



Submission on the National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper

April 2024

About us

Established in 1914 and by [Royal Charter](#) in 1941, Australian Red Cross is auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. We have a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of government and Australian society.

Australian Red Cross is one of 191 Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) – the world’s largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

The Movement is guided at all times and in all places by seven [Fundamental Principles](#): Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles sum up our ethics and the way we work, and they are at the core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

We remain neutral, and don’t take sides, including in politics; enabling us to maintain the trust of all and to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and thousands of volunteers and members support us every day, helping solve social issues in their own communities. All our work is inspired and framed by the principle of Humanity: we seek always to act where there is humanitarian need.

Core areas of expertise for Australian Red Cross include Emergency Services, Migration, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Programs, Community Activities and Programs.

Highlights from our [2022-23 Annual Report](#):



18,000+
members and volunteers
acting for humanity



324,000+
Australians supported during
33 emergency activations

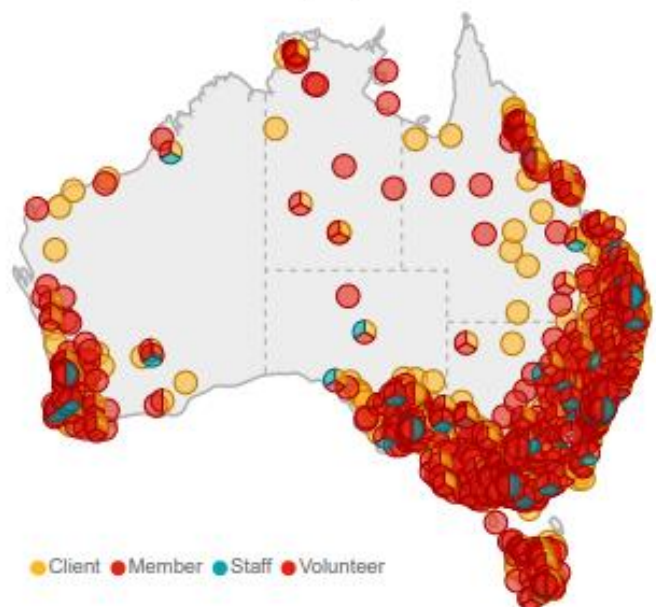


216,000+
social support hours
delivered



19,700+
people from 125 countries
supported through migration
programs

Location of Red Cross people and clients



Purpose

The Australian Government is seeking feedback on Australia's first National Adaptation Plan, which responds to the findings of the National Climate Risk Assessment.

Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to respond to the [National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper](#). We have focused our response on those areas where we have extensive expertise, and that align with the unique humanitarian mandate of Australian Red Cross.

Summary of recommendations

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Australian Government:

Recommendation 1

Enables and supports individuals, households and communities to build their resilience by understanding their climate risk and put in place plans to mitigate and adapt, prioritising the most at-risk Local Government Areas and those experiencing vulnerability.

This requires an investment in social capital – building community connections that enable us to cope and adapt to the threats of climate change – as well as a coordinated, consistent, scalable approach that provides communities with reliable data, tools and expertise they need to build meaningful plans, and to learn from one another.

Australian Red Cross stands ready to support the Government to deliver this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

Uses the National Adaptation Plan to establish (and make accessible) consistent, evidence-based, minimum requirements for individual, household and community mitigation and adaptation plans, and a menu of mitigation and adaptation solutions that may be suitable for inclusion in those plans, including those that build social capital.

Australian Red Cross stands ready to support the development of these requirements and options, drawing on the collective resources of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Recommendation 3

Recognises and embeds the status of Australian Red Cross as auxiliary to government in the humanitarian field within the National Adaptation Plan – Australian Red Cross is foundationally required to support the Australian people in the face of crises and emergencies, as per international and domestic law.

We stand ready to support the Australian Government to realise the ambition of the National Adaptation Plan. Our auxiliary status is not merely a designation; it is a force multiplier that allows a more nuanced, collaborative, and holistic approach to tackling the challenges that lie ahead.

What a well-adapted Australia looks like

A well-adapted and resilient Australia is one in which individuals, households and communities understand their climate risk, have plans in place to mitigate and adapt to that risk, and have the networks and resources to act upon those plans.

Progress in realising this vision will be limited, however, if approaches are developed in silos, with each community working independently to secure reliable data, research better practice and develop an adaptation plan. A coordinated, consistent and scalable approach is needed – one that provides communities with reliable data, tools, templates and support to take action, and to learn from one another.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with the Australian Government to make this vision a reality – prioritising the most at-risk Local Government Areas and vulnerable population groups in Australia.

Building adaptive and resilient communities

Climate adaptation involves actions that aim to reduce, compensate for, or adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change.

In order to adapt, communities must draw on their strengths. Resilience is a process of positive adaptation before, during and after adversity. It is strengthened by bringing community members together to understand their collective risk, existing networks, strengths and resources.

Australian Red Cross has undertaken research about the importance of community resilience in the context of disasters and climate adaptation ([Australian Red Cross, 2023](#)).

Through our research, we understand that resilience is not a fixed outcome or goal. It is not about 'bouncing back' or the immediate ability to respond to negative events. It requires long-term commitment. It emphasises strengths rather than needs and deficits.

Inclusivity is key. The more people who get involved in activities that foster a sense of community, efficacy and problem solving, the greater their resilience to adversity.

There are four indicators that we look for when building disaster resilience. If a community or person has all four elements, they likely have high resilience.

Knowledge

- having access to, and the ability to act upon, appropriate information, communal knowledge, and local wisdom.

Wellbeing

- a person or community's health and wellbeing status, including psychological coping ability.

Security

- having adequate shelter, safety, and the capacity to maintain financial protection of assets and livelihoods.

Connection

- the amount of support people can draw upon (social capital) to achieve goals or shared objectives.

We have identified 11 dimensions of a resilient community ([IFRC, 2016](#)). Each of these align with the resilience capacities above:

1. **Risk management:** A resilient community knows and manages its risks.
2. **Health:** A resilient community is healthy – mentally and physically.
3. **Water and sanitation:** A resilient community can meet its basic water and sanitation needs.
4. **Shelter:** A resilient community can meet its basic shelter needs.
5. **Food and nutrition security:** A resilient community can meet its basic food needs.
6. **Economic opportunities:** A resilient community has diverse economic opportunities.
7. **Infrastructure and services:** A resilient community has well-maintained and accessible infrastructure and services.
8. **Natural resource management:** A resilient community has access to, manages and uses its natural assets in a sustainable manner.
9. **Social cohesion:** A resilient community draws on formal and informal community networks to act for the good of all in the community.
10. **Inclusion:** A resilient community fights exclusion on any basis, including gender, ability, ethnicity, religion, political view etc.
11. **Connectedness:** A resilient community has strong and supportive relationships with local government authorities and other external organisations, as well as access to information.

Resilience cannot be developed for, or on behalf of, communities ([AIDR, 2020](#)). Communities must be enabled and empowered to build resilience, and this requires sharing of information and resources within and between communities and partners.

For the National Adaptation Plan to realise its aims, the Government must establish the environment for communities to succeed. This involves providing communities with reliable data, tools and expertise to develop their own evidence-based plans, and supporting communities to build the connections, networks and partnerships necessary to achieve resilience outcomes.

Although strengthening community values, promoting self-leadership and developing greater community resilience are not typically seen as 'climate change adaptation', in our view, they are. Anything that enhances social capital and infrastructure, reduces the damage that future disasters will have on people and communities. *This is climate change adaptation in action.*

Australian Red Cross has experience working with and for communities to build resilience. Our approach is human-centred, strengths-based, and community-led. We ensure that the voices and needs of those who are vulnerable, people with a disability, people from culturally and diverse backgrounds and First Nations people are heard and considered. We stand ready to support the Government and Australian communities to deliver the ambition of the National Adaptation Plan.

Australian Red Cross delivers RediCommunities and EmergencyRedi Workshops in some of the most at-risk communities in Australia, identified as such based on our data modelling, hazard risk forecasting by Risk Frontiers and our analysis of previous disasters, impacts and vulnerability.

Examples of projects working with people experiencing vulnerability are provided below:

- [Out of the Storm](#) project, working with people experiencing homelessness in South Australia,

- Reimagining Resilience Project, working with First Nations communities in Northern Territory, and
- Disaster Resilience work with [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities](#) in Queensland.

As a result of our projects and programs, people are better informed and empowered to make decisions, they have increased physical and emotional preparedness, and they take action to reduce risk at the individual, household and community level.

Recommendation 1

The Australian Government enables and supports individuals, households and communities to build their resilience by understanding their climate risk and put in place plans to mitigate and adapt, prioritising the most at-risk Local Government Areas and those experiencing vulnerability.

This requires an investment in social capital – building community connections that enable us to cope and adapt to the threats of climate change – as well as a coordinated, consistent, scalable approach that provides communities with reliable data, tools and expertise they need to build meaningful plans, and to learn from one another.

Australian Red Cross stands ready to support the Government to deliver this recommendation.

Practical ways that the National Adaptation Plan can support action

Because of the complexity of climate change, no single government, community, organisation or sector can address the challenge alone – a collective and coordinated approach is required to maximise time and resources.

The National Adaptation Plan must unify and align effort.

The National Adaptation Plan could establish consistent, evidence-based minimum requirements for inclusion in mitigation and adaptation plans. This would ensure that efforts at national, state, community, household and individual level are grounded in better practice and work collectively to achieve the desired outcomes.

The National Adaptation Plan could provide a menu of mitigation and adaptation options.

We understand that no national level plan can (or should) prescribe adaptation actions at the local level, however people don't know what they don't know, and starting from a blank page can be daunting for would-be developers of adaptation actions.

A bank or library of ideas that could be included in adaptation and mitigation plans, with advice and tools to conduct cost-benefit-risk analyses, would accelerate dialogue and investigation appropriate to local circumstances while fostering collaboration and ensuring we learn from what works.

These could be generic options (i.e. avoid, accommodate, protect, retreat, attack, relocate) or specific options (i.e. firebreaks, desalination, reforestation, enhancing social capital). Importantly, adaptation options should not be limited to the built environment – they must include social and behavioural actions that connect individuals, households and communities.

We note work underway through the [Hazard Insurance Partnership](#) to develop a mitigation measure knowledge base. Such a knowledge base could be leveraged for this purpose. The National Emergency Management Agency has approached Australian Red Cross to engage with the Hazard Insurance Partnership, to contribute ideas on working at the individual and household level.

A mechanism or platform that connects communities doing this work and allows them to share case studies of adaptation options would help build momentum, capacity and ensure the sustainability of this work into the future.

Recommendation 2

The Australian Government uses the National Adaptation Plan to establish (and make accessible) consistent, evidence-based, minimum requirements for individual, household and community mitigation and adaptation plans, and a menu of mitigation and adaptation options that may be suitable for inclusion in those plans, including those that build social capital.

Australian Red Cross stands ready to support the development of these requirements and options, drawing on the collective resources of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Further insights for consideration

Australian Red Cross offers the following additional insights for your consideration in developing the National Adaptation Plan.

These insights draw on the expertise of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement including our role as the host country for the Global Migration Lab and are based on our experience providing psychosocial assistance to communities in crisis.

Strengthening the social environment

Australian Red Cross welcomes the mainstreaming of adaptation that builds resilience and social capital across systems, as it enables communities to prepare for and recover from disasters.

We note that while the Issues Paper highlights a range of initiatives and partnerships across risk areas, the majority of those focus on physical infrastructure, as opposed to human infrastructure. While hard, structural, asset-based measures are valuable, there are risks in prioritising the built environment at the exclusion or expense of the social environment. Our extensive work before, during and after disasters demonstrates the central role and necessity of building social capital. People are the key to resilience.

The Australian Psychological Association highlights that in order to prepare communities for a world in which our climate looks and feels very different, we need to invest in strong psychological support to build resilience ([APS, 2024](#)).

The National Adaptation Plan must ensure that human wellbeing is prioritised across all identified risk areas.

Measures that build social capital (i.e., the connections between people that allow them to work collectively and exchange information) will enhance resilience to all disruptions.

For example, in Japan in 2011 when a triple disaster occurred (an earthquake triggered a tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear meltdown), it demonstrated how \$380 billion AUD invested in 40+ foot tall concrete seawalls disrupted local ecosystems, angered residents, and did little to save lives, while the intangible social bonds in other coastal communities helped residents survive and thrive ([Aldrich, 2023](#)).

Research also shows the long-term economic impacts of disasters on people's mental health and wellbeing, are equivalent to costs of replacing personal assets ([Australian Business Roundtable, 2021](#)).

We also note that while the Issues Paper places an emphasis on regional and remote communities, communities experience heightened climate risks and vulnerabilities regardless of their geographic location. Intersecting population characteristics such as age, gender, cultural background, language fluency, health issues, and ability can all impact on the vulnerability of a community. Adaptation action must be tailored to community needs with those factors in mind.

Australian Red Cross is well placed to partner with the government in supporting communities to build their social resilience. Our work focuses on supporting community-led initiatives that strengthen social infrastructure, which is key to building resilience in the face of climate change.

First Nations' values and knowledge systems

Australian Red Cross welcomes the proposed recognition and prioritisation of First Nations voices in the National Adaptation Plan.

We encourage building capacity and resilience *with* and not *for* First Nations communities, recognising strengths rather than taking a deficit-based approach, and acknowledging the unconscious biases at play in policy, procedure and practice.

In taking action to strengthen First Nations-led adaptation, a sense of allyship, where government and partners listen to understand, rather than listen to respond, is critical.

To address key issues, such as the loss of cultural heritage, loss of traditional ways of life and displacement in response to climate-accelerated disasters, it is important to acknowledge that mainstreaming processes may be understood as assimilation, and lead to a loss of voice and erosion of cultural activities for First Nations communities.

A bottom-up approach will enable communities to drive their own recovery and identify culturally safe adaptation actions. These might include facilitating a quick return for people displaced by disasters or embedding reconciliation into regional partnership agreements.

Traditional knowledges can support this work, but First Nations voice must be represented in every forum, at every table and in every decision that impacts this work – embodying the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’.

There is much to learn from First Nations leadership and ways of working, including traditional understandings of place and Country, the impact of climate on traditional foods, and collective ownership of the future.

Climate mobility and adaptation

Climate-driven population movement is likely to increase in the years ahead – both internally (within Australia) and regionally (people seeking safe and orderly migration routes to Australia, where available, to escape climate driven disasters, resource shortages and conflicts) ([IFRC, 2022](#)).

In the Issues Paper, adaptation is framed as an achievable pathway where people stay in place. However, we are already seeing instances where this is not possible ([IAG, 2023](#)). For many communities, a resilient and adaptive approach to unacceptable climate risk will involve moving out of harm's way before a disaster strikes or a place becomes uninhabitable ([IFRC, 2022](#)).

The National Adaptation Plan should acknowledge planned relocation and resettlement as a proactive adaptation measure, and as a remedial measure after displacement.

These adaptation options are complex, require resourcing and whole-of-community planning, an understanding of social vulnerability, voluntariness, support for those who choose to stay and for those who choose to remain, ensuring safety, dignity and agency of all ([IFRC, 2022](#)).

Policy and legal preparedness are critical to ensure the protection of people at risk of climate and disaster related displacement. There is an urgent need to integrate climate mobility considerations within national and international climate adaptation policy in complementary ways. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 ([UNDRR, 2015](#)) contains specific provisions to 'address disaster-induced human mobility to strengthen the resilience of affected people and that of host communities'.

Australia is one of the very few countries that have not signed up to the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which contains specific provisions relating to climate mobility. Signing it is a key opportunity for Australia to demonstrate its commitment to preventing and addressing the humanitarian impacts of climate change across the region. It will ensure people can continue living on their lands for as long as possible and move with safety and dignity before a disaster strikes or places become uninhabitable.

Reducing the drivers of climate change

As a humanitarian organisation, Australian Red Cross engages in humanitarian diplomacy on issues of humanitarian concern.

The Climate and Environmental Charter for Humanitarian Organisations ([ICRC, 2024](#)), of which the [Australian Government is a signatory](#) (as at 18 October 2023), recognises that today's climate and environmental crises threaten the survival of humanity, and calls for ambitious action at all levels to reduce risks and address the causes and consequences of climate change.

We encourage the government to explore all options to reduce the risks and drivers of climate change and address the causes of climate and environmental crises.

Recognising the auxiliary status of Australian Red Cross

Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to work with the Australian Government in further developing and implementing the National Adaptation Plan.

No other organisation works where we do (we are embedded in communities around the country), when we do (at all stages of the emergency management continuum) and how we do (we focus on the wellbeing of people and communities).

We are established under international legal frameworks and domestically under a Royal Charter – this gives us authority to work in the humanitarian field alongside all levels of government, and those who act with their authority. No other organisation has this unique auxiliary status.

We work under an internationally recognised and respected emblem that is regulated under international and domestic law.

We are exclusively humanitarian; neutral, impartial and independent; always seeking to support those who are most in need and ensure the trust and confidence of all.

The benefits that this provides the Government include access to the largest humanitarian network in the world, and a partner that is fundamentally required to prevent and respond to humanitarian crises.

The National Adaptation Plan provides an opportunity to formally define where and how the work of Australian Red Cross supplements programs and services in Australia to realise the full potential of our auxiliary relationship with Government.

Recommendation 3

The Australian Government recognises and embeds the status of Australian Red Cross as auxiliary to government in the humanitarian field within the National Adaptation Plan – Australian Red Cross is foundationally required to support the Australian people in the face of crises and emergencies, as per international and domestic law.

Conclusion

As one of the most disaster-affected countries in the most disaster-prone region of the world, Australia needs to maintain a progressive, ambitious, and forward-looking approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Australian Red Cross has been responding to disasters for over 100 years. In that time, we've seen the importance of proactive adaptation time and time again, especially community-led approaches which are known to increase active participation, buy-in, and sustainability.

Communities know their strengths and needs better than anyone else. They are best placed to develop meaningful climate adaptation solutions for strengthening resilience locally. With the right skills, resources, and support, they can withstand shocks, solve problems collectively and emerge stronger after disasters and shocks.

We stand ready to support the Australian Government to realise the ambition of the National Adaptation Plan.

Our auxiliary status is not merely a designation; it is a force multiplier that allows a more nuanced, collaborative, and holistic approach to tackling the challenges that lie ahead.

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