GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DFES
Department of Fire &
Emergency Services

SEMC
STATE EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

WA Community
Disaster Resilience Strategy

Resilience: It happens before,
during and after a disaster

OCTOBER 2023

Acknowledgment of Country

This report was prepared on the lands of the Beeliar Noongar people. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services recognises the traditional custodianship of the Noongar people, and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations across the State. We acknowledge their rich culture and ongoing relationship with the land, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Community

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services also acknowledges the community members who have contributed time and ideas to the development of this Strategy. We thank them for their commitment to the resilience of their community.

Beeliar Noongar means 'river people'

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Welcome to the WA Community Disaster Resilience Strategy.

Forewords

Intro to the Strategy

Western Australia has always been, and will continue to be, impacted by disasters from natural hazards, most notably bushfires, cyclones, and floods.

The challenges associated with climate change and COVID-19, overlain with concurrent natural hazard related disasters in recent years, have served to test the resilience of the State, from front-line responders through to individual community members.

The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) appreciates the diversity and uniqueness of communities. SEMC recognise there is no one answer and certainly no single approach to improving community preparedness and resilience. The focus must be on working with communities in a way that meets their needs, as the path to a more resilient Western Australia requires their involvement. By adopting a culture of preventing and preparing for emergencies rather than simply reacting to them, communities can be made safer. To do this everyone must understand, accept, and personalise risks and work together to be more prepared.

In doing so, overall resilience can be enhanced and the increasingly significant economic, social and environmental impacts that are affecting all Western Australians can be addressed

Recognised in Western Australia's State Emergency Management Policy as a key principle, disaster resilience is a shared responsibility including all levels of government, business, the non-government sector, and individuals. In recognising this shared responsibility, Western Australians should feel empowered in their activities. The intent of the Community Disaster Resilience Strategy (Strategy) is to provide the necessary guidance to support all Western Australians to increase their disaster resilience, as well as to identify priorities for activities and projects, and where to direct investment.

Our focus must be on working with communities in a way that meets their needs.

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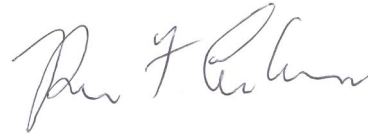
The Resilience Outcomes provide a useful tool for the assessment of projects and emphasise the importance of monitoring and evaluation to inform our progress in this space.

Achieving resilience is a long-term process; it needs long-term support and should become a central consideration across the prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery spectrum.

Sincere thanks go to the hundreds of people who participated in building this Strategy and gave their valuable time to provide insight, ideas, and feedback.

We encourage you to read, understand and incorporate the Strategy into your organisation's and individual short, medium, and long-term planning, and to incorporate the Resilience Outcomes where possible and practicable.

Dr Ron F Edwards

Chair of the State Emergency Management Committee

Ms Emma Cole

SEMC Deputy Chair & Sponsor of the Community Resilience & Recovery Sub-Committee

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SEMC
STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Australian Red Cross

For over 100 years the Australian Red Cross has been responding to disasters and traumatic events that impact individuals and communities across Australia. The Australian Red Cross is a recognised partner of the Strategy.

As a result of our experience and research over such an extended period, our staff and volunteers have collected a multitude of accounts which demonstrate the astounding ability of people and communities to both respond to and recover from these events. They are a testament to the human spirit and the power of humanity.

However, we are now at a turning point. Whether through climate change, the impact of war, or political upheaval around the globe we are facing growing environmental, social, and economic change which is placing ever increasing pressure on our communities. In recent times Australian Red Cross, alongside other agencies, has been working with more and more communities impacted by multiple disasters that have taken place within relatively short periods of time. This has resulted in increased trauma among impacted communities, with agencies struggling to respond within an ever more complex environment.

While the severity, frequency and impact of disasters are increasing, we also recognise that despite their experiences, communities adapt to these new conditions and recover. This resilience is inspiring and proof of the spirit of the impacted community members and supporting agencies.

Our research and experience demonstrate that resilience is bolstered where communities are actively engaged and prepared as much as they can be, where they are part of the recovery effort, and where the roles and responsibilities of agencies responding are clear and well-coordinated.

This Strategy supports a collaborative and community led approach to disaster resilience. It outlines an approach that empowers communities to consider what will assist their recovery should disaster hit, or a traumatic event take place, the resources available to be leveraged when needed and where to direct those resources to achieve a positive quality of life into the future.

Australian Red Cross thanks the SEMC for the opportunity to work collaboratively on this Strategy. We look forward to working with the Western Australian community, the State Government, and our colleagues in the not-for-profit sector to support its ongoing implementation.

Craig Stewart

State Director Western Australia
Australian Red Cross

Department of Fire and Emergency Services

As the leading emergency management agency in Western Australia, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) has seen first-hand the impact of increasingly intense and frequent natural disaster events.

Over the years, we have witnessed the unwavering willingness of the Western Australian people to support their communities in times of crisis. As an organisation, DFES relies on the compassion, commitment and community knowledge of more than 26,000 volunteers across the state. We know first-hand the importance of working effectively with communities, and the vital contribution they make to prevention, preparation, response and recovery (PPRR) efforts.

Local communities are best placed to know what they need to prepare for, reduce the impact of and recover from emergencies and disasters, with a unique understanding of their own capabilities and capacity for resilience.

Utilising the broad range of skills and expertise available locally enables a stronger and more effective emergency management across the PPRR spectrum. This Strategy will enable government agencies, local governments and other organisations to consider how to best work with communities in a coordinated, responsive and respectful way.

Placing communities at the centre of emergency management empowers local people at a crucial time and ensures emergency management efforts are relevant to their unique needs.

I would like to thank all the organisations, community groups and individuals who contributed to the development of this Strategy. Your contribution demonstrates a commitment to advocate for community voices in emergency management and ensures better outcomes for all Western Australians.

Darren Klemm AFSM

Commissioner
Fire and Emergency Services

Definitions

Western Australian Community Disaster Resilience Strategy

Community

A **community of place** is a group of people who live in and/or feel they belong to a particular place. They create bridging networks between the individuals in a place.

A **community of interest** is a group of people with a shared interest such as language, culture, religion, hobby, sport, volunteering or profession. Communities of interest create bridging networks and networks that link externally.

A **community of circumstance** occurs when a group of otherwise unrelated people share a significant event or experience, such as a disaster. Communities of circumstance often overlap with a community of place.

All types of communities and networks have a role in resilience and can benefit from the Strategy.

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Disaster

A disaster can be described as an event that overwhelms the resources of a community and causes significant harm to people, buildings, infrastructure, the environment and/or the economy. A significant and coordinated response is needed to assist communities to cope with and recover from the consequences of a disaster.

Disasters caused by natural hazards are an inherent part of the Western Australian landscape and are occurring more frequently and often concurrently (IPCC 2022). All levels of government are investing significantly in projects to reduce the risks posed by natural hazards, however, there remain hazards that cannot be entirely managed or eliminated.

Disasters impose a range of economic, social, and environmental costs. The total economic cost to Western Australia from disasters caused by natural hazards between 2020 and 2060 is estimated to be $120 billion (Deloitte Access Economics 2021).

Resilience

Community resilience is the ability of communities (and their members) exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects.

Community disaster resilience means being able to cope with the impacts of a disaster, to recover afterwards and to adapt to changed circumstances.

Community at the Core

Guiding Principles

Resilience begins and ends with community, so it was vital there was meaningful engagement throughout the development of the Strategy.

Prior to consultation taking place in 2020, Guiding Principles were developed.

These are as follows:

Listen and Learn

Guiding Principles

The strategy was developed through listening to the experiences of Western Australians and other Australian communities. Learnings from international research were also incorporated.

Don't do more: Do differently

A journey not a destination

The Emergency Management space is complex, with a multitude of layers, roles and responsibilities which make it harder for communities to get involved. Where possible, the principle of "don't do more: do differently" means priority will be given to exploring ways to do things differently, more locally and more simply, rather than unnecessarily adding more layers and more complexity.

This strategy is not a short term action plan, it is a long term strategy. As environments and communities change, the journey towards resilience will be ongoing and will require long term engagement across all activities of government, industry, business and community.

It's also very useful to note that the outcomes from the Strategy are not all-encompassing; they provide a strong base from which to start.

Symbols of Resilience

Resilience is all around us, all of the time. Nature provides us with many examples of this. The Eucalyptus Wandoo or White Gum: symbolises resiliency within this strategy.

Adapted

The White Gum tree has special fire-adaptive traits, including re-sprouting after fires. This is often referred to as epicormic sprouting. After fires, a series of events trigger the sprouting to occur.

Durable

Research shows that this adaptive trait of renewal after fire developed millions of years ago, allowing the White Gum to endure in a harsh climate.

Self-Protecting

Eucalypts are described as 'hard-leaved'. The leaves are thick, leathery and tough due to lignin, and do not easily wilt. This enables them to survive hot and dry conditions.

Supportive

Due to their ability to re-sprout after fires, areas dominated by the eucalypts act as carbon banks for CO_2.

Resilience is owned by each individual, group and agency. Everyone has a role.

It is understood that although everyone has a part to play with resilience building, not everybody has the same capacity. We do what we can.

This Strategy helps agencies through to individuals to:

Increase the capacity and capability to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from, disasters.

Feel empowered to bring a resilience focus to everyday, and project specific, activities.

Work together to improve outcomes for each other.

Develop a shared understanding of disaster resilience.

Focus investment into preparation activities to reduce the costs of recovery.

Resilience is before, during and after a disaster

Increasing resilience through community level capability is an integral part of emergency management within Western Australia.

Before

During

After

Resilience

Resilience Outcomes

The Outcomes have been created by grouping into themes the characteristics of resilience as identified through the consultation process and comparing these with international experience and research.

The Outcomes establish a logic for planning, delivering and evaluating activities and projects undertaken to support the Strategy. The impact of the Strategy, and areas of need, can be measured by monitoring each of the five outcome areas.

Connect
We connect and link up

Informed
We are well-informed

Outcomes

Prepared
We plan and prepare for disruption

Involved
We get involved and are empowered to help

Supported
We feel safe and supported

Connect

We connect and link up

Networks and relationships are essential for resilience as they help people through emergencies and tough times.

Objectives:

- Networks are broad, inclusive and effective
- Communities have linking networks with government and industry.

Prepared

We plan and prepare for disruption

Being physically and mentally prepared for emergencies and disasters means knowing what could happen, planning for what to do during and after, and identifying resources that can help.

Being prepared improves capacity to respond and can reduce the impact of disasters. Being prepared can also prepare people mentally for disruption, which can assist recovery.

Communities are also more resilient when the businesses, industries, organisations and essential services they rely on are prepared for disruption or disaster. This is achieved when businesses and organisations understand their risks and have effective plans to maintain service delivery or re-start as quickly as possible.

Objectives:

- Being prepared and adaptive is a normal part of community life
- Young people have skills and knowledge to cope with emergencies and disruption
- Businesses, supply chains and essential services are sustainable and adaptive.

Supported

We feel safe and supported

In an emergency, people often feel powerless against the event and its impacts. Powerlessness erodes an individual's sense of personal safety and control, which can result in psychological harm. If the disaster results in loss – whether of life, work, financial security, homes and possessions, community, security, certainty or normalcy – the harm can be substantial.

No-one is immune from these impacts. Research shows that people who already experience disadvantage are likely to be more adversely impacted and may find it more difficult to engage with emergency services.

Objectives:

- People who are more at risk are supported to plan and prepare
- People in need can access the support they require
- Emergency Management practices are inclusive, person-centred and trauma-informed.

Involved

We get involved and are empowered to help

Empowering communities to be involved allows people to be able to do more to help in an emergency. Many community members don't know how to help, or believe that regulations make it harder to help in the ways that they have in the past.

Objectives:

- Businesses and community leaders engage and participate in Emergency Management

- Community members feel empowered to help before, during and after an emergency

- Communities are equipped, resourced and supported to lead a resilient recovery

- Community members can become involved by volunteering.

Informed

We are well-informed

The importance of the community being informed was identified as a priority. In an emergency people want more information to help them make sense of what is happening. Knowledge enables people to make better decisions about their own safety. It can also reduce trauma by reducing feelings of powerlessness.
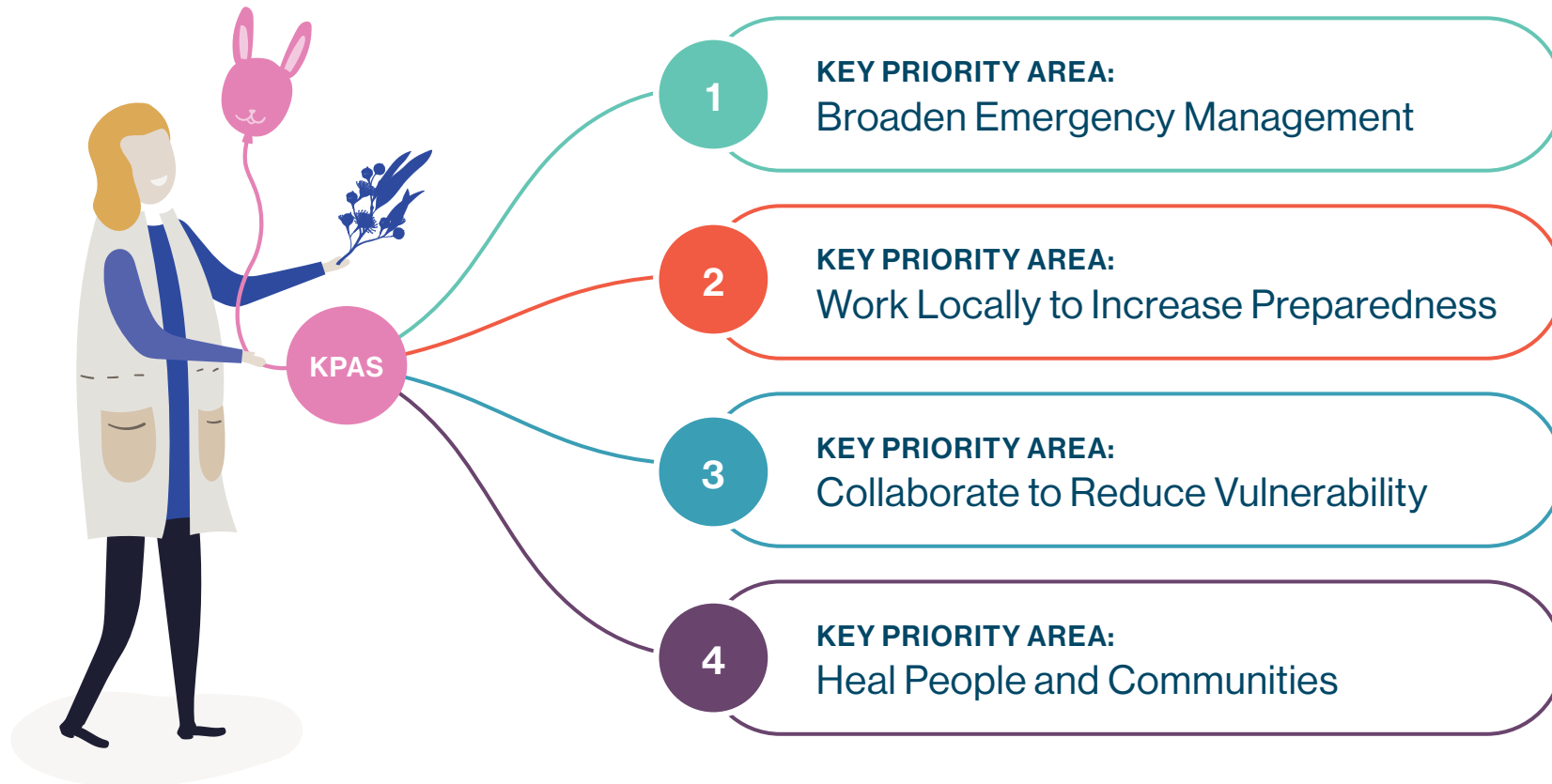
Objectives:

- Everyone can access information about risk and emergencies regardless of language, ability or location

- State Government has access to local knowledge and use it across the five resilience outcomes.

The impact of the Strategy can be measured by monitoring each of the five areas

Strategic Focus

Key Priority Areas

The Key Priority Areas are a distillation of what community have identified as being the best places to start with resilience building. They are designed to give organisations a mechanism to deliver resilience building efforts that align with their strategic plans.

The Initiatives listed in this section are designed to be a guide and can be added to.

KPAS

1

KEY PRIORITY AREA:
Broaden Emergency Management

2

KEY PRIORITY AREA:
Work Locally to Increase Preparedness

3

KEY PRIORITY AREA:
Collaborate to Reduce Vulnerability

4

KEY PRIORITY AREA:
Heal People and Communities

Key Priority Area #1: Broaden Emergency Management

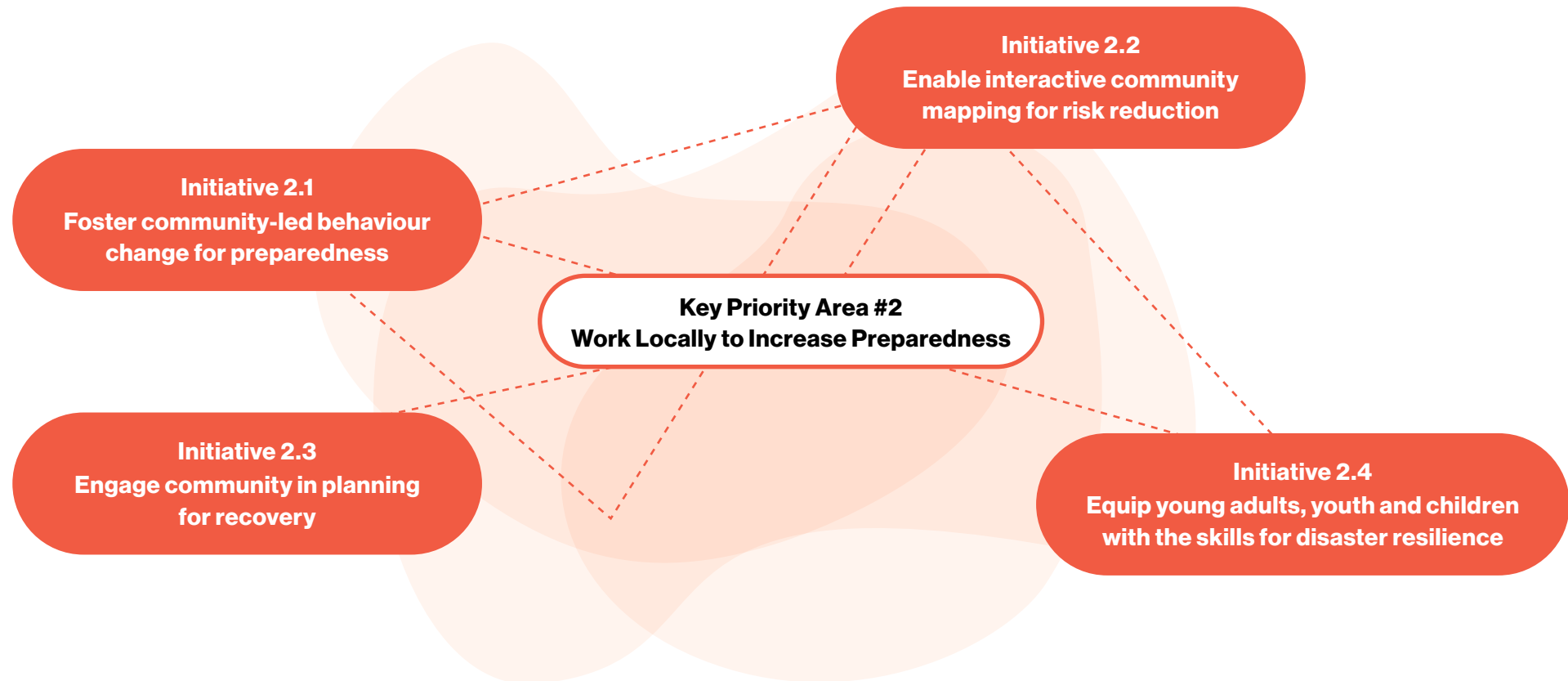The principles of community engagement and shared responsibility form part of the Emergency Management framework. However, current practices are not fully aligned with these principles and the potential benefits are not being realised. The majority of work undertaken by the Emergency Management sector to understand risks, to plan and exercise for response, and to develop skills and capacity involves only a small number of State and Local Government representatives. The wider community has limited opportunity for involvement.

Initiative 1.2
Increase engagement with peak bodies and industry groups

Initiative 1.1
Consider the membership and agenda of Emergency Management committees

Key Priority Area #1
Broaden Emergency Management

Initiative 1.4
Improve access to information about risk and emergencies

Initiative 1.3
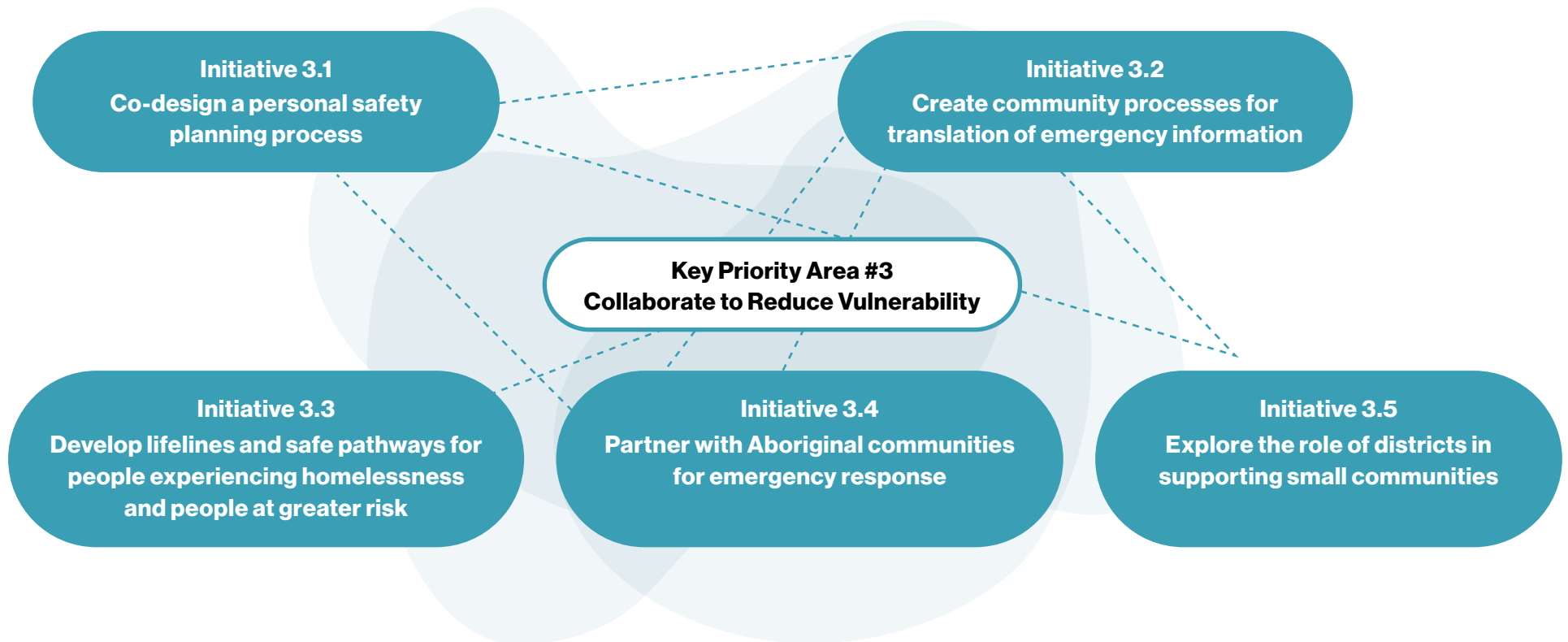**Create more pathways to volunteer and help in emergencies**
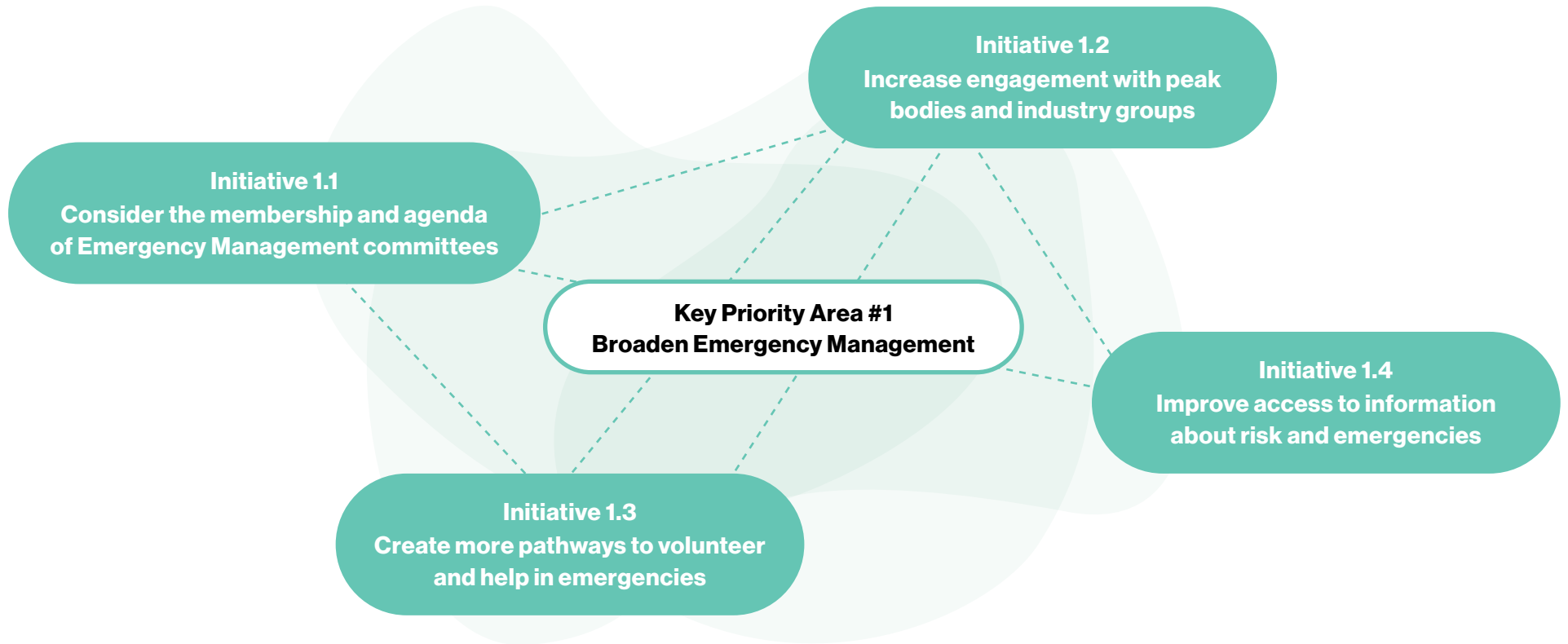
Key Priority Area #2: Work Locally to Increase Preparedness

The Western Australian Emergency Management framework aims to localise Emergency Management to the extent possible and to share responsibility for risk reduction between individuals, communities and government. Current Emergency Management arrangements and community preparedness activities do not necessarily equip communities with the essential knowledge and skills for these responsibilities and are not scaled to augment local capacity. It is recommended that community development models be used within Emergency Management to build the capacity of communities to reduce risk, prepare and respond for emergencies, and recover.

Initiative 2.2
Enable interactive community mapping for risk reduction

Initiative 2.1
Foster community-led behaviour change for preparedness

Key Priority Area #2
Work Locally to Increase Preparedness

Initiative 2.3
Engage community in planning for recovery

Initiative 2.4
Equip young adults, youth and children with the skills for disaster resilience
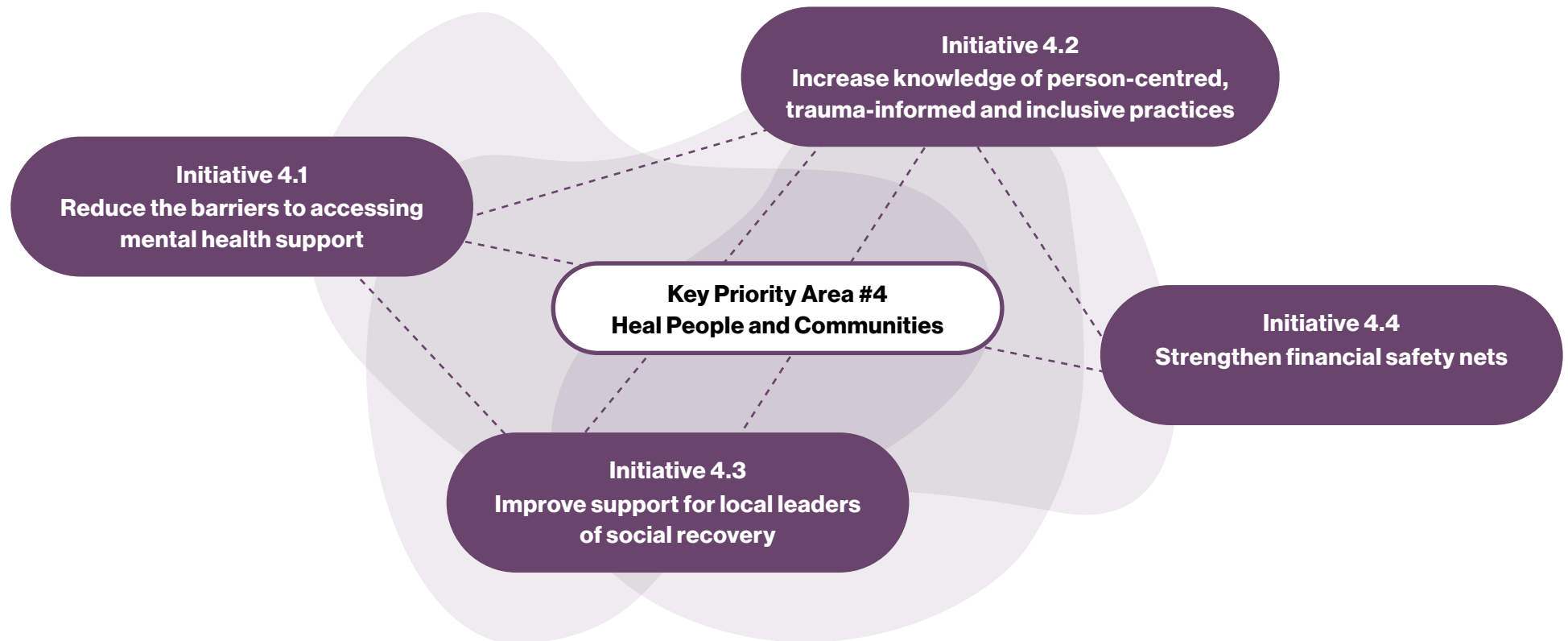
Key Priority Area #3: Collaborate to Reduce Vulnerability

People who experience disadvantage are more likely to be impacted by an emergency or disaster. In addition to physical and economic impacts, people with a lived experience of disadvantage describe feeling unsafe, abandoned or undervalued when their needs, and their abilities, are not acknowledged in an emergency. These feelings can increase the psychological impacts of an event. The issue was highlighted during the initial COVID-19 response. Older people, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people experiencing homelessness expressed their sense of vulnerability and abandonment. Key Priority Area #3 aims to improve community resilience by reducing the vulnerability of those most at risk in emergencies using co-design processes that involve end-users and people with lived experience in the design of solutions. Co-design requires that government, non-government stakeholders and end-users participate as equal collaborators.

Initiative 3.1
Co-design a personal safety planning process

Initiative 3.2
Create community processes for translation of emergency information

Key Priority Area #3
Collaborate to Reduce Vulnerability

Initiative 3.3
Develop lifelines and safe pathways for people experiencing homelessness and people at greater risk

Initiative 3.4
Partner with Aboriginal communities for emergency response

Initiative 3.5
Explore the role of districts in supporting small communities

Key Priority Area #4: Heal People and Communities

The impacts of trauma, and the priority of assisting people and communities to heal, are not explicitly recognised in Emergency Management arrangements and practices. Key Priority Area #4 is also about prioritising the needs and voices of people. Person-centred practices that respond to the capabilities, lived experience and choices of communities deliver better outcomes in terms of well-being, recovery and resilience.

Initiative 4.2
Increase knowledge of person-centred, trauma-informed and inclusive practices

Initiative 4.1
Reduce the barriers to accessing mental health support

Key Priority Area #4
Heal People and Communities

Initiative 4.4
Strengthen financial safety nets

Initiative 4.3
Improve support for local leaders of social recovery

Resources

Useful Links

Link	
www.dfes.wa.gov.au	Information about bushfires and natural hazards
www.emergency.wa.gov.au	Information and warnings about emergency incidents around the state including natural hazards and public health alerts
www.water.wa.gov.au	Floodplain mapping, not linked with DFES website or Emergency WA
www.alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au	Information about incidents in parks, park closures and prescribed burns
www.bom.gov.au	Severe weather advice and warnings
www.abc.net.au/emergency	Emergency advice, re-published from DFES and BOM advice

What do other states do?

Link	
getready.qld.gov.au	Is a single portal to information across State and Local Government websites, including risk mapping and translated content. Natural hazard mapping is available on all Local Government websites
emergency.vic.gov.au	Has a similar format to the EmergencyWA site but has more comprehensive information, including hazard mapping and links to other sites