

Diversity in the emergency services sector encompasses gender, disability and cultural diversity. Currently, there are low rates of participation for women and people from diverse cultural backgrounds in many areas of the sector. This has ramifications for the capacity of the emergency services to modernise and build human service capability.

The 2011 National Strategy for Disaster Resilience identifies the importance of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, the need for the emergency management sector to understand the needs of such communities, and the critical importance of community consultation and partnerships. The strategy also stresses the importance of “more action-based resilience planning to strengthen local capacity and capability with a greater emphasis on community engagement and better understanding of the diversity, needs, strengths and vulnerabilities within communities”. Key components of the response are to build trust and understand how natural hazard risks function.

One in four Australians – or some 5.75 million people – were born overseas. Many members of recently arrived CALD communities may not understand Australian natural hazards or the information relating to them, and may also have different levels of trust relating to officials in uniforms. Emergency management personnel need to become culturally competent and aware of the different aspects of local communities to be able to support and respond to their needs and what barriers to resilience may exist amongst diverse communities. At the same time, diversity within the emergency management sector is also an untapped area of potential that can have benefits not only for the sector, but also for the broader community. It is important to understand how existing forms of community resilience, knowledge and resourcefulness can be harnessed and strengthened, and how the benefits derived from diversity add value, and what that value is.

Throughout 2015-2017, emergency service agencies around Australia participated in workshops hosted by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC to consider the major issues in natural hazards emergency management.

This publication on diversity summarises the outcomes of one of these workshops and poses questions as a guide for a national research agenda in natural hazard emergency management.

DIVERSITY AND STRONG LEADERSHIP

The emergency management sector has been tackling the issue of diversity in the emergency management sector for a considerable amount of time with relatively small progress. More recently leaders in the sector are beginning to recognise the value of diversity and their role in achieving a more diverse workforce. This is an important step for the sector as strong leadership will drive transformational change in the culture to uncover and consistently address the systemic and attitudinal barriers to diversity and inclusion in the sector. A key aspect of this is to have diverse leadership at all levels, to mentor staff and exemplify the benefits of a diverse culture. Although the sector has worked to improve in this area, more work could be done to attract more diversity onto boards and in leadership teams to ensure they are more representative of the community they serve.

Key issues that need to be addressed are:

- **How can leaders entrenched in traditional processes be encouraged to embrace change?**
- **How can the sector design agile process to enable inclusiveness and innovation?**
- **What strategic doctrine has worked in the past to encourage systemic change in industries and organisations?**



As a culture that is exclusive in nature, that does not always embrace difference, sometimes a part of the resistance to diversity is an unconscious refusal to think differently about emergency management. Sector transformation is about making those necessary changes for diversity. The business of transformation lies in the economic factors of diversity, attracting the best workforce for the sector. Consequently, defining the business case for diversity is critical to reaching the overall workforce and understanding how diversity can help to achieve the mission and vision of emergency management organisations.

Ultimately the culture that permeates across the emergency management sector needs to be addressed to achieve broader awareness and appreciation of diversity promoted across all levels of emergency management sector organisations. The sector cannot continue to rely on a few committed individuals to champion change. It needs to build awareness and understanding about the benefits, barriers and implications of not having a diverse and inclusive organisation.

Taking a strength-based approach to diversity support and training enables a more positive narrative around diversity. There are existing diversity reporting opportunities that can be harnessed to support diversity within organisations. However, these are not always meaningful and organisations don't always use them as effectively as they could. Meaningful data can help the sector to truly gauge how successful each organisation is and in which areas, so the sector as a whole can learn from each other. This kind of data can also help organisations to understand how well they are tackling diversity and where they sit in relation to the sector, and other sectors, both nationally and internationally.

- **What are the benefits barriers and implications of diverse workforce?**
- **What business models exist for diversity in other industries that can be applied to the emergency management sector?**
- **How can the emergency management sector capitalise on the economic factors of diversity?**
- **Which methods including sharing stories are the most effective to share success and failures in diversity?**

As an industry the emergency management sector need to work across the community to reframe what an emergency services professional looks like. There is a widespread belief that only men work as responders, and women and diverse groups are more comfortable in other roles.

As cultures, values and demographics evolve so should the culture. For example, with the evolution of support technology, the future emergency service professional could change from being extremely physically capable to being having greater capability. These kind of changes provide an opportunity for better participation of diverse groups.

Contemporary political and social drivers will also lead change in the role of the emergency service professional with potentially radical consequences for the sector. The sector has the opportunity to change the traditional paradigm and genuinely collaborate with diverse communities to build resilience and prevent and prepare for emergencies. This will not only require a different skill set from the emergency service professional, but it could also significantly reduce cost to government as the community becomes more resilient.

- **What are the implications of the changing role of the emergency service professional on diversity? How are other countries dealing with these issues? Is there anything we can learn from international counterparts?**
- **What does the community expect of the emergency service professional, now and in the future?**
- **How can community engagement be carried out more effectively before, during and after emergencies?**



National research priorities for natural hazards emergency management

What are the most significant natural hazard emergency management issues Australia faces over the next 10 years?

This was the question posed to emergency service agencies around Australia in a series of workshops hosted by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC from 2015-2017.

This publication is an outcome of one of these workshops and part of a broader national research agenda in natural hazards emergency management being developed by the CRC.

The workshops provided an exploration of major issues that would benefit from the support of research at a national level. There was no attempt to solve any of the issues or problems raised nor was there any discussion on the details of specific research projects. The participants discussed the issues they believed were relevant to the specific topic under discussion, the relative importance of the issues and the reasons underpinning their relative importance.

This series of publications summarises the outcomes of the workshops conducted so far – more will take place in 2017. They provide a guide for future research activities by identifying national priorities across major themes. The workshop outcomes have also influenced the evolving research agenda of the CRC.

This publication on diversity has been developed with the assistance of a network assembled by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council on diversity. The network hosted the workshop in Melbourne and by video conference to all other Australian states on 31 January 2017.



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