

Emerging Minds.

Following a request during the public hearing we attended on July 30, we are providing further advice and recommendations regarding the development of a **National Infant, Children and Young People Disaster Resilience committee (NICYPDRC)** and potential governance arrangements for this group. The committee is intended to support decision makers regarding the right mix of activities to strengthen infants, children, young people and families' psychosocial resilience in preparation for, and in response to, disasters.

Our initial recommendation regarding the position of this group is based on our understanding of governance structures that existed prior to, and at the time of, the 2019-2020 bushfires. However, we acknowledge that current structural arrangements are changing or likely to change, in response to this enquiry, to COVID-19, alongside other relevant reviews and enquiries that are currently in progress. Ideally, the group would sit within a governance structure that facilitates recovery preparedness and recovery response with the following features:

- Brings together key portfolios from Commonwealth and State Government funders and decision makers across health and mental health, education and care, social services, emergency services and community recovery
- Coordination of local preparedness and recovery plans for infants, children and young people.

For this reason, we are making suggestions regarding potential options, identifying the benefits and challenges for each option.

Option 1: DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS

The [Department of Home Affairs](#) leads the Australian Government's planning and responses to disasters and emergencies. The Emergency Management Australia division coordinates the Australian Government disaster assistance to states and territories and arrangements are outlined in the [National Emergency Management Arrangements](#).

The [Australian Government Disaster Response Plan](#) (COMDISPLAN) outlines the arrangements regarding Australian Government non-financial assistance to Australian state and territories in a disaster, as process to support jurisdictions seeking advice or expertise from Commonwealth.

[Australian Emergency Management Arrangements Handbook](#) (AIDR 2019, p.8) cite the following that "*the roles of the Australian Government in emergency management are to:* [in particular]

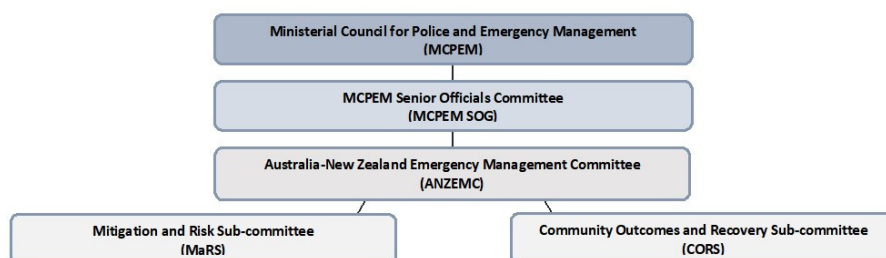
- *build and promote resilience to emergencies*
- *where necessary, provide direct assistance to affected communities*
- *undertake and support the conduct of research of national significance to the management of emergencies*".

Further in handbook (AIDR 2019, p.9) state the "*the Australian Government has a continuing role in providing:* [in particular]

- *coordination of the national response to emergencies*
- *a contact point for requests for assistance to, and for offers of assistance from, other countries*
- *leadership on national emergency management related strategies*".

The Australian Government peak government committee responsible and provides a nationally coordinated approach to emergency management through the [Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee](#) (ANZEMC). It reports to the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management. ANZEMC is responsible for influencing and advocating for national policies and capabilities that reduce disaster risk, minimise the potential for harm and uphold public trust and confidence in emergency management arrangements.

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A key committee enabler is the Community Outcomes and Recovery Subcommittee (CORS) in supporting infant, children and young people in disasters. As Emergency Management Australia (EMA) funds [Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience \(AIDR\)](#), we consider the AIDR a potential key enabling structure or agency for the **National Infant, Children and Young People Disaster Resilience committee (NICYPDRC)**.

The benefits of integrating the committee in this area:

- Opportunity to integrate with emergency management operations and ensure responsiveness to needs of infants, children and young people during emergencies
- AIDR is an existing knowledge translation hub for a number of sectors regarding disaster resilience

The challenges of integrating the committee in this area include:

- A strong emphasis on the role of emergency management, with strong networks of emergency services
- This nature of this network is likely to prioritise expertise in emergency services and responses in immediate and short, but sustained or longer-term psychosocial preparedness or responses for children may not be as easily integrated as these are usually led and influenced by Commonwealth and State government health, mental health and education departments

OPTION 2: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The [Department of Health](#) is responsible for the health aspects of national disaster plans, which is outlined in the [National Health Emergency Response Arrangements](#). In addition, they fund a number of national and regional programs and services with the intent to improve the mental health and resilience of infants, children and young people in preparation for and following disasters. This includes primary mental health services, national mental health and resilience capacity building activities in health, social services, education, early childhood education and care, and local coordination and funding of activities through Primary Health Networks.

The [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](#) (AHPPC), is a key decision-making committee for health emergencies and comprised of all state and territory Chief Health Officers and is chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer. AHPPC is also tasked with the role of mitigating emerging health threats related to infectious diseases, the environment as well as natural and human made disasters. The Committee works with states and territories to develop and adopt national health protection policies, guidelines, standards and alignment of plans.

The [National Health Emergency Response Arrangements](#) describe the national health sector enablers available to the AHPPC in response to an emergency of national consequence. The enablers currently include expert committees, working groups, operational teams, equipment caches and specialist health facilities available to the AHPPC for the provision of advice, support and operational input across the key functional areas in response and recovery. The AHPPC may task, activate and deploy any or all of these enablers in response to an emergency of national consequence.

The benefits of integrating the committee in this area are:

- Department of Health is responsible for funding a number of national programs and services designed to support infants, children's and young people's mental health, trauma and resilience including workforce

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capacity building initiatives in health, mental health, social services, schools and early childhood education and care

- A capacity to focus on longer term resilience strategies required for preparedness and long-term responses to disaster, including existing programs that can be activated to deliver support
- Mechanisms to coordinate and commission local recovery and resilience activities through Primary Health Networks
- National Health Emergency Standing Committee addresses the operational aspects of disaster medicine and health emergency management in an all hazards context with a focus on preparedness and response.
- Disaster Mental Health Working Group provide advice on mental health and welfare recovery aspects of the emergency.
- The new Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Mental Health role and how this could be integrated within these national arrangements

The challenges of integrating the committee in this area include:

- Lower levels of integration with aspects of disaster resilience that do not have direct health benefits but can enhance psychosocial resilience (eg. community rebuilding and infrastructure projects)
- The COVID-19 response appears to have resulted in some changes to previous emergency management arrangements and this requires further information and clarification.

OPTION 3: THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION

The National Mental Health Commission provides evidence and advice on strategies to improve mental health and prevent suicide. This includes guidance in relation to psychosocial and mental health activities in the context of disasters. They are leading the development of a national Framework to guide a coordinated approach in Australia to psychosocial and mental health issues in the context of natural disasters. The Framework will aim to improve how governments work together to respond to and support people's mental health before, during and after natural disasters. Therefore, the **National Infant, Children and Young People Disaster Resilience committee (NICYPDRC)** could act as an advisory group and network for the National Mental Health Commission in relation to their advice and guidance to different governments on responding to disasters.

The benefits of integrating the committee in this area are:

- The National Mental Health Commission has existing networks and structures to provide national guidance in relation to mental health matters of national significance, including in response to disasters
- The Draft Productivity Commission highlighted potential roles and responsibilities for the National Mental Health Commission, which if agreed to, place additional responsibilities in this group
- Increasing activities to guide mental health reforms regarding infant and child mental health, which could incorporate disaster preparedness, response and resilience activities

The challenges of integrating the committee in this area include:

- Limited levels of responsibility for program delivery and implementation (which primarily sit with Government Departments)

Recommendation

Pending future arrangements and structures, our recommendation is for the committee to sit within the Department of Health, with membership to be connected with the Department of Home Affairs and the National Mental Health Commission.