensure that children and young people have access to technology (laptops and data).</p> <p>6.4 Utilising Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Disaster Infrastructure datasets, priority should be given to restoring critical infrastructure including recreational facilities used by children and young people.</p> <p>6.5 NSW Transport could explore innovative options to increase access to public transport for children and young people in smaller towns and outlying areas to be able to travel into regional centres to reduce isolation, and restore a routine following a disaster through allowing them to engage in education, training, or employment opportunities.</p> <p>6.6 NSW Transport should work with transport providers to utilise decommissioned transport as local shuttles for communities affected by disaster.</p> | <p><i>“The Internet’s it’s really slow”</i></p> |

7. Practical and financial assistance

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|--|--|---|
| <p>7.1 Access to material and financial assistance be made as simple as possible, including providing assistance to families to help with application processes, in recognition of the additional stress children and young people say they suffer as a result of wait times while their eligibility is assessed.</p> <p>7.2 Offer in-person as well as online options for financial assistance services as not all families have access to technology, or do not want to/are unable to leave their homes during a disaster. Children and young people also reported being asked by family members for assistance to complete forms.</p> | <p>7.3 Establish a policy and protocol around working with organisations such as Thriving Communities Partnership and Australian Business and Community Network to accelerate the financial, and customer support that is available in response to the disaster event.</p> <p>7.4 Promote and utilise the Service NSW model to enable both access to government and non-government services, and streamline the access to government grants and funding.</p> <p>7.5 Establish a children and young person specific platform that provides information around supports, funding and grants available specifically for children and young people.</p> <p>7.6 Service NSW should conduct door to door services within communities affected by disaster to assist those eligible for grants and financial assistance to complete the required forms.</p> <p>7.7 NSW Police and Transit Officers should defer or cancel all fines received due to a PT fair evasion incident and warnings given to children and young people from disaster communities for a period of six months.</p> <p>7.8 The NSW Government should provide financial support for families affected by recent disasters including; child care assistance and higher education scholarships.</p> | <p><i>“Ongoing financial, education, and job support to help them get back on their feet within the right means.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support Services and Stimulus Packages would help the community drastically.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think there should be counselling like services available to those affected and financial support for those who have lost homes, jobs etc.”</i></p> |

8. Mental Health

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|---|---|--|
| <p>8.1 Mental health and youth services offer peer to peer support programs to enable young people to support each other during and after disaster events (for example, Youth InSearch)</p> <p>8.2 Mental health training be provided to adults in communities so they understand the important role that trusted adults play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in their communities</p> <p>8.3 Ensure there are structured mental health supports for young volunteers and firefighters during and after disaster events</p> | <p>8.4 Support for the youth led programs developed by Batyr that encourage Peer to Peer support and training for children and young people. (https://www.batyr.com.au)</p> <p>8.5 Mental health and youth services provide children and young people with mental health training such as mental health first aid, accidental counsellor training, or be provided with checklists for coping strategies so that they have the knowledge and skills to support their friends, family, and others through disaster events</p> <p>8.6 The Teen Mental Health First Aid Course is conducted in all schools affected by disaster (https://mhfa.com.au/courses/public/types/teen)</p> <p>8.7 The NSW Government should invest in a variety of mental health support strategies and programs following disaster.</p> <p>8.8 The government should invest in the Rural Mental Health Adversity Program past 2020 to meet the needs of regional and rural communities in the continued disaster recovery. https://www.ramhp.com.au/</p> <p>8.9 The Youth Mental Health First Aid Course is adapted to accord with the disaster context and delivered in community meetings pre and post disaster (https://mhfa.com.au/courses/public/types/youthedition4)</p> <p>8.10 Continue to invest in the Critical Incident Support Services and Chaplaincy Service operated by the RFS to ensure they are able to continue meeting the needs of the additional workforce within the RFS following the most recent bushfire season.</p> | <p><i>“When you can see that your child is suffering... from the devastation while it’s happening. While they’re panicking, you just need to be there for them and support them.”</i></p> <p><i>“We have lots of younger members who do participate in the fires after they turn 16 with parent permission. I feel like they actually need a lot more support than what they get...We talk about what’s happening in the fire season, how we feel about it but younger people tend to just shut themselves up. Now we have counselling support systems in Brigades but I feel like something else needs to be done. I’m just not sure what.”</i></p> |

9. Voice

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|---|--|--|
| <p>9.1 The NSW Government, organisations and communities provide regular opportunities for children and young people to give their views in relation to disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery and rebuilding.</p> <p>9.2 Information provided to the community by leaders in Government or local leaders include a focus on addressing particular concerns of children and young people to ensure children and young people feel reassured that decisions are being made in their best interests and acknowledge any anxieties or worries they might have.</p> | <p>9.3 Following a disaster event, organisations like ACYP should be deployed into affected regions to ensure children and young people are given a voice in future disaster preparedness and recovery. In the transition from emergency response to recovery, state, regional and local recovery committees have been established to coordinate cross agency, whole of community programs and interventions. There must be a place and mechanism for children and young people in these committees.</p> <p>9.4 Before, during and after a disaster event, local Incident Controllers work with the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) to ensure that children and young people are appropriately factored into community engagement plans and consulted during the recovery process at a local level.</p> <p>9.5 The Department of Customer Service should develop a platform similar to the Hi Viz TV series created by Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) post the Christchurch Earthquake. This platform was a place where young people can share their experience of a disaster to aid in the process of recovery and shared learning.</p> | <p><i>“Listen to our opinions and invite us to be more a part of decisions that directly impact our present and future.”</i></p> <p><i>“Allowing people my age to have a specific place to give their opinions to the government.”</i></p> |

10. Education

| Recommendations from children and young people | Recommendations from ACYP | The voice of children and young people |
|---|---|--|
| <p>10.1 Children and young people are educated about disaster prevention and preparedness (through school curriculum, or incursions/workshops).</p> <p>10.2 That schools provide online learning options during disaster events.</p> <p>10.3 That schools conduct regular "check-ins" with all students during and after disaster events to identify children and young people requiring additional support.</p> | <p>10.4 The Department of Education should consider imbedding the Project Firestorm Program developed by the RFS within the School Curriculum.</p> <p>10.5 The Department of Education could work with the Department of Communities and Justice and NGO's to ensure that children and young people have access to technology (laptops and data) to ensure access to online learning .</p> <p>10.6 The NSW Government should commit to a pilot program of year advisors from the 20 most vulnerable schools as determined by the OEM to undertake an Accidental Counselling Course. (http://www.acwa.org.au/BookingRetrieve.aspx?ID=140333)</p> <p>10.7 The Department of Education should review its procedures around the closure of schools in disaster events focusing on local decision making.</p> <p>10.8 The Department of Education should consider a HECS style payment scheme for school aged education for families struggling financially after a disaster.</p> <p>10.9 The Department of Education should consider the co-location of schools where there may be reduced facilities and resources following a disaster.</p> | <p><i>"Do it through school, or like workshops maybe. It reassures young children to be clam in those situations when it's hard not to be frantic. Not to worry too much. Just stay calm."</i></p> <p><i>"Groups or facilities catering specifically for checking on the wellbeing of young people."</i></p> |

Concluding Remarks

- concluding remarks

There is no doubt that children and young people are especially vulnerable and can be greatly impacted by disaster events. However what we have seen and learnt over the course of this project, is that children and young people also have an incredible amount of resilience in the face of disaster events.

Children and young people's experience of disaster can be vastly different to those of adults. These differing experiences mean that children and young people can have exceptionally innovative ideas in regards to disaster prevention, preparation and recovery.

Children and young people have called for more targeted and tailored mental health intervention of not only themselves but also their families to address the significant mental health impacts disaster can have. Within the education sphere, children and young people have called for greater education around disaster, integrated mental health supports in schools and greater choice of educational delivery following disaster.

In regards to housing and youth employment and family supports, children and young people have called for greater support to ensure adequate housing following disaster, either in their own property or short term accommodation and greater financial and material support for families who have suffered social and economic impacts of disaster.

Children and young people have made it clear that community is incredibly important to their sense of identity and resilience. Disaster recovery must ensure that it prioritises children and young people's inclusion in community rebuild and events which foster community cohesion and participation for all.

Closely linked with community ties and identity is the place of the natural environment.

Unfortunately disaster has significant impact on the environment including destruction, insecurity around water rights and levels and disconnection for our Aboriginal population. Disaster responses must include participation of young people in land management and disaster preparation and prevention.

Most importantly for children and young people is that they are given an opportunity and a platform to have a voice. They feel invisible, forgotten, helpless and unable to influence the world around them in disaster. This has detrimental impacts for the individual and fails to realise the full potential and contribution they can make to enhance our understanding of disaster. All responses must create platforms for children and young people to share their stories and experiences and to participate in disaster recovery. Children and young people should be supported to do this.

Within this report, children and young people have shared their experiences, concerns and innovation when we experience a disaster event. It is now our responsibility as government, non-government, community and business to work with them to ensure services and support systems effectively and efficiently respond to this, now and in the future.

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Appendicies

**Consultations and
supporting information
for the disaster report**

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We would also like to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal people and culture within the NSW community.

ACYP advises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers this report may contain images of people who may have passed away.

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Office of the Advocate for
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Consultation Report with Children and Young People on Disaster

Introduction

Children and young people have the capacity to form an opinion about decisions that affect their lives, and they have the right to voice that opinion. As experts in their own lives; they have experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation.

As a result, they can tell adults things that adults do not know, and children and young people's perspectives can lead to more creative and relevant solutions and services. It is both the role and responsibility of ACYP to reflect the truth as they see it to all sectors of the community. It is for this reason that ACYP undertakes participatory research.

Key Findings

Children and young people identified what they need to be prepared before a disaster occurs; and for support both during a disaster situation and after the disaster has ended. They were also very clear about the positive impacts they can have before, during and after disaster events and how they would like to be engaged during such events.

before

To be prepared before a disaster occurs, children and young people would like:

- Education about disasters and what to do in a disaster situation
- Government and other decision-makers to act to prevent disasters and be prepared for when a disaster occurs
- Mechanisms to have a voice in their communities around disaster prevention and management;
- To be provided with accurate information well before a disaster hits their communities.

during

During a disaster event, children and young people want:

- Supports to be widely available, including school and mental health supports
- A range of activities to distract them, connect to others and reduce isolation
- Practical assistance to be provided to them and their families
- Child and youth-friendly evacuation centres
- Opportunities to volunteer
- The profile of communities in disaster to be raised.

after

After a disaster event has occurred, children and young people would like:

- Ongoing professional and peer to peer mental health support
- Ongoing economic and financial support
- Opportunities to voice their opinions regarding recovery and rebuilding
- Opportunities for community healing, reflection and learning through connection and celebrations of resilience.

Children and young people, especially those in small regional centres, view their communities' collective wellbeing as directly related to their own individual sense of wellbeing.

Children and young people living through disasters, whether drought, floods or bushfires, expressed a desire for other children and young people to have an understanding of what their daily lives entail. In particular, those living in regional areas wanted opportunities to share their experiences with children and young people living in city areas. Children and young people also identified a range of areas that

were currently working well and not working well in their communities. It was evident from group discussions about the impact of disasters on children and young people that these areas serve as either pre-existing risk or protective factors in communities that can be either exacerbated or utilised by children and young people during times of disaster.

Methodology

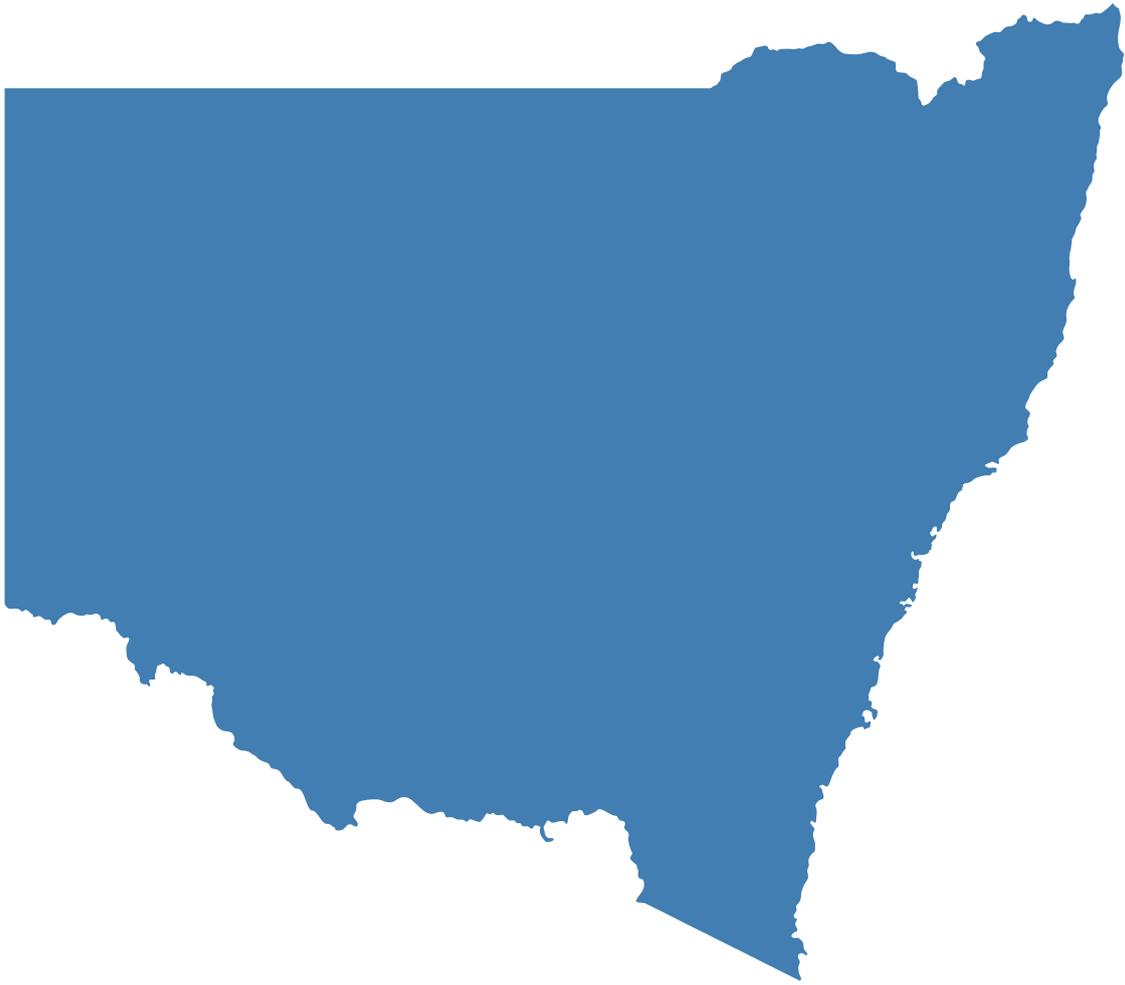
ACYP conducted face to face focus groups and administered individual surveys in 28 sites across NSW.

These included: Government, Independent and Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools; local youth councils; service providers for children and young people; and out of hour's school care settings in the following areas:

- Blue Mountains: Katoomba(2 sites); Winmalee; Wentworth Falls
- Hawkesbury: Freemans Reach; Windsor
- South East and Tablelands: Bega; Wingecarribee; Wollondilly (2 sites)
- Illawarra Shoalhaven: Shoalhaven
- North Coast: Coffs Harbour (2 sites); Bowraville; Port Macquarie (3 sites); Lismore (2 sites)
- Far West: Walgett
- Hunter: Paterson; Gloucester
- Central West and Orana: Lithgow (3 sites)
- New England and North West: Gunnedah; Manilla; Narrabri.

Focus groups were arranged in an additional 14 sites; but it became necessary to cancel these as COVID-19 escalated and subsequent Public Health Orders precluded their occurrence:

- Central West and Orana: Dubbo (3 sites); Orange (1 site); Parkes (1 site); Cabonne (1 site)
- South East and Tablelands: Eurobodalla (2 sites); Snowy Mountains (1 site); Cooma (1 site); Nowra (3 sites) North Coast: Goonellabah (1 site).



Some of these locations had been planned for later in the consultation process as they had been the most greatly impacted by the 2019 bushfires and it was considered appropriate to give these children and young people more time and distance from the disasters before asking them to share their experiences, in line with best interests' principles.³²

These locations were sent individual surveys of the focus group questions for children and young people to complete and were offered to have the focus groups conducted using online methods. To further accommodate those individuals,

schools and organisations that ACYP was unable to conduct face-to-face consultations with, ACYP also set up an online submission process for those that wished to make a submission.³³

In total, 404 children and young people aged 5-24 years took part in focus group consultations. Of those, 335 provided demographic information:

32.1%

were aged 5-11 years

52.5%

were aged 12-17 years

15.4%

were aged 18-24 years

56.3%

identified as female

42.6%

identified as male

1.1%

as a gender other than male or female

100%

resided outside of Sydney

16.3%

identified as Aboriginal

16.9%

were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

7.4%

identified as living with disability.

**Focus group participants
discussed the following questions:**

1

What is working well for children and young people?

2

What is not working so well now for children and young people?

3

When the recent drought/bushfire/floods first happened what was helpful for you, your family, friends, and other people in your community?

4

What are the things that you wish would have been around at the time of the disaster that would have been helpful to you, your family, friends, and other people in the community?

5

What do you think are the most important things that can help children and young people before; during; and after something like this happens?

6

What do you think the government and other decision-makers can do to better support children and young people when disasters such as these happen?

Focus group consultations were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Conscious that some children and young people may not feel shy or uncomfortable sharing in a larger group context or that there will not always be complete agreement between group members, ACYP also placed the more targeted questions on individual surveys for respondents to complete during the group session.

This also allowed for more accurate data collection ensuring that we collected the individual views of participants.

Participants that completed individual surveys answered the following questions:

1

When the recent disaster that you've spoken about today was happening, what was helpful for you, your family, friends and community?

2

What do you think are the most important things that can help children and young people when something like this happens?

- a.** To feel prepared before a disaster?
- b.** To help during disaster?
- c.** To feel supported after a disaster has happened?

Following data collection; focus group transcriptions were read by multiple ACYP staff members with training in ACYPs participation methodology.

A coding framework was developed for analysis of the individual surveys and code frames were applied to results in order to draw out major themes that emerged. Results were coded by two staff members to increase data integrity.

Detailed Findings

Detailed Findings is broken down into the following four sections:

- 1** What are the things that can help children and young people be prepared before a disaster?
- 2** What are the things that can help children and young people during a disaster?
- 3** What are the things that can help children and young people after a disaster has occurred?
- 4** The role of pre-existing risk and protective factors in communities

What are the things that can help children and young people be prepared before a disaster?

Children and young people's responses about what they need to be prepared before a disaster occurs could be grouped into the following themes:



they would like to be educated about disasters in general and what to do in a disaster situation



they want government and their communities to act to try to prevent disasters and to be prepared for when a disaster occurs



they would like mechanisms to have a voice in their communities around disaster prevention and management



they would like to be provided with accurate information well before the disaster hits their communities.

Educate children and young people about disasters

Many children and young people discussed the need to learn about different disasters and what to do in disaster situations. They agreed that school was an ideal setting for this to occur. Children and young people reported that this education would not only assist them with knowing what they should do; it would also help them remain calm when faced with a disaster situation:

Young Person 1:

“Do it through school, or like workshops maybe. It reassures young children to be calm in those situations when it’s hard not to be frantic. Not to worry too much. Just stay calm.”

Young Person 2:

“Something along the lines of what they do in the old PE classes, how there’s sex education, do like a bushfire education or something. Or disaster relief education. It’s common in Australia and I’m shocked there isn’t a course in the curriculum already.”

Young Person 1:

“It’s like a police officer comes in and talks about cyber bullying. Like a fireman should come in and talk about it, like that.”

“They could just educate them. So it’s not so scary. You just know how bad it can be and what to do.”

Children and young people spoke about wanting both practical knowledge about how to respond in an emergency as well as a deeper knowledge about how disasters occur:

“I think before, people should be taught how to use a pump and whatnot. Water hose and pump, so preparation and learning because if there are no firefighters and you’ve got to combat it, and you don’t know how to use it.”

“There should be someone coming to the school that tells you if a fire is coming...you should pack these (things).”

“There should be people that come to the school and make sure kids know what their fire plan is.”

“I was never really taught about droughts...so being taught about what’s really going on, what can happen from such natural things. So, education.”

Some children and young people reported that they were receiving education around the ongoing drought in NSW and spoke positively about this:

“In class time, after the drought and stuff has been happening, we’ve been learning about it and coming up with ideas how maybe we could fix it in the future and stuff. That was nice.”

Act to prevent disasters and be prepared for a disaster

Children and young people raised a number of ways that they would like the government and their communities to act in an attempt to prevent disasters from occurring in the first place or to prepare communities for when they do occur.

In terms of prevention; children and young people discussed issues related to back-burning, water restrictions and management, acknowledging climate change and teaching sustainable agricultural practices to address the drought.

With regards to disaster preparedness; children and young people reported that disaster plans were essential for all communities; with some suggesting the introduction of disaster information packs for every household and that sufficient emergency supplies were needed in communities prone to disaster.

For children and young people that had been affected by bushfires; there was a great deal of discussion around back-burning and in particular that many landowners had not been permitted to clear away their land:

“If a landholder wanted to prevent an area from being burned, they couldn’t, because the government was saying no, so it was a bit annoying.”

“If we did more back-burning before the fires came, that would have helped to decrease the amount of devastation that actually happened.”

Other young people discussed the reasons as to why back-burning was not always allowed; with the potential for catastrophic effects:

“We were in a drought, so they thought that if we back-burnt something, that something may go wrong and we don’t have any water to fix it. So they had a lot to chew on.”

Children and young people in drought affected areas raised the importance of water restrictions and water management; expressing frustration at those who did not take these seriously:

“People need to be taught how to act. If you’re in a drought, you can’t really be having showers that last 10 minutes...but...people come to school and go like, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m going to go have a 40 minute shower.’ I’m like, ‘We’re in a drought!’”

Some children and young people in smaller towns felt like this was particularly applicable to those in larger towns with access to more water supplies and asked for information nights to educate people about water restrictions. These children and young people discussed the anxiety caused by the fast escalation in restrictions in their towns, fearing that they would run out of water:

“We went from no water restrictions to Level 2, then in a short period of time to Level 4 and Level 5 quite abruptly.”

The need to acknowledge and act on climate change was another aspect that children and young people raised with respect to the prevention of disasters from occurring:

“The government should make a plan to start fixing climate change and reduce natural disasters.”

Finally in terms of prevention of disasters, in particular drought, some children and young people raised the importance of teaching sustainable agricultural practices. These included strategies such as rotating stock to keep grass growing back and water management practices.

With respect to disaster preparedness, there was widespread agreement across children and young people that families need to have disaster plans in place – to know exactly what they are going to do in case a disaster hits. This included knowing how to protect their homes and properties; at what stage they would need to leave their homes; where they would go and what and how many of their belongings they would take with them:

“A plan! Being entirely informed and aware of what actions to take i.e. fire evacuation plan, lock down plan.”

“This isn’t just for young people, but I think they need to know the fire plans. Because there were a lot of people who did not have a fire plan and were just panicking.”

“Right down the road from us, he lost his house, and they had a fire plan, but they only got enough clothes for a week, but their house burned down, so they have nothing.”

“If they had a system or something that everyone knew what to do in that situation, they could help reassure people; to know before it happens.”

Children and young people were particularly concerned about not wanting to lose things that were most valuable to them. Having a disaster plan in place meant being able to save precious items:

“If you get a box, or two really big boxes of some things that are really important to you...pack really special things to you.”

“It’s really sad if your house burnt down and you have really special memories in there that you can’t replace, because you can’t buy back the memories.”

Some children and young people suggested that disaster information packs should be prepared by government and delivered to every household so that people can be prepared. They discussed that there should be online and hardcopy versions and that it should include what to do in different disaster situations; if you need to evacuate what documents to take with you and what clothes are important to pack:

“A kit or something to tell us what we need or what we should do and clear instructions on where it’s safe.”

“Pack important documents...what documents are important...what clothing should you pack because some are more flammable than others.”

“Things like information packs that you can get...if it gets dropped in every single mailbox then that way everyone’s got the information... what to prep if you aren’t in immediate danger. If you’re in immediate danger what to do.”

“Even if you have two options...an electronic version...and if you want a physical version...we’ll deliver it to you, but this is your electronic version...knowing teenagers, we’re going to lose it.”

One group had the idea of creating another book in the “Dummies” series:

“A dumbed down version of everything. If there was like...You know those for dummies books?”

“Emergencies for dummies.”

This group also identified the importance of any emergency information pack being accessible to all people:

“There should be options as well for culturally and linguistically diverse people...able to change the online version of the information. Able to change the language and stuff on it.”

Finally children and young people thought that communities needed to have enough emergency supplies to be prepared for disasters. Some discussed running out of food, water and fuel. Those in bushfire affected areas often raised the need for enough masks to be distributed to children and young people:

“There wasn’t really any masks available for people that had asthma at the schools. Some of the days were very smoky.”

“And the government wasn’t really providing good quality masks for the fires...there were people donating some. The government could put more money into that.”

“We ran out of diesel and no one could use their cars for several weeks...store fuel I guess for disasters.”

Provide a voice to children and young people

The desire to have their views, ideas and concerns heard by adults was repeatedly raised by children and young people across all locations. It was clear from group discussions that children and young people had their own ideas with regards to disaster prevention and what they wanted in order to feel prepared for a disaster; although felt that government and others do not give them opportunities to voice these:

“They need to know that, we recommend these, and what we think and stuff.”

“I think children have more passionate...and fresh ideas.”

Many children and young people reported that their ideas were typically disregarded simply due to their age:

“They don’t really listen to us in the community because we’re young.”
“The government needs to know that we have views and emotions too. And we know how to speak too. And we should be recognised as human beings as well.”

“Just to actually take our ideas on board because I feel like sometimes they just think, Oh, we’re children, we don’t really matter, so they just push it under the rug.”

“They don’t realise that some of us have an opinion about stuff that’s going on. We know what’s going on, but some people don’t pay attention to that. And I feel like it would be good if people actually noticed.”

“That’s why most of the time young people don’t speak up, it’s because we get told, ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about’.”

Some children and young people were involved in youth-driven projects and spoke very positively about these. For example, one group discussed their involvement in sustainability initiatives at their school that was being run by students as a way of addressing the broader issue of climate change. Another group spoke about their class discussions to think of ways to address the ongoing drought.

It was very clear from the group discussions that children and young people were not only asking for their own voices to be heard. Rather, they wanted government and other decision-makers to be listening to their entire communities with regards to the best action to take to prevent a disaster or to be prepared.

Their conversations were very much around what was best for their community as a whole, not just for children and young people:

“There needs to be a lot more listening to the firefighters and the fire affected...there was the group of firefighters who sent a letter to the Prime Minister telling them about this new fire season that’s happening because of the climate process. And then there was no follow up from that.”

“We could use our skills together, their skills of business and how things operate and we have the knowledge of the younger generation’s opinions and voice.”

“Talking to farmers about what is needed rather than just guessing.”

“It’s literally as simple as asking. I’m sick of people making decisions about people that they aren’t....Just ask. Literally, just ask.”



Provide information before the disaster hits

Children and young people reported mixed views in relation to the provision of information in the lead up to the disasters they had experienced. On the one hand, many spoke favourably about the various channels through which they had accessed information.

These included all forms of media: social media; television and radio news and newspapers; text messages; the NSW Rural Fire Service Fires Near Me App and website; the Bureau of Meteorology website, the Floods Near Me App as well as face-to-face community meetings:

“I really like how they’ve got all the different Apps and things that you get an idea of where all the fires and stuff are, just to know if you need to evacuate or not, or if you should prepare or anything like that. Just to be warned or help others.”

“A lot of people were getting messages on their phones which is like a notification. And it was saying, ‘You may need to be evacuated,’ or the word to watch out and it will say certain areas.”

“There was a lot of ways that we could easily get information about what was happening the fires.”

“There was also live broadcast on Facebook, I know that my Dad was always watching. So telling people what they need to do.”

“Community gatherings and seminars, we had the authorities coming in telling people what they need to do to prepare their house, what you should be preparing for.”

Children and young people reported that the provision of this information in the lead up to the disaster helped to reduce anxiety and reassure people:

“Something that really helped our family in keeping calm was actually social media...the RFS App even, was keeping tabs on where it was and like, ‘Keep calm. You don’t have to leave your house yet.’”

Children and young people that had lived through previous bushfires discussed that the provision of information this time around was better than before:

“This time we definitely had more information...so more live information this time actually coming from the firies who were there.”

Other children and young people felt that the provision of information prior to disasters reaching their communities could have been more accurate and up to date. Sometimes this was attributed to technological issues when information was being accessed digitally. This was especially relevant for young people living in more remote areas:

“A friend of mine...he lost everything...he has a phone, but he didn't have the ability to download the App and get help.”

“But the fire App wasn't very accurate.”

“The Fire Near Me, it needed to be updated.”

“The App was not always accurate...it wasn't always correct. It wasn't updated for a couple of hours.”

Some children and young people felt that the NSW Rural Fire Service could have communicated with people in the direct line of the fires better than they did:

“We knew where the fires were and how big they were but we didn't really know anything about what direction it was travelling or if there were certain spots that were bigger hotspots than others...especially when fires were heading towards houses.”

Many also believed that the information should have been made available earlier than it was to give people more time to prepare to evacuate their homes:

“You needed warning to prepare for it. But there wasn't a lot.”

“It would be more helpful if we had more time to be prepared.”

“We kept the Fires Near Me App on all the time and then the radio was on and they'd say, ‘Evacuate if you're in this area now.’ They told us a little bit too late I guess.”

Some young people raised the importance of being able to access accurate and current information particularly for those young people that live on their own. Mostly they agreed that social media or an App just for young people was the best way for them to receive this information:

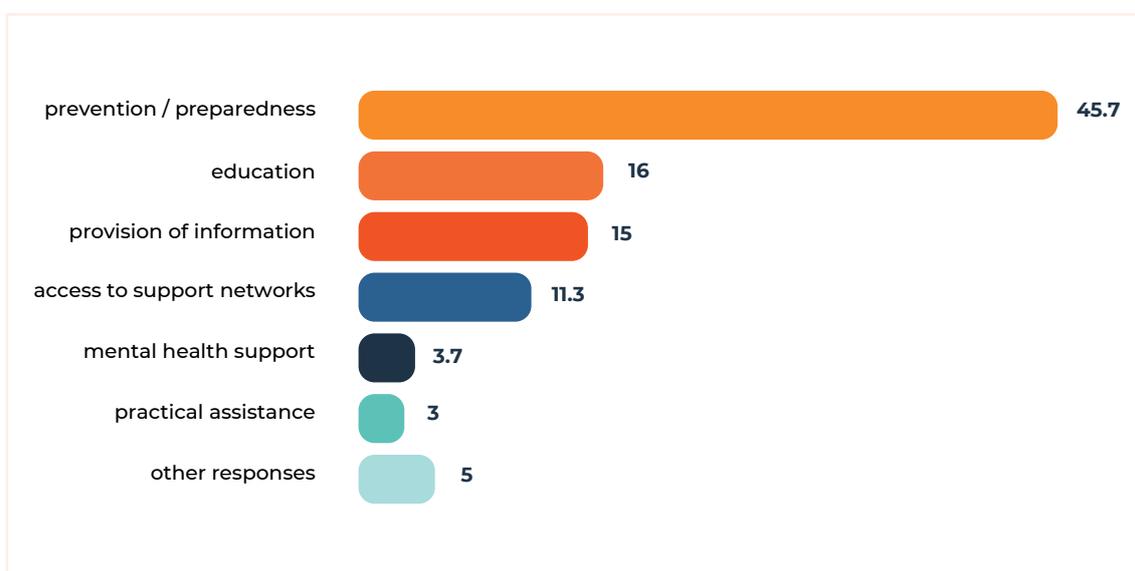
“Even if there's an App that young people can download that just has alerts...just something that we have. So we just know that instead of going home and then looking at the telly and then looking outside and seeing red sky, black...so just something that we had like some type of notification.”

Other young people said they would have preferred more face-to-face meetings in the lead up to the disaster. Those that had experienced these reported finding community leaders very helpful in keeping people informed and maintaining a sense of calm:

“More meetings with like, ‘This is what we expect to happen’, maybe having, ‘this is what you can do if you have to stay at home or you're caught out in it’.”

What are the most important things that children and young people need to be prepared before a disaster occurs?

Responses to the individual surveys completed by children and young people were coded thematically. The figure below shows the major themes identified from the analysis of what children and young people reported would help them be prepared before a disaster occurs.



As shown, prevention/preparedness was the most common theme identified from children and young people's responses (45.7%). This included wanting to have a clear disaster/emergency plan and needing to have their belongings packed so they could evacuate at short notice and not lose their most valuable items.

Education (16.0%) and provision of information (15.0%) were also reported to be important to feel prepared before a disaster. When children and young people listed education, they were most concerned about wanting to be educated at school about disasters in general and more specifically; what to do when a disaster occurs. When children and young

people reported wanting provision of information; they most often mentioned wanting to be provided with accurate information and early warnings of the approaching disaster.

The desire for access to support networks before a disaster was also reported as important by children and young people (11.3%). Most often, they wrote that they wanted support from their parents and wider family members in the form of reassurance that everything would be okay. Mental health services were also mentioned as an important source of support before a disaster occurs.

What are the things that can help children and young people during a disaster?

Children and young people raised a wide variety of things that they considered to be helpful for them during their experiences of the drought, bushfire and flood disasters. They also discussed things that were not available to them during their disaster experiences but they believed would have been helpful to see them through.

Areas discussed centred around:



provision of supports to children and young people, including school and mental health supports



the need for activities to both distract children and young people and relieve boredom



provision practical assistance to children and young people and their families



caring for children and young people's needs in evacuation centres



opportunities for children and young people to volunteer during disasters



raising the profile of communities in disaster

Provide support to children and young people

Across all locations, children and young people discussed the enormous stress they experienced during the various disaster situations. Some reported seeing their parents, teachers and neighbours panicking; which heightened their own anxiety:

“It would have been helpful if people weren’t screaming as much in my street.”

“My mum and Dad are not together anymore...my mum couldn’t really hold it all together...with my Pop not being there when he’s fighting the fires and I really want my Dad to be there.”

“I remember one of the teachers was like, ‘We’re all going to die. We’re all going to burn.’ The teachers [should try] to stay calm.”

Others underwent significant school-related stress with the disasters causing disruptions to schooling. This was particularly the case for those in their senior years of school:

“We need alternatives to shutting down school. We had the smoke and we missed almost a month of our Year 11.”

Children and young people that had experienced ongoing drought discussed being exposed to extreme levels of stress due to the additional responsibilities placed on them to help out at home. It was evident that young people living on farms feel the stress of the family business and their parents’ work in ways that other young people do not.

They relayed their daily lives involved making their own way to and from school; going straight from school to their casual

jobs; doing homework; and looking after the livestock. These children and young people had a deep understanding of the impact of drought and bushfires on their lives. Even the younger children knew a great deal about the workings of their families’ farming businesses, including the price of stock, water and feed and water management practices:

“It gets too hot and your stock just dies from standing out in the heat...getting water to them as well. You do that morning and night.”

“You go home, get out of your school clothes, get into your work clothes and water and feed the cattle, change the irrigation, get back home when it’s dark, have dinner go to bed. Get up, feed the cows in the morning and go to school.”

It is therefore not surprising that children and young people spoke of a wide variety of supports that were helpful to them during the disasters or that they would have liked to have available to them.

Children and young people expressed gratitude for support they had received from a wide range of people including their parents and wider family; friends; volunteers; rescue services; celebrities and the world in general:

“Parents were probably the most useful source.”

“The amount of volunteers that joined in on the fires and stuff.”

“People from other countries donating money for the Australian bushfires.”

“Mostly our best friends were very supportive.”

“Firefighters...monitoring the area all day long everyday...all night long...they were excellent. They did a really good job.”

“These kids from other countries and schools around the world that sent messages wishing us the best and hoping we were all okay. It made me feel safe and feeling like we’ve been looked after.”

“Even the celebrities did some stuff as well.”

Perhaps most appreciated by children and young people was the overwhelming community support that was exhibited during the various disasters. Across almost all locations, children and young people discussed the way communities came together to provide unconditional support to each other:

“The community coming together for people who had lost their homes.”

“The neighbours that came over to people’s houses with hoses and stuff like that.”

“We’ve had so many people say come to our house.”

“Just seeing the posts on Facebook about the families going out to communities affected by bushfires. Really cool, I tried not to cry.”

“It’s just that sense of community...I know it’s really bad here, when we

have all these natural disasters, but at the same time you can also see the community coming together.”

Unfortunately in more isolated communities, some young people felt that they were not afforded the support they would have liked from nearby towns:

“Everybody was kind of separate.”

“It was like one town was struggling and the other town was like ‘That’s not us so we don’t have to worry about it.’”

There were also children and young people that felt the adults in their lives could have been more supportive and provided them with the reassurance they were seeking:

“During such a big event I think children needed a lot more support than they were getting, because adults were just freaking out about what was going on and they weren’t listening. And they were more frantic, and their kids were clearly upset and stressed.”

“When you can see that your child is suffering...from the devastation while it’s happening. While they’re panicking, you just need to be there for them and support them.”

In addition to support in the form of reassurance, children and young people also wanted adults to support them by giving them accurate information in a calm manner:

“I think having someone there that you can talk to...and tell you the proper thing, but without the panicked view of it.”

Provide additional school supports to children and young people

When children and young people spoke positively about school support at the time of the disasters, they discussed liking it when teachers provided students with relevant information and attempted to reassure students and calm them down:

“I really just like the school support...it was like the sky was orange, it was all red and the teachers would just calm you down because no one knew what was happening.”

Some children and young people also reported that school provided a place of normalcy. The routine and structure helped them to focus on life outside the crisis at the time.

Several groups reported that their schools had provided additional mental health supports during the disasters. These included extra school counsellors; opportunities to talk to each other in special assemblies; and also identifying children and young people most impacted by the disasters and offering them practical assistance and trauma support:

“When we did go back to school we had a big talk about it...we had a big assembly...we all went round saying what happened and if our house got damaged or anything. And if we wanted to say anything or not.”

“We did have assemblies about the fires. It was pretty nice and all [they said] if you need any help, come speak to us.”

Some consultation groups reported wanting their schools to be more supportive than they were during the

disasters. Specific things mentioned were: more assistance for the students impacted the most; providing regular mental health check-ins with students; and more understanding and leniency from teachers and compensation for HSC students, including lowering university entrance marks for young people that had suffered trauma during the disasters:

“I think that with the people that lost their homes, they should come to school and they could make everyone lunch, or something to eat, because they have nowhere to go.”

“You get evacuated fast, you can’t pick up everything. So you can’t bring school supplies to school and then the school’s like ‘Oh, why don’t you have anything?’ And then you say ‘Oh, I got evacuated.’ And they’re like ‘Well you still need to bring your stuff.’”

“A lot of the people that got evacuated still didn’t get extensions on their assignments.”

“Give Year 12 extra ATAR points for living through this year.”

Other children and young people expressed frustration at having to keep coming to school during the disasters, either because of health hazards or they were concerned about leaving their families:

“Sometimes coming to school isn’t always the best...having to actually get through the fires to get to school, or even coming to school and then having to breathe in the smoke.”

“You always have the fact that while they’re at school, they also have no idea what’s happening back at home. What’s going to happen? Should I be there or not?”

“Our entire town was covered in smoke, the Department of Education rather than keeping schools open, maybe close them so students don’t have to go to school and have to walk around with shirts over their mouths trying not to choke on the smoke.”

Students that attended schools that had given students time off expressed appreciation for this:

“The school gave us the day out of school because school wasn’t the priority; the priority was about our safety.”

However, there were also senior high school students that underwent school closures and were upset that they had not been provided with an alternative given that they missed out on valuable learning time:

“They could have done something where they provided schools, at least their senior years with a gas mask or something. Or they could have made an online option for all the kids because there was lots of kids all over Australia missing out on that very important time.”

Provide mental health support to children and young people

Across all locations, children and young people discussed the impact of living through disasters on their mental health and wellbeing. For many, the actual witnessing of houses burning down; the red, orange and black skies and animals being burnt had left them feeling traumatised. They spoke about these visual triggers and associated distress:

*Young person 1:
"With a lot of kids seeing and watching everything they owned..."*

*Young person 2:
"Just decimated."*

*Young person 1:
"And then having to deal with that also, probably would have been very hard on them..."*

*Young person 3:
"Especially if it was their childhood home they grew up in."*

"It was quite sad to see half of my life gone."

"We saw the massive column of grey and black smoke. And it kept turning from red to orange and then back to grey and black and kept changing. And we were evacuated and went down to the bottom of the driveway. We could see the house burning down, not our house, [our] neighbour's house."

"They could see cows walking down the street on fire."

"People are traumatised."

Others talked about feelings of isolation due to being separated from friends and family and not being able to socialise:

"I just remember being isolated for a long time, it was quite overwhelming."

As a result, children and young people often raised the need for mental health supports at the time of disasters. For some, it was as simple as the adults in their lives reassuring them that things will be okay:

"I would say reassurance. Reassuring them that everything's going to be okay."

Others reported wanting supports to be available constantly during disaster situations rather than having set opening times:

"So more [support] people while it's happening. Not just after it's happened. Probably where you could go all the time. Not just certain hours."

Children and young people living in areas that had been experiencing prolonged drought also discussed the need for greater awareness about the importance of seeking mental health support, not just for children and young people but adults as well:

“In drought affected communities there are a lot of farmers knocking themselves off because they can’t afford to feed their kids or anything.”

Linked to this, there was some discussion about the lack of available mental health support in regional and rural NSW:

“And the rurals are struggling mentally between the age of 14 and 25. And that’s when you see a lot of suicides... all that kind of stuff because there’s just not enough support here.”

Some young people also discussed the lack of mental health support available to the young volunteers and firefighters during the bushfire disaster:

“And there was no support, barely any recognition to the volunteers. I had a friend who was staying up till 2am with the firefighters helping them as they came back and then getting up at 6am to help them go out...We just needed a support system for people that needed to be heard and talked to...Someone to just sit there and just listen and be like, ‘Hey, are you okay? Are you alright? Is there anything you need to speak about before you go back on?’”

“We have a lots of younger members who do participate in the fires after they turn 16 with parent permission. I feel like they actually need a lot more support than what they get...We talk about what’s happening in the fire season, how we feel about it but younger people tend to just shut themselves up. Now

we have counselling support systems in Brigades but I feel like something else needs to be done. I’m just not sure what.”

When children and young people did speak positively about mental health supports that were available during the disasters; they typically discussed peer to peer support. Children and young people reported that they liked having the opportunity to discuss things with their peers that were going through the same situation; as opposed to discussing their feelings with an adult stranger:

Young person 1:

“I’ve tried 17 different counsellors and nothing was helping me, I went to Youth Insearch and I don’t know what it was but the peer-to-peer conversations that we have there is what made a lot of us more...”

Young person 2:

“Like sitting in a counsellor’s office one-on-one...it just makes you feel very uncomfortable.”

Young person 1:

“You can just talk about whatever because you’re talking about the same stuff.”

Other groups of children and young people that did not have similar support groups available in their areas reported they would have liked to have this option:

“I feel like it might be easier to talk about something that’s getting you down if there is something like that where you’ve got multiple people in the same situation.”

“I think there should be a service by kids for kids.”

“If there was another child who, for example, maybe their house had burnt down or they had a scary experience, that would be quite comforting to know that somebody’s been there, done the same as you.”

Finally, one group of children and young people spoke very positively about the free support service on the Behind The News website. Their school had made this available to them:

“They have a part of their website where if you’re worried about something you can talk to them...it’s really nice to know that adults don’t just care about making money. They also care about, not even their own kids, just kids in general. I think that’s really nice.”



Provide activities for children and young people

The desire for activities and things to do during disaster situations was widely discussed among groups of children and young people. The availability of activities was said to serve several purposes; including providing a distraction from the disaster; relieving boredom and promoting community togetherness.

In one drought affected area, young people spoke about the benefits they gained from participating in a local concert:

Young person 1:

“We performed at the Blast for our concert and Hartley Under the Stars, which are both for the drought and that just made us feel better in the time that it was happening. It just gave us a bit of leeway and we were able to just be happy and perform with each other.”

Young person 2:

“Because it was like a distraction and also because it was like a charity thing.”

Young person 1:

“Yeah...just getting away from the fact there was a drought and performing with each other.”

Children and young people in several locations reported the Drought Break Program funded by the Office of Regional Youth as working well in their communities. Some of these children and young people had enjoyed free entry to their local swimming pool; others had been on sport and recreation camps free of charge and funded through this initiative.

Children and young people in bushfire affected areas reported that they would have liked alternative sporting and other activities to be available when the smoke precluded them from being outdoors:

“When there was lots of smoke we weren’t allowed outside. I think it would have been nice if we had somewhere where we could do PE during school that was safe for us to be.”

“I feel it would be really nice to have somewhere where we could just go with friends and be active that still has good air quality.”

Others spoke about the need for activities to distract children and young people and clam them down during a disaster:

“Distracting the kids from the fire so they’re not scared.”

“Take your kids to the movies so they’re out of the smoke but still they’re not thinking about it.”

“It doesn’t even have to be something big. It can be a chess game or something.”

Some other ideas for activities put forward by children and young people were that youth groups could take children away for a while; using local youth centres as a place for young people have a break or time out; and holding more community events and fundraisers.

One group of children and young people spoke about the need for children to be supervised during the disaster event:

“In my street, we have all of the younger kids through the end of the street before the fire came through that side so they weren’t in the way of the firefighters. Because they’d want to go up and touch the equipment and they’d just be in the way. So somewhere for them to go I suppose...like a child centre. Like a place that would not be directly in the fire line where people could just put their kid for the day.”



Provide practical assistance to children and young people and their families

Children and young people frequently raised the overwhelming practical assistance that had been provided to those most directly affected by the disasters. This included the provision of emergency accommodation to families; financial assistance from government and in the form of donations; and the provision of material things such as food, household items, feed for stock and water:

“We’ve had so many people say come to our house.”

“Some bakeries gave out bread for animals.”

“Water trucks gave out free water, which is very important in this area because we don’t all have town water.”

“There were a lot of little groups that came together to get supplies organised for the firefighters.”

“It was good that people were delivering food to people that didn’t have food, or had stock and it all died...OzHarvest.”

Young people in drought affected areas spoke positively about the farmer’s aid and drought relief assistance provided by the government that enabled families to buy food, general house supplies and feed for stock. These young people also reported that there was a community aid program that sent trucks with food to give drought affected farms.

Many children and young people pointed out that as the most recent bushfires occurred over the Christmas holidays, donations of presents for children were very helpful in allowing people to still have some experience of Christmas.

However, not all children and young people had experienced this support. Some reported having nowhere fixed to stay during the disaster:

“We didn’t really have a place to stay. So I guess having somewhere where you could go without paying, or just a safe place to stay overnight. I think that was a big thing. So we had to move around a lot.”

“So after the Monday we moved about three times that week. And then ended up moving about seven times throughout those holidays. To get a safe spot, a proper house you could stay in for a while.”

Others thought that financial assistance from the government should have been provided earlier to affected communities:

“Funding as soon as it started, that was a big issue. Because it’s not different for Australia to have bushfires, it’s not like out of the ordinary. But with how bad they were, and we’ve been in a drought for so many years, it was devastating. It hit us hard.”

Caring for children and young people in evacuation centres

Children and young people had several recommendations that were specific to evacuation centres that were accessed during the most recent bushfire disasters. These were around the need for evacuation centres to be safe and child and youth friendly; the importance of centres accommodating animals; supervision and support for children and young people in evacuation centres and the physical comfort provided in the centres.

Children and young people reported that the idea of having to leave your home and stay in a centre with many other people is quite daunting:

“I can imagine that it can be quite scary for young kids and young people. I’ve never been to one of those centres. I hope I don’t have to.”

As a result, they discussed the need for evacuation centres to be child and youth friendly. This included having activities to keep occupied; making supports available; physical comforts and being able to keep pets with families in the centres. There was also discussion around the need for more psychological support to be accessible in the centres as people often entered evacuation centres in shock and distressed:

“I think it would be nice if...they had a centre or something, like a building where you could just go if you had to be evacuated...and there be a whole bunch of activities and things that you could do; and talk to people as well about how you feel.”

“Maybe something like a yoga mat to sleep on because apparently you had to sleep on the floor.”

“There was a couple [of evacuation centres] but they wouldn’t really let animals in.”

In some locations, children and young people also discussed the need for more evacuation centres to be available. These children and young people described situations where the centres were filling up quickly and people were panicking that they would have nowhere to stay:

“At the peak of it all, the showgrounds, the C.ex Club³⁴, everything was getting full. Everyone was evacuating...and they were running out of space for everyone to go and everything was chaotic.”

Provide opportunities for children and young people to volunteer

Children and young people highlighted the lack of volunteering opportunities available to them during disaster events. It was clearly evident from their conversations that they would really like to be able to help out their own or other communities in need:

“People always want to feel needed, right? So, actually letting people know what they can do to help.”

“It would be really nice to know that we could help because we don’t really get the opportunity to help. It would be really nice if we could get that.”

“I was in Sydney...there were a lot of things about donating money. But apart from donating money there wasn’t really any way to know how people [in] Sydney could have helped.”

A few children and young people described positive volunteering experiences that had during the recent disasters:

“I went to the university where some of the firies were staying on campus and we just put a whole lunch thing out for them. It was really nice to see people actually helping them as well, as well as them helping us.”

Children and young people also suggested some other ways that they could volunteer and help out those in need:

“In your local community, if these families need help...they give you a list, you do the shopping and you give it to them.”

“High school students to come together and say, ‘this is what we’re going to do as a collective to work with the firefighters.’”

“Farmhand volunteers to help out farmers that can’t afford to pay farmhands.”

Raise the profile of communities in disaster

In some locations, children and young people discussed the need for the media to raise the profile of their communities in disaster. They felt that people living in Sydney, in particular, did not have an understanding of how dire the situation is for many living in rural areas during disaster events.

This conversation highlights the sentiment that young people in rural NSW often feel less important than those in city areas:

Young person 1:

“There’s no real way for us to make [people] aware of the severity.”

Young person 2:

“No one did know about how rapidly it was growing and how the wind was picking up on it...spreading fast. They would have just known about Brisbane, all the major cities.”

Young person 3:

“Just once again, we get little to no recognition of our area.”

Young person 2:

“Obviously we’re a small town. We’re probably not as important or we’re not as big as the major cities...”

This young person expressed similar concerns:

“Those areas that aren’t really affected like us, they’re getting more support and recognition. And small areas like us... that are actually on fire.”

One group of children and young people living with prolonged drought suggested that there should be an initiative where people from the city visit drought affected communities to witness firsthand what is going on:

Young person 1:

“Having the city people come out and look what is going on.”

Young person 2:

“I was talking to one of the taxi drivers down there [in Sydney] and he said he has five showers a day at half an hour.”

Young person 3:

“I think funding, even to do an exchange, get some city kids to come out and we can go there.”

Other things that children and young people would like to see occur during a disaster

Other factors less frequently mentioned by children and young people that they would like to see occur during disaster events included:

Providing information updates at times when young children are less likely to be watching or listening

"I think mainly with the media and radio, if they did it at a certain time where the kids would not be around... like during school hours...or during late at night because just watching the news...it's terrifying to watch."

Government members to be present, available and take immediate action during disasters

"It was mostly the community that helped. There was lots of people that helped, not really the government so much."

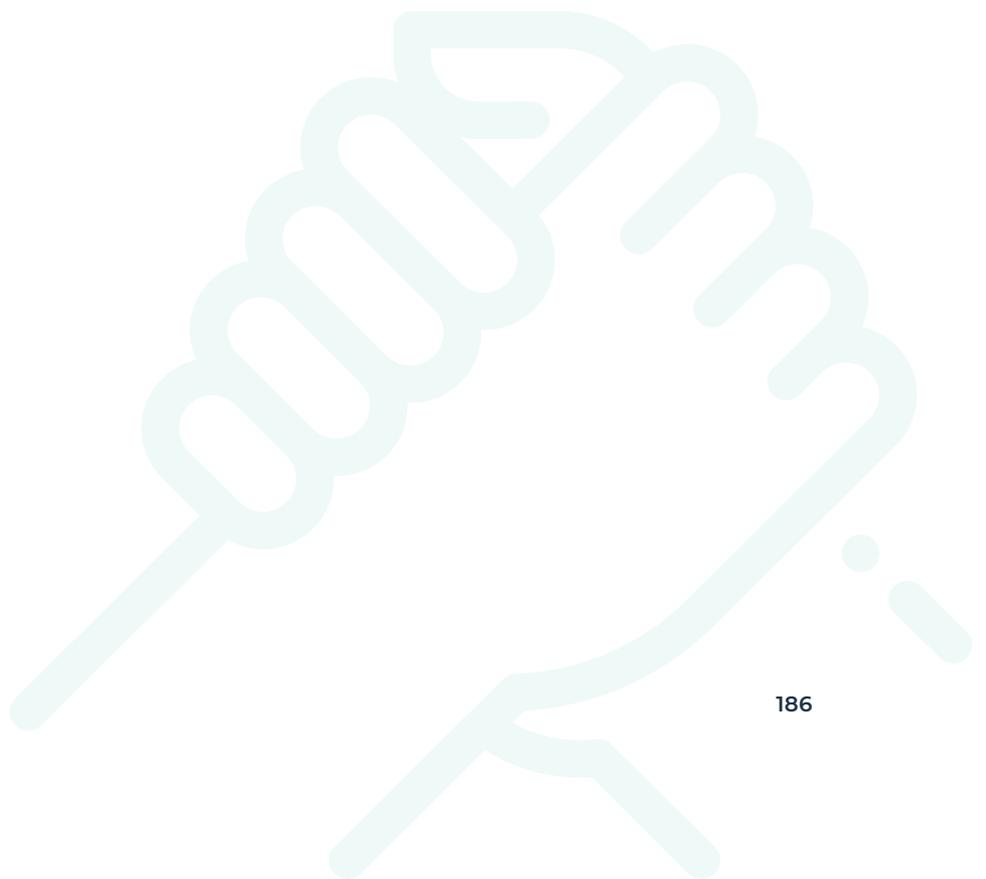
Ensuring community infrastructure can cope in a disaster

"We lost power and we also lost the landlines."

"So there was just no warning about anything."

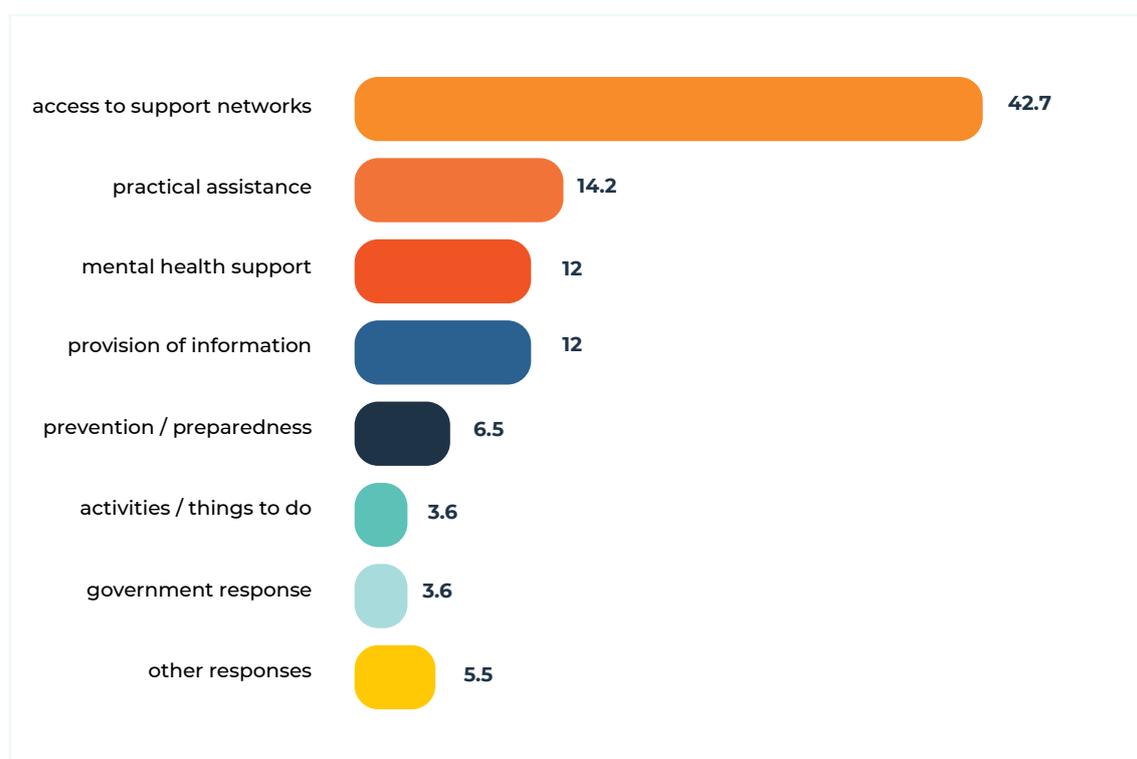
Providing timely information to those directly affected

"I guess having someone tell you what happens if you're in an area that is affected. We didn't know what happened to our house for a week."



What are the most important things that children and young people need to be supported during a disaster?

Children and young people's responses to the individual survey question of what they need to be supported during a disaster are presented in the figure below.



Once a disaster occurs, access to support networks was identified as the most important thing for children and young people (42.7%). Most commonly reported were access to support from parents and wider family members; community support; emergency services support (fire fighters, SES etc.); support from friends; support in the form of donations and fundraising; and reassurance from adults that it will be okay.

Practical assistance was also important for children and young people during a disaster (14.2%). This included the

provision of material things such as food, water, household items and feed for stock; emergency accommodation; and financial assistance.

Mental health support and the provision of information were seen as equally important during a disaster (12.0% each). With respect to mental health supports; children and young people reported wanting access services and support groups. In terms of provision of information, most frequently mentioned was the desire for constant updates and the provision of accurate information.

What are the things that can help children and young people after a disaster has occurred?

Children and young people's responses to what they need after a disaster has occurred could be grouped into the following themes:



providing a voice to children and young people



access to ongoing mental health support



access to ongoing economic and financial support



opportunities for communities to heal, reflect and learn from the disaster experience



providing assistance to communities in the recovery and rebuilding process

Provide a voice to children and young people

Children and young people were very clear that they wanted opportunities to voice their ideas and concerns in the aftermath of a disaster. In particular, they reported that the government should talk to and hear the advice of children and young people that have experienced disaster events firsthand.

This included being able to sit and talk about what happened and what will work for them moving forward:

“Opportunities to sit and discuss concerns.”

“Let young people do the planning for helping other young people.”

“Ask young people about what they think.”

Children and young people also discussed wanting to be involved in the recovery and rebuilding of their communities. Some had ideas for community redesign:

“Something that would make it look like the disaster was never there. Beautifying it.”

“We need a wildlife centre...we don’t have one of those...because there was nowhere for wildlife to go.”

“I think if we had a big sport arena or dome...and you can play inside without getting heatstroke.”

Others had ideas for developing sustainability initiatives that look more broadly at climate change. They saw this as a way of addressing their feelings of powerlessness over the bushfires and taking control over what happens in the future.

Once again, children and young people also demonstrated that they think about their whole communities by recommending that government provides opportunities to hear from all local people, especially the older generation as they have lived through similar disaster events in the past and have a great deal of knowledge about what to do.

Provide ongoing mental health support

It was widely agreed that mental health support needs to be provided to children and young people long after a disaster has ended. Children and young people expressed that the trauma still continues without the disaster being active:

“Emotional support...even the impact afterwards. People are still stressed about it today. There’s still a large impact on them.”

“Therapy is definitely needed for some of the kids that have gone through stuff.”

“A lot of people just see it happen and then they move on. And they don’t realise there’s still people that are struggling.”

Children and young people were very clear that mental health supports should be available free of charge after a disaster event. Some suggested that all children and young people that have experienced a disaster should attend a mental health session to normalise the process of everyone:

“Counsellors should be going around and giving out free consultations to talk with anybody that’s been affected by the bushfires.”

“Don’t make people pay for support such as counsellors; good mental health should be free of charge.”

“Free counselling sessions or everyone goes to a session so no one feels left out or embarrassed.”

Linked to the idea of normalising help-seeking, some children and young people suggested that there should be awareness campaigns after a disaster to make getting help seem “normal.”

Others thought that services could proactively check-in with children and young people to seeing how they are feeling:

“Groups or facilities catering specifically for checking on the wellbeing of young people.”

Children and young people saw the value in speaking with peers that had gone through the same experiences as them and also wanted to know what to do to help their friends if needed:

“Talk to other people about what you experienced and try to find someone that has already experienced something like that and just tell them how you feel.”

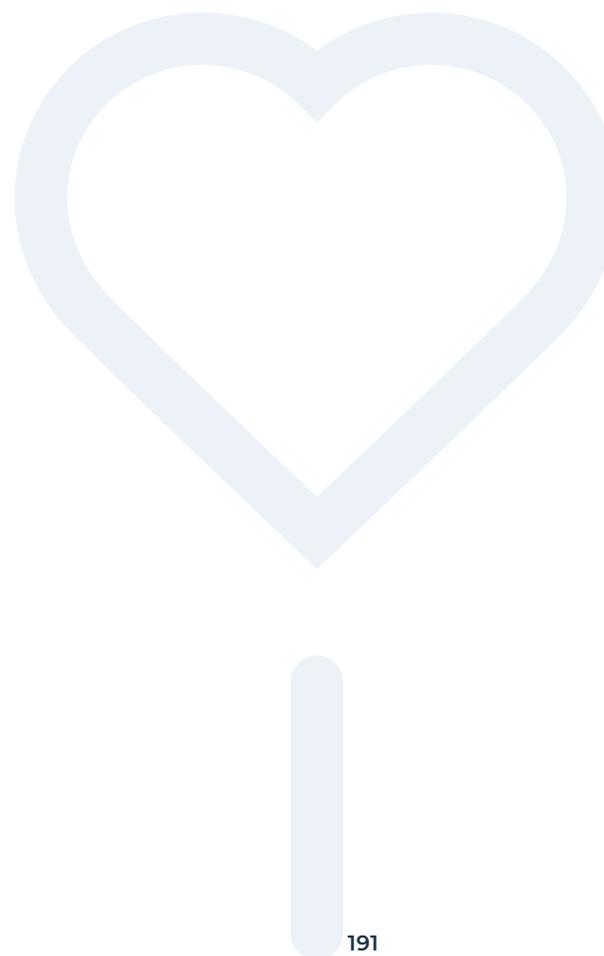
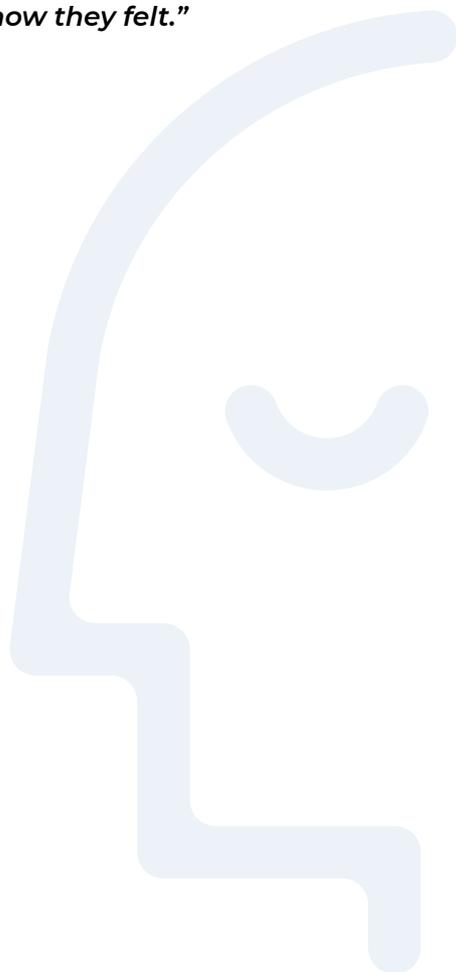
“How to support people around them and how to help them even if they don’t ask for it.”

Some groups of children and young people spoke very positively about mental health support services they had come into contact with post-disaster events.

They reported that mental health services such as Headspace had received additional funding to provide outreach clinical support to young people in bushfire affected towns. They said that young people who called Headspace and mentioned the bushfires were given priority:

“There was a lot of counselling to help people.”

“It was also helpful to talk to someone that had experienced something scary to know how to react or know how they felt.”



Provide ongoing economic and financial support

Many children and young people spoke about the need for families to receive long-term economic and financial support. Specific areas they raised were: the need for ongoing financial support until people 'get back on their feet'; more transparent and equitable allocation of existing recovery funds, resources and donations; better support from insurance companies and support with school supplies.

First, children and young people discussed the need for families to receive long-term financial assistance:

“For the government to open up rooms that are away from it [disaster] for the people who had lost their homes, like while their homes are getting rebuilt.”

“Like you get no assistance for your stock or whatever. We had to get rid of all our sheep and cattle.”

“Some people don't have cars because it's been burnt by the bushfires. That means they can't do daily things like go to work, or if there work's far away they have to get a taxi or something which costs money.”

Those in drought areas emphasised that even after the rain, the drought will affect areas for many years to come. Therefore a long-term plan is for continued economic support:

“Helping support family and community with resources and interest free loans and drought assistance as most pressure is on young people due to pressure from family they are worried about.”

Other children and young people called for the government to provide low interest loans to help farmers can rebuild after the drought and financial assistance through either cash payments or grants for farmers to purchase things like feed.

Children and young people also felt that more transparency and equity is needed in the allocation of recovery funds, resources and donations:

“I would really like it if our government could put more input into allocating funds specifically, not just chucking money everywhere and anywhere.”

For example, one group of children and young people discussed the allocation of hay bales and reported that the distribution of these currently favours small farms over large farms. Another group talked about the lack of resources for regional firefighters compared with firefighters in Sydney.

Some children and young people reported that insurance companies were not providing sufficient support to families. They spoke about insurance companies making people wait eight days for insurance policies to come into effect. As a result, some children and young people reported that their families' insurance claims were not being accepted or processed. Other young people raised the fact that insurance is not affordable for everyone:

“Some places, people didn’t have insurance, some people couldn’t afford it.”

Also raised by children and young people was the need for Government to provide additional assistance for children and young people to continue their schooling after disaster events. This was especially the case for children and young people that had lost their homes and all their possessions:

“School support by funding free school supplies, uniforms and lunches.”

“Help with school supplies...make sure they have transport to school.”

“Helping those that lost housing and school stuff; providing free school items for those affected.”



Allow communities to heal, reflect and learn from the disaster experience

The need to allow time for communities and families to heal, reflect and learn from their experiences was frequently mentioned by children and young people. First, children and young people reported wanting time to process the traumas experienced. Some felt that the experience of back to back disasters had prevented them from being able to do this:

“Because of the Coronavirus everyone has had to move on to the next thing...we just had fires, then floods, the drought and then straight into this Coronavirus so we haven’t had a chance to stop and breathe and reflect.”

“Because of the fires, I feel like I haven’t really had time at all to really de-stress.”

“I think the floods decimated the community ... we just hit rock bottom and haven’t recovered yet.”

Many children and young people reported wanting time with their families to reconnect. They discussed not having seen their parents and other family members for many weeks either due to family members volunteering, or being separated in different evacuation sites and homes:

“Just seeing my Dad because even after I didn’t really see him.”

“Just spending time with their family that they haven’t seen...their dads were...some of them didn’t see them for 50 days straight.”

“I didn’t see my Mum for a whole week because she was out in Mudgee feeding the firefighters in the canteen and stuff.”

Finally, children and young people stressed the importance of communities and government taking time to learn from the disaster experience and putting things in place to prevent similar disasters from occurring in the future:

“Education on why the event happened and how to keep it from occurring again.”

“To acknowledge what went wrong and try and solve what more needs to be done.”

“They [government] can help and reflect on the events that just occurred the rundown of the process and reflection on how we can be better prepared.”

“Taking time to look back on the situation rather than just jumping back to a normal life. Evaluate the disaster.”

Provide assistance in the recovery and rebuilding of communities

When children and young people spoke about the need for support in the recovery and rebuilding of communities they discussed: the need for events and activities; the importance of community control over the recovery process with government support; and their frustrations with government not providing sufficient support to communities.

Children and young people spoke about simply wanting to have fun after the disasters had passed. The arranging of community events and activities that bring people together to support each other in informal ways was seen by young people as vital to improving the sense of wellbeing in the community:

“Activities, carnivals - bring community together.”

“A concert, like a disaster aid or whatever...when kids are down, some kids don’t speak. Because they don’t really want to. So maybe if they want to go and have a good time and listen to music. Some arts and crafts. Just spend time with friends.”

“Because they’ve gone through all this disaster. They need a bit of cheering up.”

“Take your mind off things and enjoy and celebrate.”

Children and young people also reported wanting similar events and activity days at their schools as a way to support each other and restore a sense of normalcy.

Children and young people said that they wanted the focus of community events to be on strength and resilience, not just about victims. Those that had experienced the bushfires firsthand reported that such events could give back a little of the “summer feeling” they had missed out on.

One group of children and young people suggested a local public holiday when people did not have to go to work or school. The purpose was to acknowledge how stressful the summer had been and how hard everyone had to work without having a break. They suggested that community events could be held on this holiday.

Some children and young people also reported needing safe play spaces as their usual play areas had been burnt down:

“Somewhere to play while building a house or whatever has been damaged and is getting built.”

It is important to draw attention to the fact that children and young people impacted by the 2019 floods and bushfires and ongoing drought had little opportunity to

recover before COVID-19 hit and all community events, sports and activities were cancelled indefinitely. The negative impact on children and young people of these back to back disasters with no opportunity for community healing cannot be underestimated.

Children and young people also discussed a desire for recovery and rebuilding efforts to be led by communities themselves, rather than directed by centralised part of government located in the metropolitan area. They were clear that individual communities knew what would work best for their members and should be allowed to develop their own solutions:

“The community, government and individuals working together to help each other.”

“More communication between public about future plans in their community and getting their opinion.”

For some children and young people, it was important to raise their own money to do their bit for their community:

“My mum and me made cakes and we went to...Tamworth...and we took

our cakes with us and we started selling them. We were raising money and we got \$365 and we gave it to charity.”

Linked to the desire for community control over recovery and rebuilding, there were children and young people that expressed frustration at the length of time it was taking government to allow communities to clean up after the bushfires.

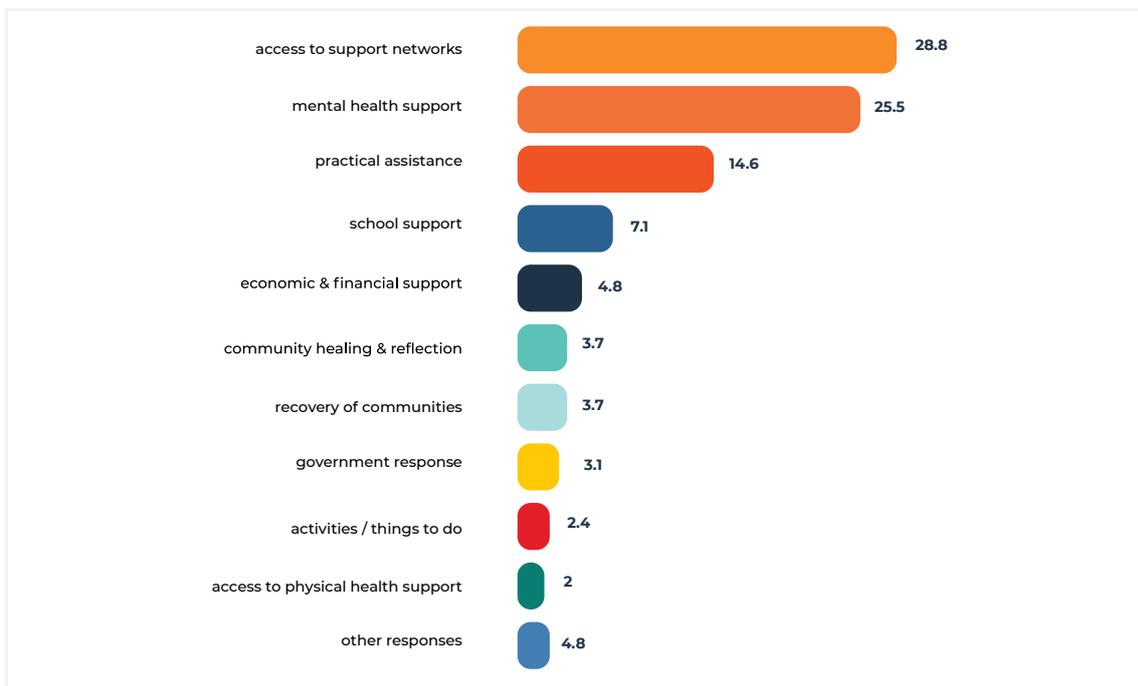
Young people spoke about not being permitted to clean up their properties until the correct clean up bins were delivered. Others reported waiting months for necessary equipment to be delivered:

“My pop, he requested some equipment and it was eight weeks before you got an answer, and even then he didn’t get it, so maybe just more availability.”

“They weren’t even allowed to do any work, moving or anything. All they were allowed to do was pick up some of the stuff that was spilling over everything.”

What are the most important things that children and young people need after a disaster has occurred?

The figure below shows children and young people's responses to the individual survey question of what are the most important things they need after a disaster has occurred.



Once again, access to support networks was seen as most important for children and young people (28.2%); closely followed by mental health support (25.5%). Support networks mentioned most were family/parents; community; friends and donations/fundraising. With respect to mental health support, children and young people wanted access to mental health services and support groups, including peer-to-peer support groups; access to free counselling and information to tell them where they can access these supports from.

Practical assistance was also reported as important to have after a disaster (14.6%). Similar to what was reported as

needed during a disaster, children and young people identified needing material assistance in the form of food, water and household items; ongoing financial assistance to get back on their feet; and temporary accommodation for those who were rebuilding homes.

School support was another form of support raised by children and young people as important after a disaster (7.1%). This included identifying those students most impacted by the disaster and providing additional supports to them; as well as providing additional school counsellors.

The role of pre-existing risk and protective factors in communities

All focus groups with children and young people started with a discussion about what things were currently working well for children and young people in their communities and what things were not working well. It became clear during the analysis of the interview transcripts that the areas identified were essentially either **pre-existing protective factors** that children and young people could build upon during times of disaster; or **pre-existing risk factors** that compounded children and young people's experience of the disaster.

Pre-existing protective factors during disaster situations

Children and young people spoke about the existence of many positive factors in their communities prior to the disasters occurring. They viewed these as sources of resilience for themselves, their peers, families, and community.

They spoke about how they relied on these conditions to get them through difficult times, to support their mental health and wellbeing, and as communities began to recover they drew on these to rebuild their lives and restore a sense of normality.

Children and young people in communities with these pre-existing factors consistently described feeling safer, more “cared for” during disasters and were much more optimistic and hopeful about the future.



Identified by children and young people as working well in communities

Protective factor during a disaster

Community cohesiveness (including family, friends and wider community)

This assists in the provision of supports for children and young people during a disaster and in the recovery and rebuilding of communities

Access to sport and recreation

Important for providing activities for children and young people during disasters –distraction, connection to others and reduced isolation

Access to education and employment opportunities

Important for mental health support during a disaster and economic and mental health recovery post disaster

Opportunities for children and young people to have a voice in their communities

Children and young people feel valued and that they can contribute to disaster prevention and preparedness and to community recovery and rebuilding post disaster

Connection to culture and cultural support within communities

Connection to culture provides strong support network during a disaster, as identified by Aboriginal children and young people

Schools and teachers focusing on welfare and wellbeing of students

Provides sense of safety during a disaster and children and young people feel supported

Support services and programs for children and young people

Provides a safe space and support for children and young people during and post disaster, including mental health support

Children and young people working on family farms

Provides a sense of purpose, working together and supporting the family to tackle the drought

Access to natural environments (e.g. nature walks, beaches, rainforests)

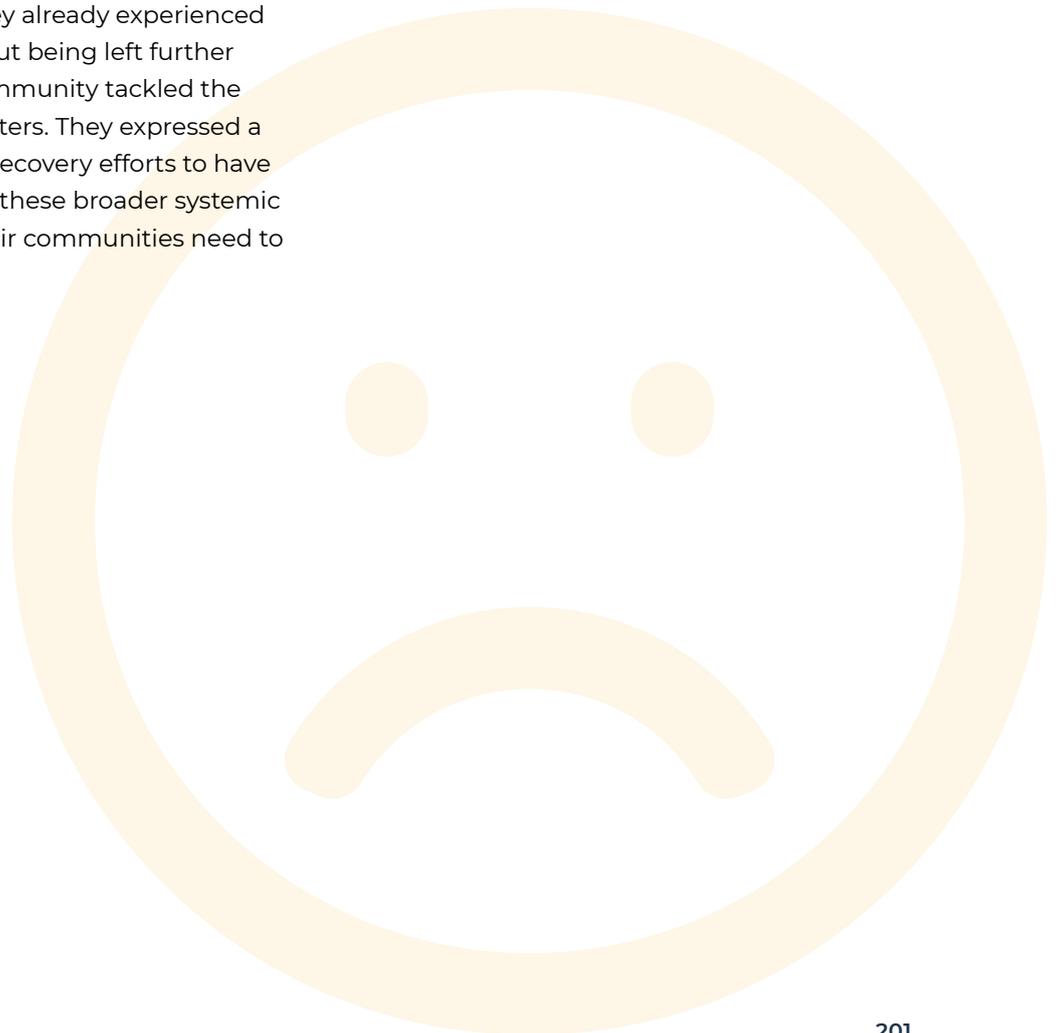
Provides activities for children and young people (although impact of destruction of these during a disaster)

Pre-existing risk factors during disaster situations

Children and young people in communities that were struggling were much more likely to speak about pre-existing challenges which they felt compounded their experiences of the disasters.

They described the vulnerabilities in their communities that were exposed and amplified as a result of the disaster. Some children and young people spoke about the impact of multiple, sustained disasters on the overall resilience and capacity for their communities to bounce back.

Children and young people in these communities discussed the aspects of social exclusion they already experienced and their fears about being left further behind as their community tackled the impact of the disasters. They expressed a clear view that for recovery efforts to have long term success, these broader systemic issues within in their communities need to be addressed.



Identified by children and young people as not working well in communities

Risk factor during a disaster

Community disconnection

Lack of support – children and young people do not feel that community can work together to tackle the crisis

Lack of opportunities: education, employment, sport and recreation

No distraction for children and young people during a disaster; limits avenues for support during a disaster

No mechanisms for children and young people's voice

Children and young people feel marginalised and alienated pre, during and post disaster

Lack of school support

Leads to further disengagement during a disaster and feeling unsupported; loss of opportunity for children and young people to access mental health support through schools

Pressure on children and young people living on farms to balance school, casual work and working on family farm

Impact of drought intensifies this pressure

Lack of support services and programs

Limits opportunities for children and young people to receive support during and post disaster; not enough safe places for children and young people

Lack of mental health services and concern about increasing suicides in communities

Limits opportunities to access support and mental health issues are intensified during and post disaster

Poor public transport

Intensifies disconnection and isolation during a disaster

| Identified by children and young people as not working well in communities | Risk factor during a disaster |
|---|--------------------------------------|
|---|--------------------------------------|

Lack of physical health services

Exacerbates fear for physical safety during a disaster

Bullying

Impacts on mental health and wellbeing; feelings of isolation – all heightened during a disaster

Poor community infrastructure (e.g. roads, internet, shops)

Feelings that the community is unable to support children and young people during a crisis

Disadvantage, drug and alcohol use, family violence

Reduces the level of resilience children and young people and communities have to recover from a disaster

Destruction of natural environments

Children and young people unable to access places that enhance their sense of wellbeing; removes activities/things to do that are cost free

Cumulative impact of multiple disasters (drought, fires, COVID-19)

Especially difficult for communities already “doing it tough” to recover

Recommendations

Children and young people's experience of disaster can be vastly different and unique compared with those of adults; and these experiences can have a profound impact of them in both the short and long term.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable in times of disaster, however they are also 'active agents' on the road to recovery. As experts in their own lives, children and young people have the right to participate in all aspects of disaster preparedness and recovery.

Past disasters show that priority needs to be given to the voice of children and young people during the recovery process. Arising directly from both our quantitative and qualitative research, these recommendations explore how government and non-government organisations can both incorporate children and young people in disaster preparedness and recovery and support them during and after disaster events.

It is important to acknowledge that the recommendations from children and young people express their needs and views as expressed to ACYP, it is their truth. We as a society have an obligation to explore how these truths may manifest themselves practically.

1. Raising awareness

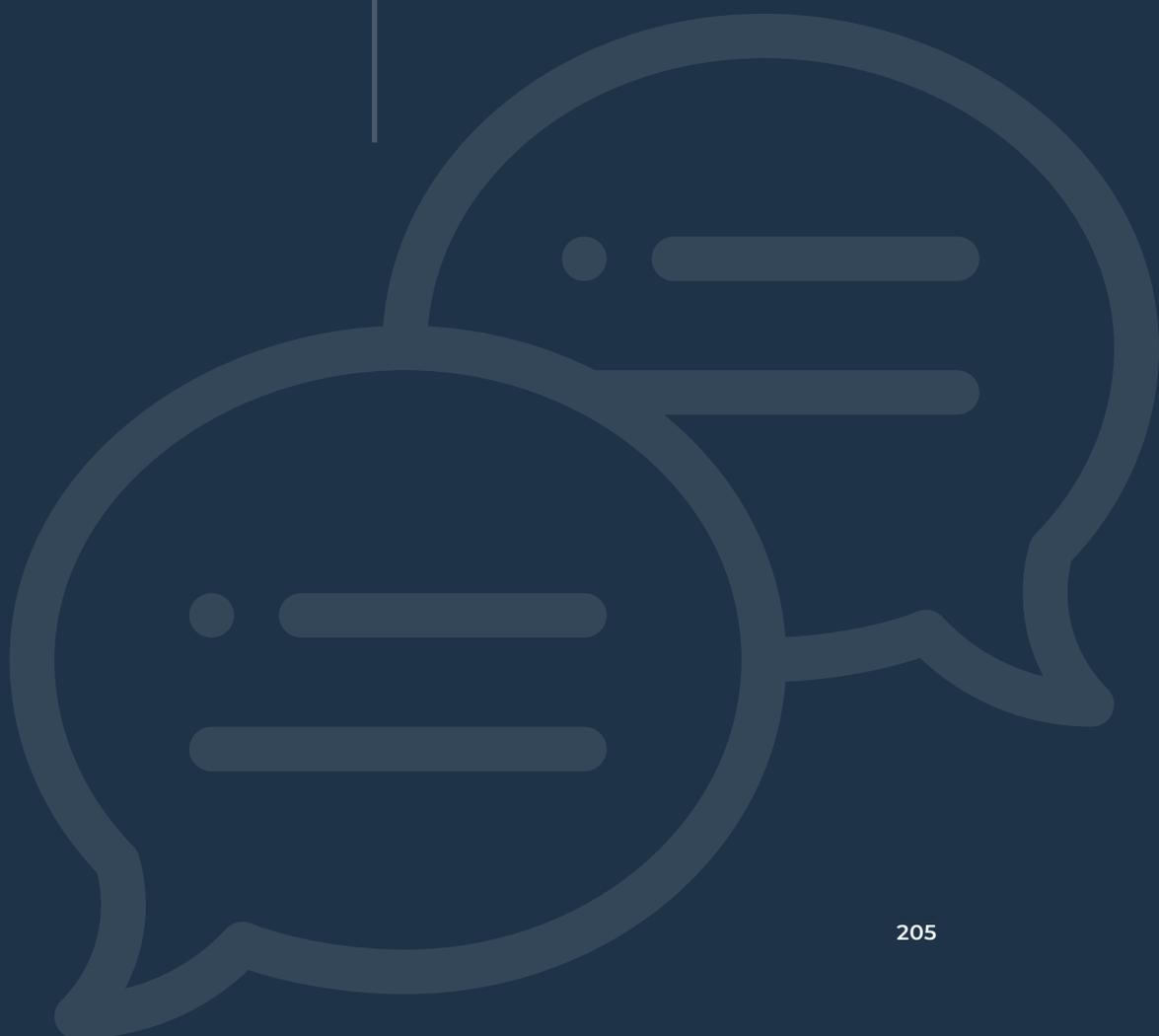
Recommendations from children and young people

1.1 That schools introduce a student exchange program or explore other creative options for partnerships between metropolitan and rural schools to raise the profile of communities in disaster. (e.g. "A day in the life of a young person living in drought")

The voice of children and young people

"Having the city people come out and look what is going on."

"I think funding, even to do an exchange, get some city kids to come out and we can go there."



2. Disaster preparedness and information provision

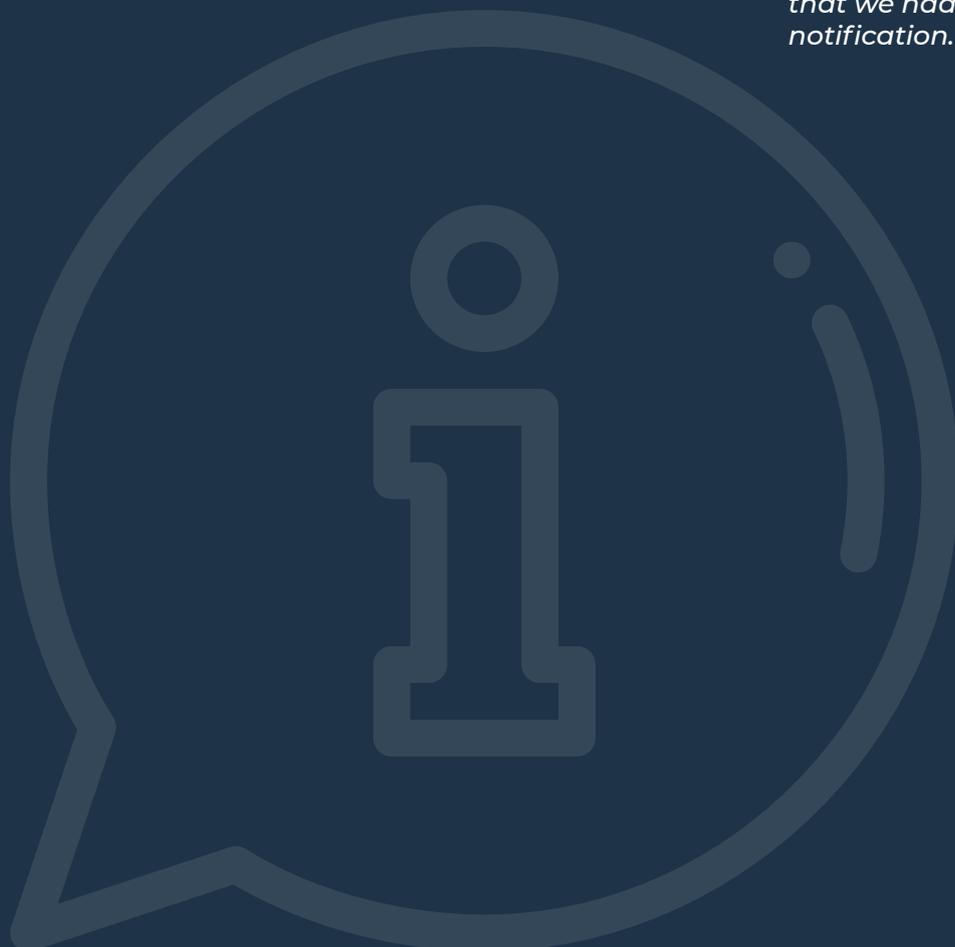
Recommendations from children and young people

2.1 The NSW Government introduces “disaster information packs” in bushfire, drought and flood prone areas, but also makes them available online. These packs inform individuals on what they need to do to prepare for a disaster. (*step by step – what to pack, where to go etc...*)

The voice of children and young people

“Things like information packs that you can get...if it gets dropped in every single mailbox then that way everyone’s got the information...what to prep if you aren’t in immediate danger. If you’re in immediate danger what to do.”

“Even if there’s an App that young people can download that just has alerts...just something that we have. So we just know that instead of going home and then looking at the telly and then looking outside and seeing red sky, black...so just something that we had like some type of notification.”



3. Activities and programs for children and young people

Recommendations from children and young people

3.1 The NSW Government provides free or affordable structured programs and recreational activities for children and young people during and after disaster events (example, ORY Drought Break Program) to provide both a distraction from the disaster that has unfolded as well as an opportunity to connect with their peers.

The voice of children and young people

“It doesn’t even have to be something big. It can be a chess game or something.”



4. Evacuation centres

Recommendations from children and young people

4.1 Evacuation centres during disaster events are child and youth friendly (in terms of safety, supervision, things to do, allowing family pets, screening of people in the centres).

The voice of children and young people

“Somewhere to play while building a house or whatever has been damaged and is getting built.”

“There was a couple [of evacuation centres] but they wouldn’t really let animals in.”



5. Community recovery

Recommendations from children and young people

5.1 The NSW Government, organisations and communities identify meaningful opportunities for children and young people to contribute to and be actively involved in the rebuilding of their communities.

5.2 Explore opportunities for children and young people, particularly those who are unemployed or disengaged from the education system, to be trained in skills which can be utilised in recovery efforts with pathways to work experience, apprenticeships, or employment in local communities.

5.3 The NSW Government and local Councils allocate resources to encourage community led and youth led events that celebrate community resilience, strength, and connection. The emphasis should be on creating opportunities for involving children and young people in the design and delivery of these events including through skills training, volunteering and employment options.

5.4 When developing community recovery strategies, give consideration to the experiences of children and young people living in smaller towns outside regional centres to ensure resources are allocated to address their needs.

The voice of children and young people

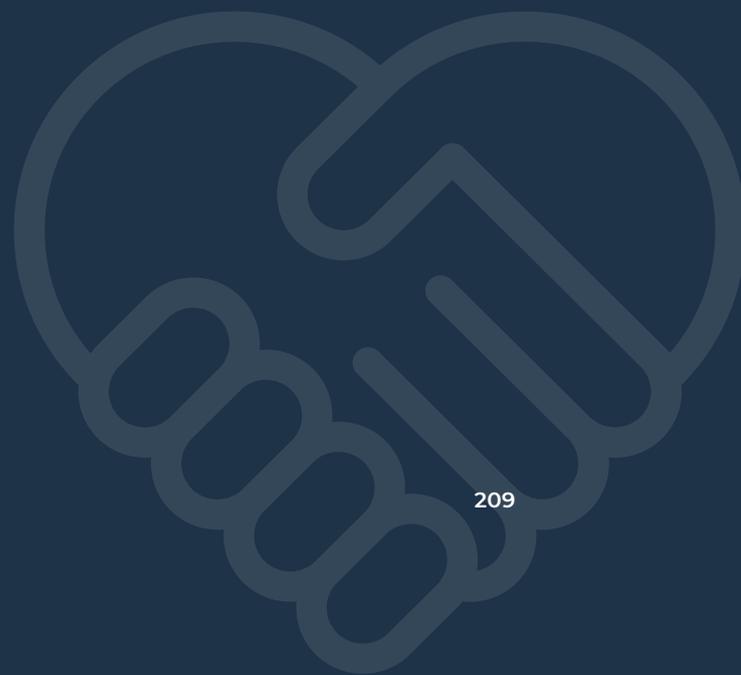
“Allowing us to have a voice in decisions that are made, especially on climate strategy and the redevelopment of affected areas to ensure that they are more sustainable and are able to withstand future natural disasters.”

“Get us involved in rebuilding the community after disaster.”

“We performed at the Blast for our concert and Hartley Under the Stars, which are both for the drought and that just made us feel better in the time that it was happening. It just gave us a bit of leeway and we were able to just be happy and perform with each other.”

“We went from no water restrictions to Level 2, then in a short period of time to Level 4 and Level 5 quite abruptly.”

“More needs to be done for the communities that suffer every year to make ends meet and continue to be ignored. It’s not fair and it’s not right.”



6. Access to infrastructure

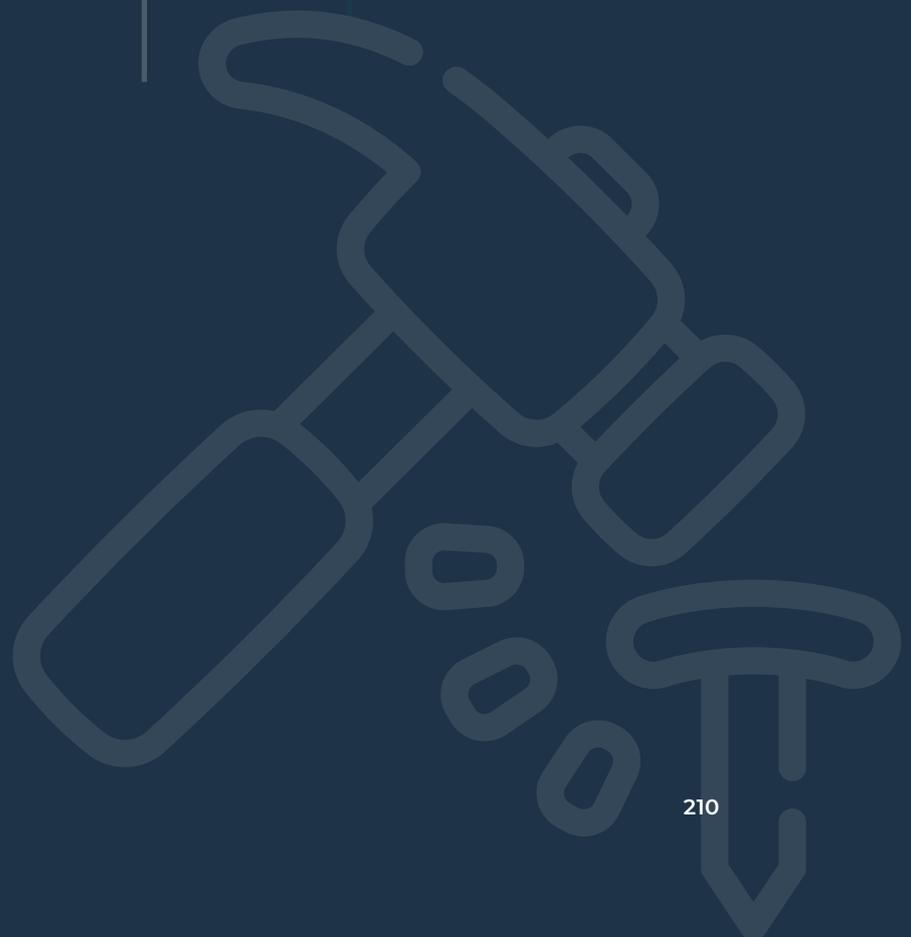
Recommendations from children and young people

6.1 To ensure continued communication and information provision during and post disaster, consideration should be given to ensuring children and young people have access to low cost or free reliable WIFI either in their own homes or through areas in the community, such as libraries.

6.2 Priority be given to rebuilding community infrastructure destroyed by disasters that is identified by children and young people within a community as crucial to their quality of life. This could include schools or education institutions, roads or transport routes leading to schools, food/grocery shops and open spaces such as parks or playgrounds.

The voice of children and young people

"The Internet's it's really slow"



7. Practical and financial assistance

Recommendations from children and young people

7.1 Access to material and financial assistance be made as simple as possible, including providing assistance to families to help with application processes, in recognition of the additional stress children and young people say they suffer as a result of wait times while their eligibility is assessed.

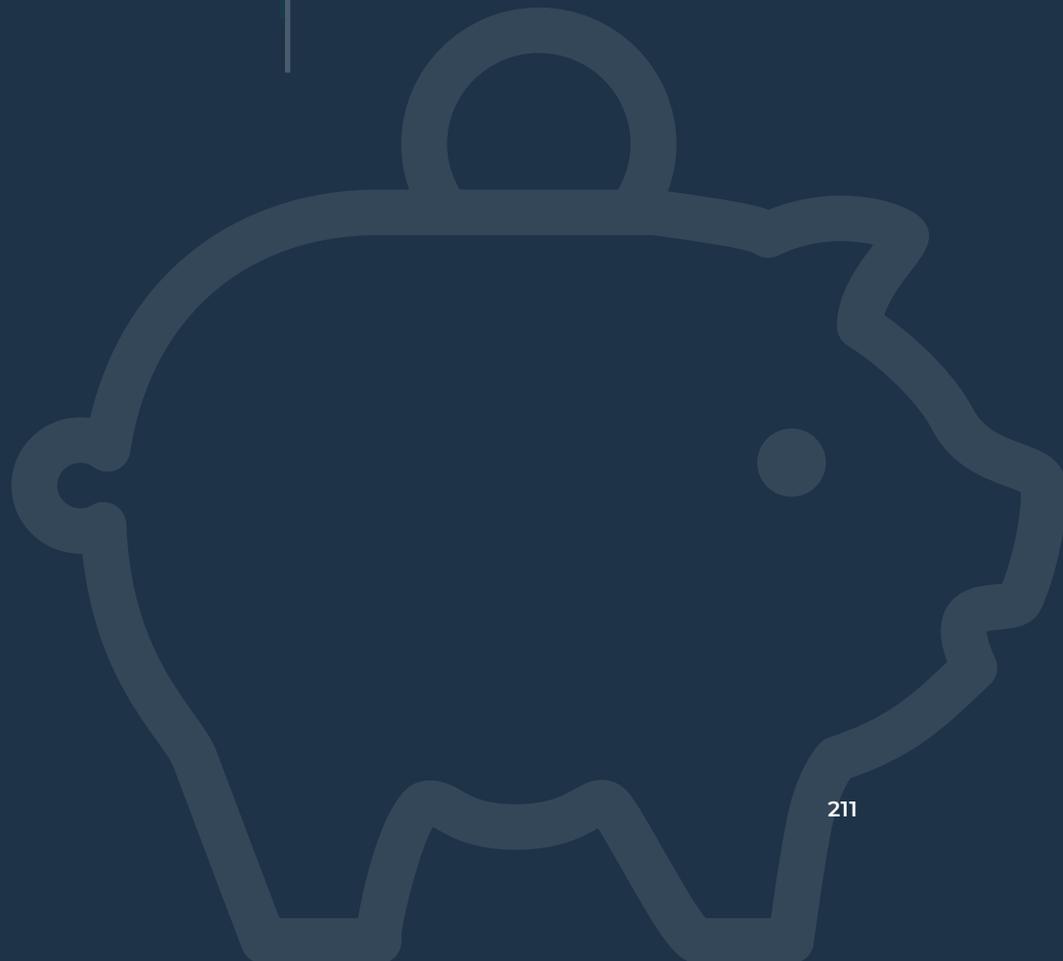
7.2 Offer in-person as well as online options for financial assistance services as not all families have access to technology, or do not want to/are unable to leave their homes during a disaster. Children and young people also reported being asked by family members for assistance to complete forms.

The voice of children and young people

“Ongoing financial, education, and job support to help them get back on their feet within the right means.”

“Support Services and Stimulus Packages would help the community drastically.”

“I think there should be counselling like services available to those affected and financial support for those who have lost homes, jobs etc.”



8. Mental Health

Recommendations from children and young people

8.1 Mental health and youth services offer peer to peer support programs to enable young people to support each other during and after disaster events (for example, Youth InSearch).

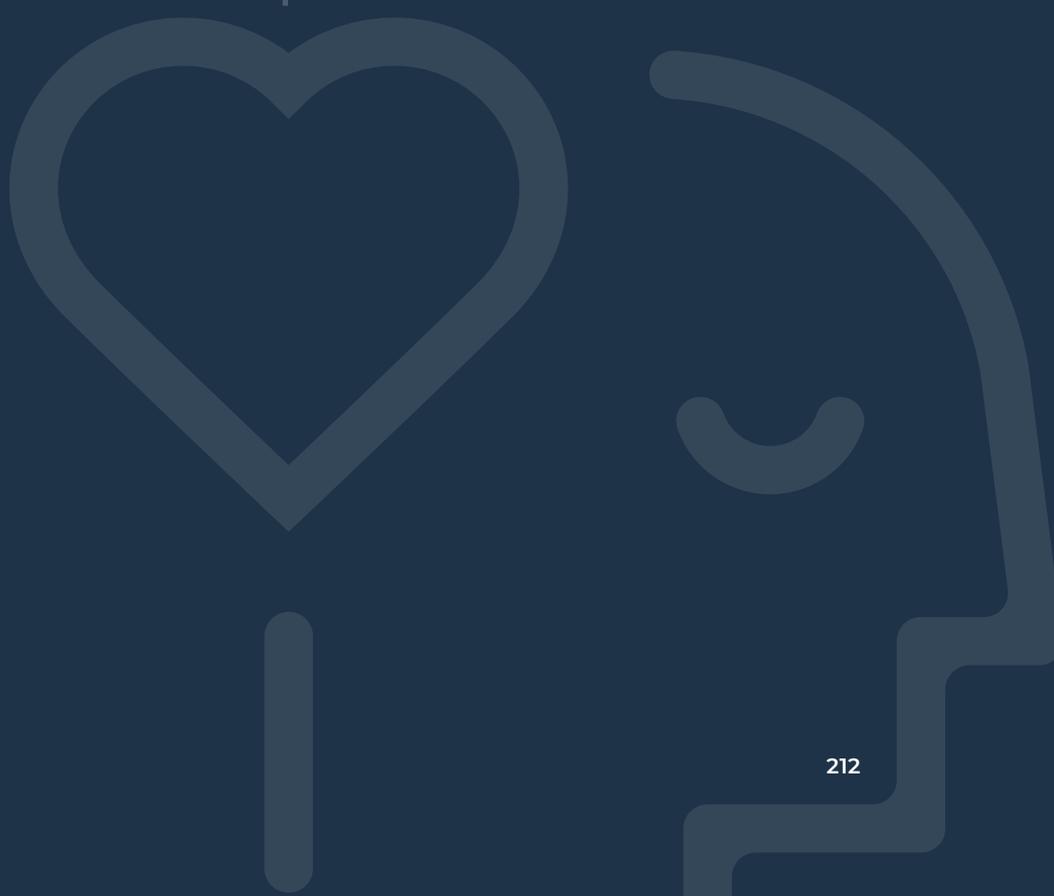
8.2 Mental health training be provided to adults in communities so they understand the important role that trusted adults play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in their communities.

8.3 Ensure there are structured mental health supports for young volunteers and firefighters during and after disaster events.

The voice of children and young people

“When you can see that your child is suffering...from the devastation while it's happening. While they're panicking, you just need to be there for them and support them.”

“We have lots of younger members who do participate in the fires after they turn 16 with parent permission. I feel like they actually need a lot more support than what they get...We talk about what's happening in the fire season, how we feel about it but younger people tend to just shut themselves up. Now we have counselling support systems in Brigades but I feel like something else needs to be done. I'm just not sure what.”



9. Voice

Recommendations from children and young people

9.1 The NSW Government, organisations and communities provide regular opportunities for children and young people to give their views in relation to disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery and rebuilding.

9.2 Information provided to the community by leaders in government or local leaders include a focus on addressing particular concerns of children and young people to ensure children and young people feel reassured that decisions are being made in their best interests and acknowledge any anxieties or worries they might have.

The voice of children and young people

“Listen to our opinions and invite us to be more a part of decisions that directly impact our present and future.”

“Allowing people my age to have a specific place to give their opinions to the government.”



10. Education

Recommendations from children and young people

- 10.1** The children and young people are educated about disaster prevention and preparedness (through school curriculum, or incursions/workshops).
- 10.2** Schools provide online learning options during disaster events.
- 10.3** Schools conduct regular “check-ins” with all students during and after disaster events to identify children and young people requiring additional support.

The voice of children and young people

“Do it through school, or like workshops maybe. It reassures young children to be clam in those situations when it’s hard not to be frantic. Not to worry too much. Just stay calm.”

“Groups or facilities catering specifically for checking on the wellbeing of young people.”



Newgate Polling

Methodology

ACYP engaged Newgate Research to conduct an online poll of children and young people aged 12-24 years across NSW. 1,031 children and young people were recruited through a dedicated youth panel and completed a 15 minute online survey between 6 – 23 March 2020:

- **51.3%** were aged 12-17 years and **48.7%** were aged 18-24 years
- **73.7%** identified as female
- **25.1%** as male and **1.2%** as a gender other than male or female
- **84.4%** lived in metropolitan areas and **15.6%** in regional areas
- **3.3%** identified as Aboriginal
- **30.0%** were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- **12.1%** identified as living with disability.

Data were weighted to balance the demographic and locational splits with a margin of error of +/- 3.1% and a confidence level of 95%.

The questions undertaken in the polling were constructed following the findings of some of our earlier focus groups to ensure that they were reflective of the voice of children and young people and that our quantitative and qualitative data could be tested against each other. Participants answered the following questions:

1

Recently, many people across NSW have been impacted by different disasters, that is, events that have had a negative impact on a community or the wider NSW area.

Over the last 12 months, how have you been affected by the following?

- a. Bushfires
- b. Droughts
- c. Floods

2

Are there any other disasters that have had a negative impact on your community or the wider NSW area in the past 12 months?

3

How have these recent natural disasters impacted your day-to-day life, or the life of other young people you know who have been directly impacted?

4

Do you think these natural disasters will have any long term impacts on young people in your area? If so, what would they be?

5

What, in your opinion, should be done to help people your age who have been impacted by the recent disasters in NSW?

6

Which of the following things should be the top priority for government to support people your age who have been impacted by disaster? (Respondents could select up to three from a list of possible priorities).

7

How should the government and communities be involving people of your age in helping prepare for any possible future natural disasters?

8

Next, we're going to focus on the recent bushfires in NSW. Here is a list of some of the impacts of the fires. Please have a look and select the three impacts that you're most concerned about. (Respondents were given a list of possible impacts to select from).

9

Now, we're going to discuss the ongoing drought in NSW. Here is a list of some of the impacts from the drought. Please have a look and select the three impacts that you're most concerned about. (Respondents were given a list of possible impacts to select from).

Findings

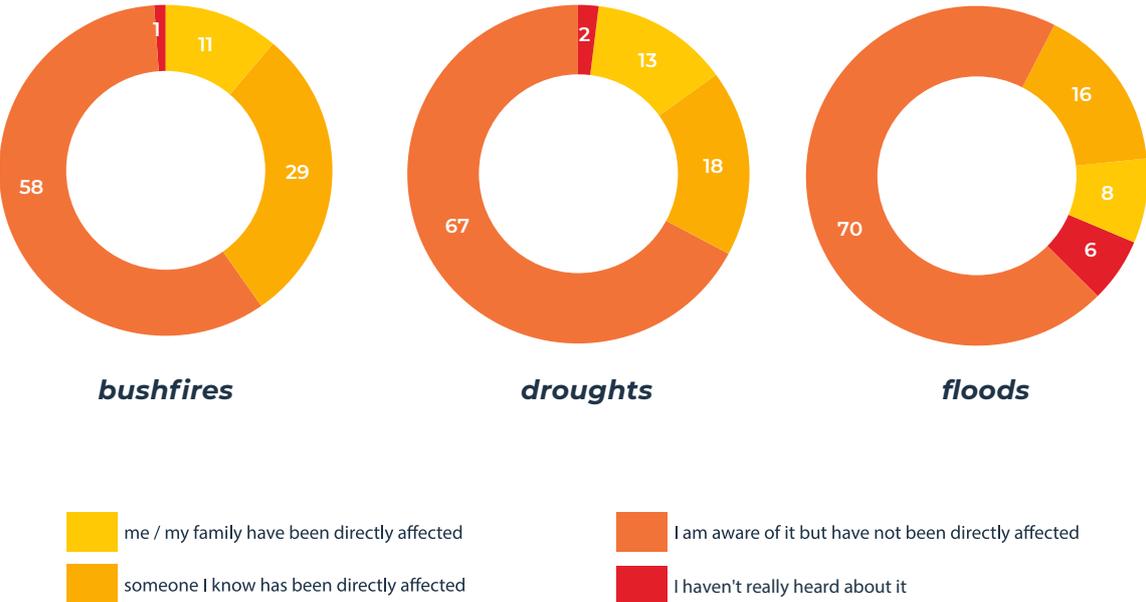
Detailed findings from the online poll of children and young people are presented by question. Where it was possible to compare results with those from the face to face consultations, similarities and differences are noted.

Personal experience of disasters

Responses to the question of whether children and young people had been personally impacted by the recent bushfires, drought or floods, either directly or knowing someone directly affected, are shown below.

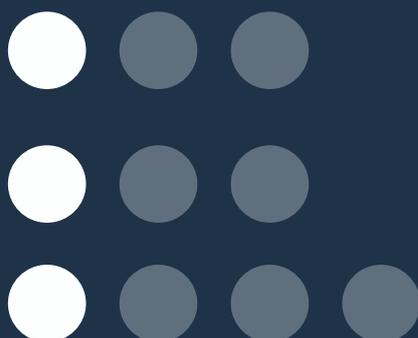
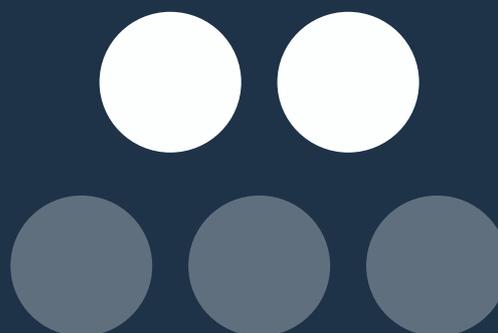


Over the last 12 months how have you been feeling about the following ? (%)



Two out of five respondents had been personally impacted by the bushfires

either being directly affected (11%) or knowing someone directly affected (29%).

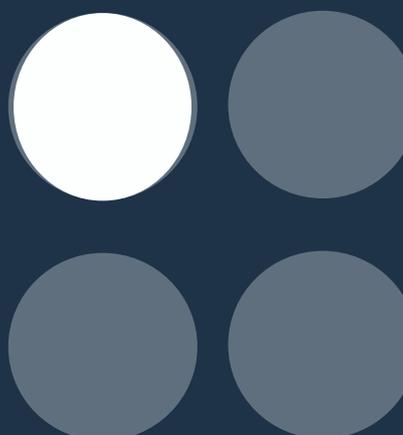


Three in ten respondents had been personally impacted by the drought

either being directly affected (13%) or knowing someone directly affected (18%).

Almost one quarter of respondents had been personally impacted by floods

Either being directly affected (8%) or knowing someone directly affected (16%).





Of those that had been directly affected by a disaster, 7% had experienced two of the three disasters and 2% had experienced all three disaster types.

Respondents were asked if there were any other disasters that had impacted their community or the wider NSW area in the past two months. Responses were coronavirus (23%), storms (1.1%) and blackouts (0.6%).

The COVID-19 crisis escalated rapidly during the course of the online poll being in field, however the impact

of Public Health Orders were only beginning to impact society in NSW.

If the poll were undertaken at a later date or if prompted, awareness and personal impact would likely be much higher.

How natural disasters impact daily life

Children and young people were asked how the recent natural disasters impacted their day-to-day lives, or the lives of other young people they knew that had been directly impacted. Their responses were coded and are shown in the table below.

How Natural Disaster Impacted Daily Lives % who mentioned by disaster type

| | bushfires | drought | floods |
|--|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Had irritated eyes, throat or lungs from bushfire smoke | 60 | 57 | 58 |
| Changed usual routine in some way | 58 | 55 | 56 |
| Felt mentally unwell, stressed or traumatised or had others experience this | 49 | 47 | 49 |
| Missed work or school | 45 | 43 | 50 |
| Had to change holiday and travel plans due to bushfire or floods | 40 | 39 | 39 |
| Had property that was directly threatened | 26 | 21 | 31 |
| Had a serious health condition exacerbated by bushfire smoke | 21 | 20 | 23 |
| Usual place of business, education or recreation was closed due to the bushfires | 21 | 19 | 26 |
| Lost household income due to a general impact on local economy | 20 | 19 | 25 |

How Natural Disaster Impacted Daily Lives % who mentioned by disaster type

| | bushfires | drought | floods |
|--|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Suffered a major loss <i>(of property, people or something else)</i> | 17 | 14 | 20 |
| Usual place of business, education or recreation was closed due to the floods | 13 | 14 | 20 |
| Working longer hours to accommodate for impact on work or business | 13 | 15 | 17 |
| Had a serious health condition develop from bushfire smoke | 11 | 12 | 15 |
| Lost household income due to impacts on farming | 8 | 11 | 10 |
| Lost household income due to impacts on tourism | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Another day-to-day impact <i>(these included not seeing parents for extended periods of time, not having electricity, work and school closing due to severe storms)</i> | 5 | 5 | 3 |

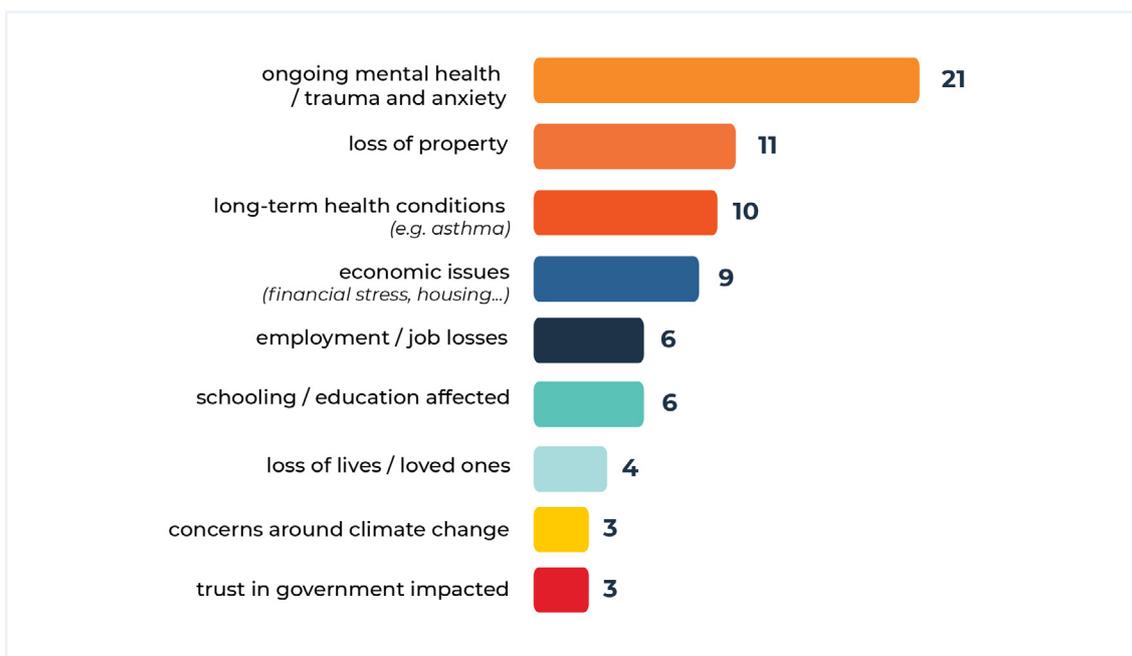
*We note that of respondents who experienced floods, 43% also experienced bushfires and 45% had experienced the drought.

The impacts on daily life reported by children and young people in the poll were similar to those raised in face-to-face focus group discussions. Both samples commonly reported concerns about bushfire smoke; mental health impacts; disruptions to school; missing out on summer holidays and damage to property.

Long-term impacts of natural disasters: *Unprompted*

Children and young people’s responses to whether they thought the natural disasters would have any long term impacts on young people in their area are presented in the figure below.

Long term impacts of natural disasters on (%)



As shown, and consistent with face-to-face discussions, ongoing mental health issues was the most frequently mentioned long term impact (21%):

“A lot of people have been traumatised in my area. They live in fear that fires will be back next summer and be even worse [and] that the firefighters won't be able to control them at all.”

“I think mental scarring will definitely be an ongoing effect on young people, especially now, but also as they grow older.”

Economic issues; job loss; disruptions to schooling and loss of property were discussed more frequently in the face-to-face consultations than appears in the poll. This is most likely due to the fact that

almost all children and young people consulted with face-to-face had been directly impacted by the recent disasters.

Interestingly, impacts to young people’s long term physical health was more frequently raised in the online poll than was brought up in face-to-face discussions:

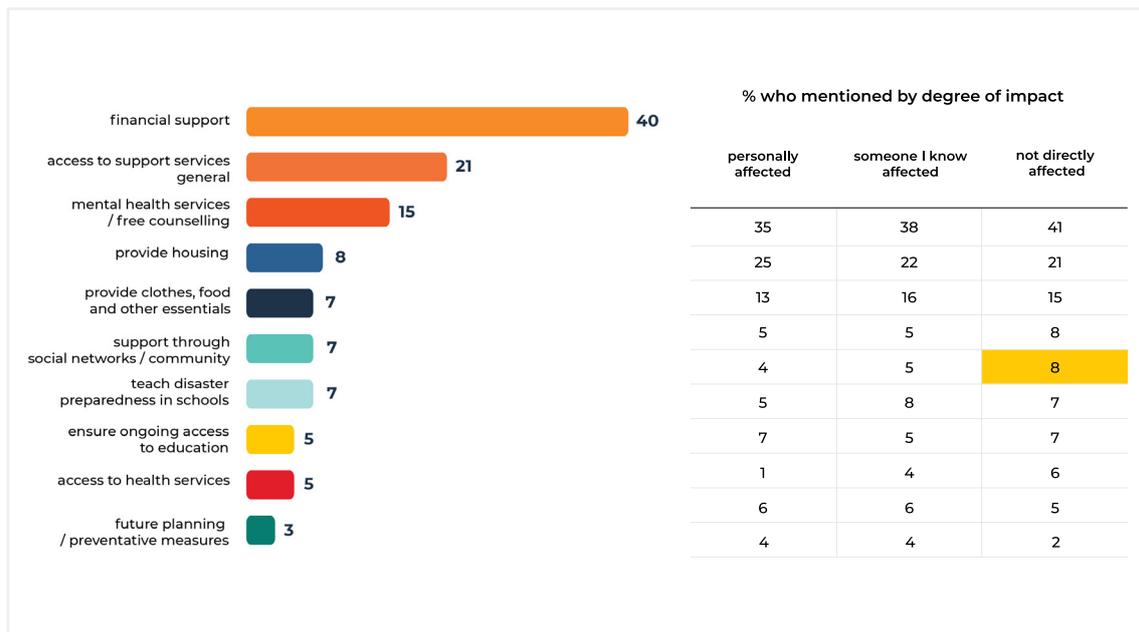
“I believe young people in the future will have problems with their health that was directly affected by smoke during the bushfires. I'm mainly concerned about respiratory health for my generation.”

This can most likely be explained by the fact that the majority of online respondents lived in the Sydney area where smoke effects were the most common impact experienced.

Help needed for young people in disasters: Unprompted

Children and young people were asked what should be done to help young people who have been impacted by the recent disasters in NSW. Their responses are shown in the figure below.

What should be done to help young people your age who have been impacted by recent disasters in NSW? (%)



As shown, results were largely consistent across disaster type. The key need identified by respondents was financial support (40%), followed by mental health support (21%):

“Ongoing financial, education, and job support to help them get back on their feet within the right means.”

“Support Services and Stimulus Packages would help the community drastically.”

“I think there should be counselling like services available to those affected and financial support for those who have lost homes, jobs etc.”

“Create specific support groups for people of our age for those affected. Offer financial support to those who have experienced a loss of income.”

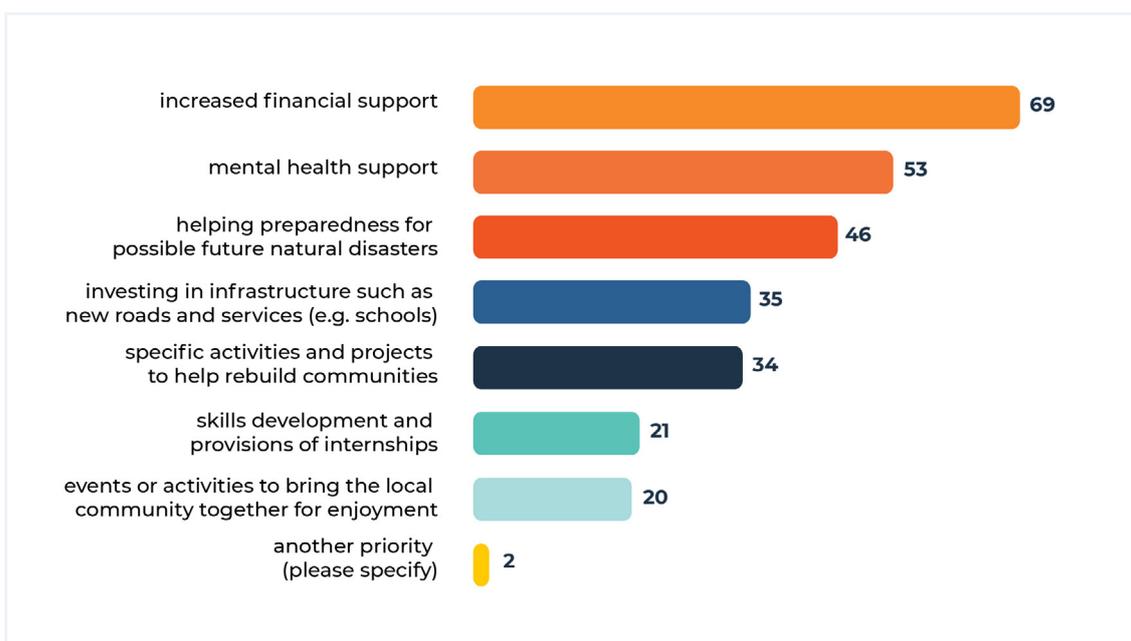
These areas were also identified as key needs in face-to-face focus groups. Respondents to the online poll expressed similar opinions as those in the face-to-face consultations that mental health support for children and young people affected by disasters should be free of charge:

“Support services for people who have been affected should have low or no cost.”

Help needed for young people in disasters: *Prompted*

Children and young people were also provided with a list of possible priorities for government to support young people impacted by disasters and asked to select up to three that they considered to be the most important. Their responses are shown in the figure below.

Top three priorities for government to support young people impacted by disasters (%)



Results were again largely consistent across disaster type. As with unprompted responses, when prompted, participants were most likely to identify increased financial support (69%) and mental health support (53%) as key priorities for supporting children and young people.

Just under half of respondents (46%) identified preparedness for future natural disasters as a key priority. This was something frequently raised unprompted in face-to-face consultations. Similarly, investing in infrastructure (35%) and rebuilding of communities (34%) were raised by more than one-third of polling respondents when prompted. Both of these were identified by face-to-face focus group participants as key priorities.

It is worth noting that although not widely raised by polling respondents, action to address climate change was identified as a key priority by some children and young people:

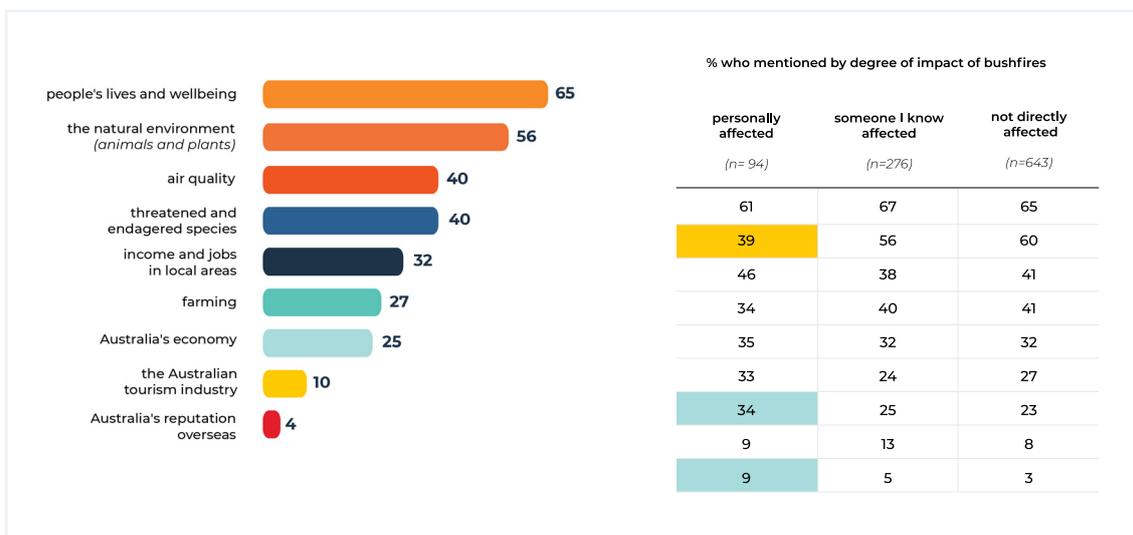
“The natural disasters has really brought the notion of climate change to the forefront of young people’s minds. Hopefully the long-term impact will be that more political and individual action is targeted at mitigating this environmental issue.”

“I think young people will have a greater responsibility to care for the environment and sustain their quality of life.”

Main Concerns about bushfires

Children and young people were provided with a list of possible concerns about the recent bushfires and asked to select the three impacts they were most concerned about. Results are shown in the figure below.

Three main concerns about bushfires impact (%)



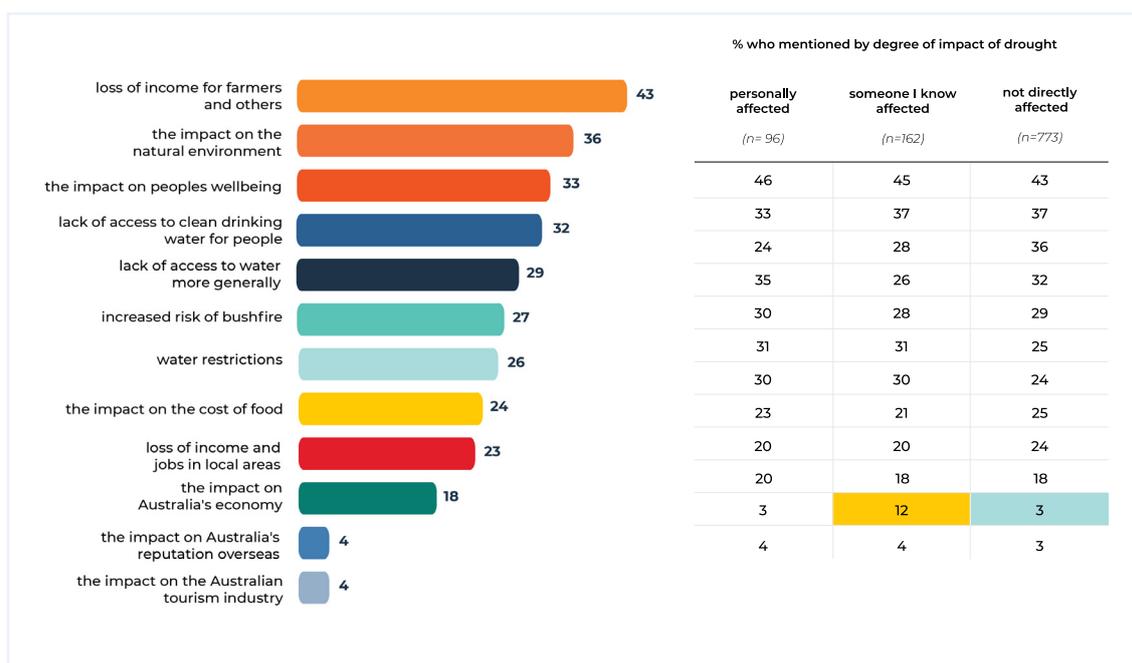
Concern for people's lives and wellbeing was the most frequently selected concern (65%); followed by the impact on the natural environment (56%).



Main concerns about drought

Children and young people were also provided with a list of possible concerns about the drought and asked to select the three impacts they were most concerned about. Results are shown in the figure below

Three main concerns about drought (%)



Concern for the income of farmers (43%) and the impact on the environment (36%) were the main concerns for most, followed by the impact on people's wellbeing (33%).

Involving children and young people in disaster preparedness

Children and young people were asked how the government and communities should be involving them to help prepare for future disasters. Areas identified were largely similar to those raised by children and young people in face-to-face consultations:

Educate children and young people about disasters

“Should be teaching us about how to respond to natural disasters as some part of the school curriculum.”

“Teach how to prepare for different natural disasters in geography.”

“Schools that have a higher chance of being impacted by natural disasters should have compulsory education programs in preparing for natural disasters.”

Provide a voice to children and young people

“Allowing us to have a voice in decisions that are made, especially on climate strategy and the redevelopment of affected areas to ensure that they are more sustainable and are able to withstand future natural disasters.”

“Ask for our opinion more. Let us help the preparations.”

“Allowing people my age to have a specific place to give their opinions to the government.”

Provide a voice to children and young people

“Listen to our opinions and invite us to be more a part of decisions that directly impact our present and future.”

“Get us involved in rebuilding the community after disaster.”

“Firstly, they should gain input of what we think is important. Then they should be working with us by having local schools, universities etc. being directly involved in the planning, designing and implementation of these prevention activities.”

Act to prevent disasters and be prepared for a disaster

“Listening about climate change and investing more into renewables.”

“Setting aside a lot of money for sudden disasters to provide immediate financial help, health services, etc.”

“Emergency kits for every household member containing non-perishable foods, basic medical gear, spare clothing and water.”

“Giving us opportunities to experience a hands on scenario of what to do.”

“Go from home to home or suburb to suburb and do free demonstrations and ask us to do it practically. Hands on is what we need to do after being explained with theory. We can not only imagine what to do, but instead we need to do it for us to have the experience.”

“Finding ways to combat or prevent future disasters like back-burning within fire prone areas. Create better infrastructure to suit adverse weather within the future like better drainage within flood prone areas.”

Provide information before the disaster hits

“We need to know exactly how to prepare for future disasters, and some widespread information would be appreciated.”

“Safety tips, posters, advertisements, campaigns on how to stay safe in a natural disaster like a bushfire and not waiting until the disaster is happening.”

“They can try to create a program that people can do online which informs them about how to prepare for multiple different types of disasters.”

“Information fliers received in the mail.”

“Social media is a great basis of communication throughout my age bracket. But also the good old fashion putting a notice in your mail box is also effective.”

“Since a lot of kids my age are on social media, the government and local communities should allow a group of young people to run a Facebook page (possibly) to raise awareness on how to stay safe and respond calmly to any possible natural disaster that can occur in the future. If the information is available on a large social platform, young people are more likely to see it and get involved.”



Provide mental health support, including peer to peer options

“People of the same age know each other best, we understand and feel more comfortable with each other so ensuring they have their not only family members but also close friends I think important in ensuring they provide the support that is best suited to them.”

“Bringing them together for group gatherings so that they can talk about what they experienced and help one another. This could give them the sense that they are not alone and have the support from same aged individuals.”

“They should make health facilities, especially mental health facilities more accessible to people in my area so that when disasters do happen, they have someone to consult with and help them out.”

Provide volunteering opportunities for children and young people

“They should allow us to help with the physical aspects of the preparation, the simple tasks that can be done by older teens. This would help us feel valued and an important part of the community and also allows us to give back to the community.”

“Come up with strategies that young people are able to get their hands dirty and involved to give back to those in the community that may be suffering from loss.”

“Have ways for us to help prepare others and the community. There’s not a lot we can do right now but I know we would do things if we could.”

Provide additional school supports to children and young people

“When there are really severe fire warnings or active fires going on, people often leave their homes so that they can go somewhere safe, in this process, people my age will not be able to attend school putting them behind in their studies. For this reason, I believe that students should have a device so that even when they are away from school or home, they would still be able to learn and work towards their goals.”

Provide assistance in the recovery and rebuilding of communities

“Building festivals, where people assist in building furniture etc. Music festivals that allow people to enjoy life, all proceeds go to rebuilding the community.”

“Just general activities to lift the spirits of the communities affected, and re-establishing the economy of the communities through such events.”

“Having community projects that allow young people to be directly involved, whether it be for volunteering or an internship.”

Support communities that are most disadvantaged

“More needs to be done for the communities that suffer every year to make ends meet and continue to be ignored. It’s not fair and it’s not right”

Endnotes

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9

While this case study (and broader report) is extensive, it is important to note that this does not give a full picture of the extent of this disaster on children and young people.

10

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<https://www.bnhcrc.com.au>

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12

The work of ACYP is conducted through the lens of Child's Rights, which is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3.1 of the Convention states the following: 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration,' and is thus known as the 'best interest principle.'

13

ACYP acknowledges that this process was conducted simultaneously with the Independent Inquiry set up by Government. The Advocate ensured while these were two separate processes both parties were cognoscente of the other so they could refer appropriate submissions to the relevant authority. For further information about the online submission process, please visit: <https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/disaster-consultation-2020>

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35

The C.ex Club is an Ex-Services, dining and recreation Club in Coffs Harbour.