

# Disaster Management Framework

Primary Care



**phn**  
DARLING DOWNS  
AND WEST MORETON

An Australian Government Initiative



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## Acknowledgements

Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across our region and pays respect to the Elders past, present and as well as emerging leaders. We recognise these lands were never ceded and acknowledge the continuation of culture and connection to land, sky and sea. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and honour the rich diversity of the world's oldest living culture.




Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN acknowledges the contribution of several Primary Health Networks

(PHNs) who have developed excellent Disaster Management Frameworks in recognition of our role in a changing climate. We would like to specifically acknowledge Healthy North Coast PHN and for their Frameworks which helped in the development and design of our Management Framework.

We would also like to thank Dr Cath Hester, Chair RACGP (Qld) and Dr Tony Bayliss (Chair, Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN) for their advice and support.

# 1. Purpose

The purpose of this Disaster Management Framework is to guide the preparation, response and recovery activities **undertaken by the primary care sector** when disasters impact our region. Specifically, through:

 <h2>Prepare</h2>	 <h2>Respond</h2>	 <h2>Recover</h2>
<p>The primary care sector to be prepared so when disasters occur they can continue to operate and respond.</p>	<p>Within the Queensland Disaster Management context, response to the health and wellbeing needs of the community during emergencies or disasters.</p>	<p>Support community recovery efforts after an emergency or disaster.</p>

# 2. About our region

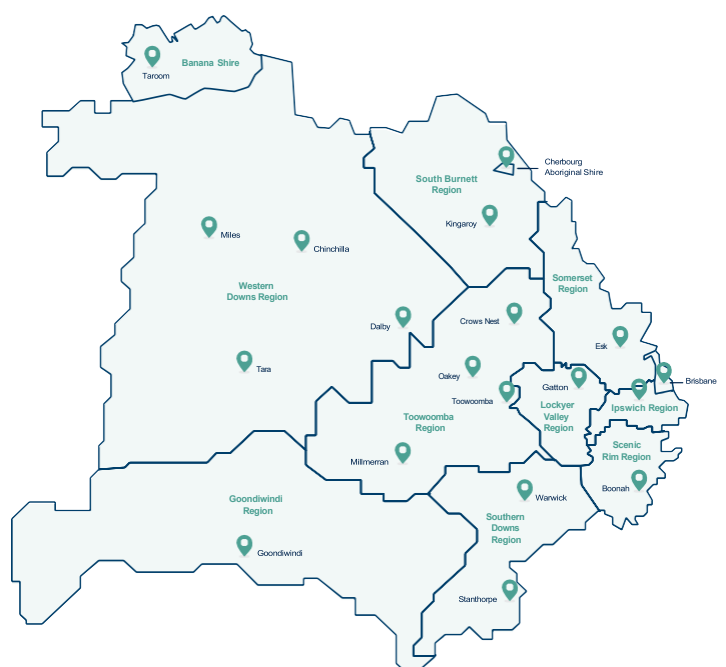
The Darling Downs and West Moreton region is around 99,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of approximately 600,000 people.

The region covers 12 local government areas (LGA), including the Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim, Somerset, South Burnett, Cherbourg, Southern Downs, Goondiwindi and Western Downs LGAs as well as communities located in the Banana Shire and Brisbane LGA.

Due to the large and predominantly rural geography, the region has experiences significant threat of emergencies and natural disasters that include:

- bushfires
- cyclones
- flooding
- prolonged droughts
- heat waves
- potential chemical/ fuel accidents due to our extensive interstate road and rail networks.

Furthermore, Queensland rural and regional areas are at greater risk of escalating social and economic costs of future natural disasters due to higher levels of social disadvantage, fewer services and supports, geographic barriers and lower levels of economic opportunity.



### 3. Disaster Management in Queensland

A disaster is defined as a serious disruption in a community, caused by the impact of an event that requires a significant coordinated response by the state and other entities to help the community recover from the disruption. (Section 13 (1) Qld State Disaster Management Act 2003)

Queensland's disaster management arrangements comprise a four tiered system: three levels of government – local, state and federal – and an additional state government tier between local and state levels known as disaster districts.

These disaster districts enable a more efficient and effective operational service delivery in support of local communities and address the size, complexity and diversity of Queensland.

#### Disaster Management Structures

Queensland's disaster management arrangements enable a progressive escalation of support and assistance through the four tiers as required as shown below.

These arrangements comprise several key management and coordination structures for achieving effective disaster management in Queensland.

The management and coordination structures are:

- **Disaster management groups** that operate at local, district and state levels and are responsible for the planning, organisation, coordination and implementation of all measures to mitigate/prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster events.
- **Coordination centres** at local, district and state levels that support disaster management groups in coordinating information, resources and services necessary for disaster operations.
- **Disaster management plans**, developed to ensure appropriate disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery at local, district and state levels.
- **Functional lead agencies** through which the disaster management functions and responsibilities of the state government are managed and coordinated.
- **Hazard specific primary agencies**, responsible for the management and coordination of combating specific hazards.
- **Specific-purpose committees**, either permanent or temporary, established under the authority of disaster management groups for specific purposes relating to disaster management.



## Disaster Management Process

The *Disaster Management Act 2003* (the Act) and the *Disaster Management Regulation 2014* (the Regulation) forms the legislative basis for disaster management within all levels of government and Queensland’s disaster management arrangements. As per section 63 of *the Act*, **the Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES)** has the authority and accountability for the preparation and management of disaster management guidelines.

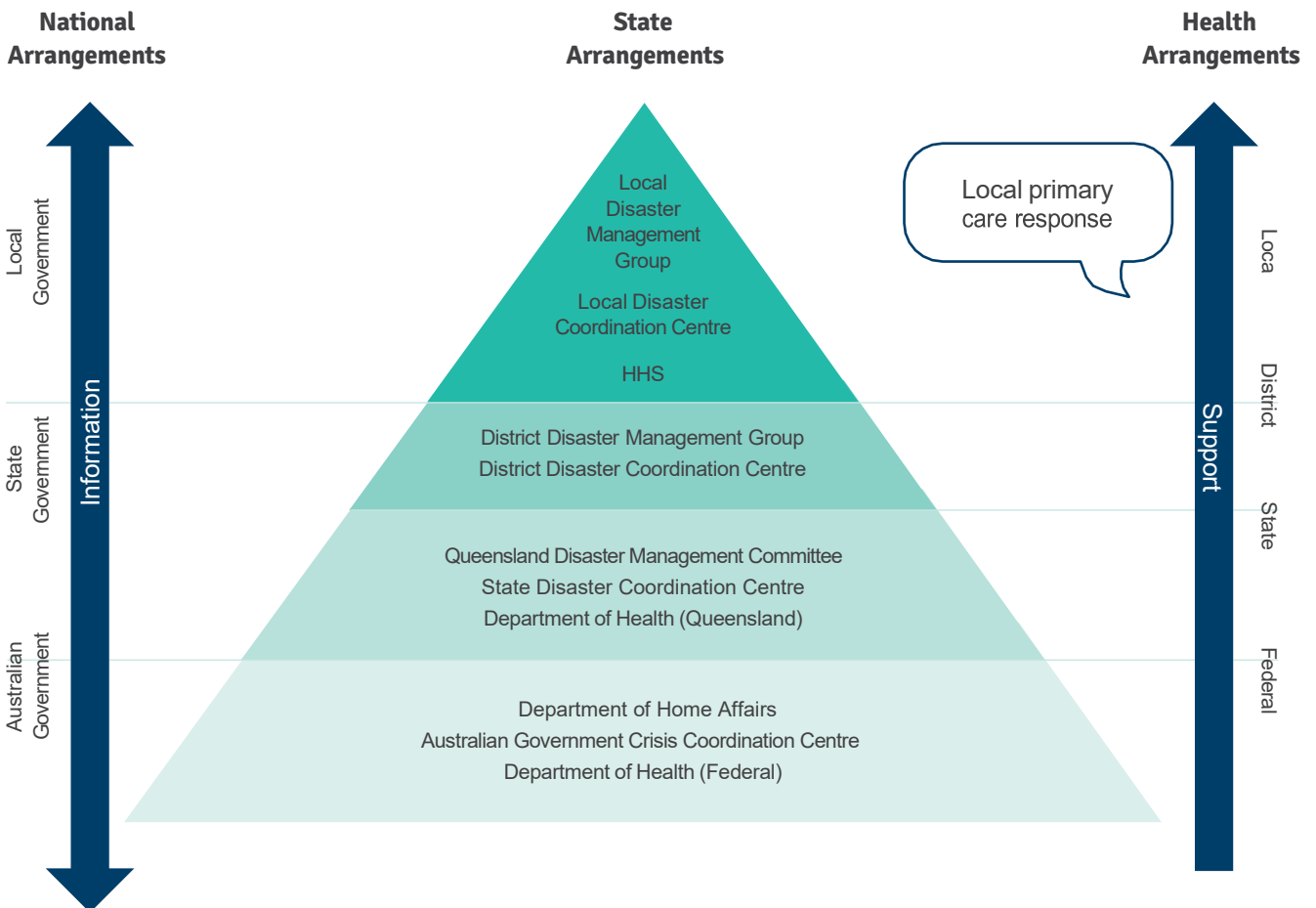
Local governments, through their respective Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG), have primary responsibility to manage a disaster at the community level. Accordingly, they are responsible for the development and implementation of their Local Disaster Management Plan (LDMP).

If local governments identify gaps in their capacity or capability to manage a potential disaster and require additional resources to manage an event, they can request support from their District Disaster Management Group (DDMG). This allows for the rapid mobilisation of resources at a local, regional or district level.

If district resources are inadequate or inappropriate, requests for assistance can be passed to the state via the State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC).

If state resources prove inadequate or inappropriate, Australian Government support can be sought through the Department of Home Affairs.

The authorising environment for disaster management is detailed below.



## 4. The role of primary care in disaster management

The primary care sector, in particular general practice, is often the first point of contact for patients in times of emergencies or natural disasters. This means it is important for general practices to have an Emergency Response Plan in place.

An Emergency Response Plan helps general practices to prepare, respond and recover from disasters, while planning for business continuity during such times and providing patients with confidence in the level and quality of care they receive. The RACGP has an [Emergency Response Planning Tool](#) available to assist general practices to better prepare for, respond to and recover from the impacts of emergencies or natural disasters.

Our PHN works collaboratively with Darling Downs Health and West Moreton Health, Darling Downs and West Moreton Public Health Units (PHUs), all LGA councils within the region, and other disaster recovery and resilience groups to support disaster management efforts within the Darling Downs and West Moreton Regions.

The primary objectives of PHNs in emergency planning and preparedness include to:

- **Coordinate:** Support and coordinate the primary health care contribution to health emergency preparedness and coordination processes to identify primary health needs and build resilience.
- **Build capacity:** Assist local primary care providers in health emergency planning, response and recovery.
- **Continuity of access:** Make plans to support local primary care providers continuing to operate during emergencies e.g. by arranging alternative premises.



### Prepare

#### Disaster preparation for patients

In the event of an emergency or a disaster, vulnerable patients face additional challenges. Knowing who those patients are and helping them be prepared is an important role for primary care providers.

In a disaster, vulnerable patients can include those who are:

- pregnant
- elderly and frail
- on multiple medications, or medications that require refrigeration
- on dialysis or use CPAPs or other equipment
- have a physical or other disability
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Primary care providers can support these patients by:

- 0 Ensuring they have a personal disaster plan (examples can be found at <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/home/pcep/>).
- 0 Ensuring they are up to date with their medications
- 0 Have their written permission to advise emergency responders that they may need extra assistance in the event of an emergency.

#### PHN Support

The PHN can support general practice in identifying vulnerable patients so that their health can be appropriately managed. This support can be provided through the practice's PHN primary care liaison officer (PCLO), via [practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au](mailto:practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au)

## Disaster preparation for business

[RACGP standards for general practices \(5th edition\)](#) require general practices to have a documented emergency response plan which is maintained and reviewed frequently.

### PHN Support

The PHN offers support for general practices and other primary care service providers to develop, test and update disaster processes and emergency response plans so they can manage unexpected events and continue to provide quality health care to their community, by:

- Facilitating access to RACGP Emergency Response planning resources and supporting practices to develop emergency response and business continuity plans to ensure general practices can stay open or recover quickly.
- Undertaking annual desktop scenario planning exercises to test emergency response plans and training staff in how to use them.
- Assisting practices to have an emergency kit ready.
- Building organisational awareness of the disaster season within the sector.
- Monitoring, assessing and communicating with the sector about emergencies based on risk / threat.

## Disaster preparation for the primary care sector

Commonwealth and State Government agencies are responsible for on-the-ground disaster management during emergencies or natural disasters.

The primary care sector plays its own important role in responding to disasters. General practices often share the disaster experience with their local community and have a deep understanding of the real-time effects of the disaster in the community.

The primary care sector needs to be prepared and, via the PHN, linked into formal Disaster Management processes at the local level.

### PHN Support

The PHN provides support through:

- Establishing and formalising links with all 12 Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMGs) in the region to represent the primary care sector, including through articulating the role of the PHN (Primary Care) in Local Disaster Management Plans.
- Implementing a program (Primary Care Extended Hours Program) to organise and support interested general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies to extend their operating hours at short notice in areas affected by emergencies or disasters.
- Coordinating and supporting interested general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies to participate in coordinated response efforts at a local level aligned with LDMG and District Disaster Management Group (DDMG) directives (Primary Care Response program). For example, linking and remunerating general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies to attend local disaster recovery centres during the response phase.
- Organising a panel of PHN funded commissioned service providers to provide mental health and other health service supports at short notice.

General practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies interested in participating in, and being consulted on, relevant disaster responses can register with the PHN via [practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au](mailto:practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au).



## Respond

During a disaster, it is important for patients and the community to know where they can access care. Some disasters will require the activation of primary care responders. These may include general practitioners attending evacuation centres, or pharmacies supplying medications into other regions. This type of primary care responses will be coordinated through the PHN.

### PHN Support

In the event of a disaster or emergency, the PHN offers resources and support to the primary care sector and communities during the response phase by:

- 0 Liaising with LDMGs and DDMGs in accordance with required Disaster Management processes.
- 0 Keeping the primary care sector up to date with relevant alerts and warnings during a disaster.
- 0 Activating the Primary Care Extended Hours and / or Primary Care Response programs in the relevant areas affected by the emergency or disaster.
- 0 Commissioning current PHN funded service providers to support response efforts, if called upon by the LDMG / DDMG.

### SMS Emergency Alerts from the PHN

The PHN offers an emergency alert service to local primary care providers. SMS Emergency Alerts are a free, fast, and reliable way to stay informed about public health notifications and critical information during disasters and emergencies. Local health care professionals can subscribe to the [alert service via the PHN website](#).

### Keeping primary care informed

The PHN actively communicates with primary care providers during disasters that have the potential to impact the delivery of care. During a disaster, primary care providers can follow local alerts and updates:

- 0 [PHN GP Updates](#) (email based – subscribe via the [PHN website](#))
- 0 [PHN SMS Emergency Alerts](#) (phone based, emergencies only)
- 0 [The BOM Weather App](#)

### Keeping the community and patients informed

The PHN keeps the LDMG informed about the availability of GPs in the region. In addition, the PHN advises the federal government of the need for extra resources or funding. To assist with this, it is important that general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies are able to keep the PHN informed of their status.

- 0 Communicate changes to opening hours, GP availability or access to your patients. Telehealth may be an alternative option where access is limited.
- 0 Communicate information to the PHN about your closure or capacity to support additional patients.

The PHN's main contact in the event of a disaster is the practice manager or their nominated representative. The PHN will contact local practice managers to ascertain the local situation. Ongoing status reports can be provided to the PHN via email to [practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au](mailto:practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au).

### Activating primary care responders

The PHN will activate primary care responders, based on those who have registered to provide support. General practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies interested in participating in, and being consulted on relevant disaster responses, can register with the PHN via [practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au](mailto:practicesupport@ddwmpnh.com.au).



## Respond

### HealthPathways

HealthPathways offers health professionals local information to make the right decisions together with patients, at the point of care. The pathways are designed primarily for general practice teams, but are also available to specialists, allied health professionals, and other health professionals in the region.

In the circumstance new treatment protocols or service referral pathways are created or need updating, HealthPathways will be the central point to capture new process or treatment protocols, and the point to which the primary care sector will be directed.

#### To access HealthPathways:

 [Darling Downs HealthPathways](#)

 [West Moreton HealthPathways](#)



## Recover

Primary care, in particular general practice and other community-based service providers, play a critical role in supporting communities to recover after emergencies and disasters.

General practice is often the first port of call for people suffering the detrimental effects of emergencies and disasters. Hence, the PHN's focus on business continuity planning in the primary care sector.

However, the long term effects of emergencies and disasters can be evident for many months and years after the event. The PHN has an important role to play in commissioning services, for example mental health services, in response to such community need.

### PHN Support

Depending on the scale of the event, the PHN will provide this support through:

- Supporting general practice, Aboriginal Medical Services and pharmacies to return to normal business as soon as possible.
- Commissioning services and supports in response to community need.
- Administering relevant grants programs on behalf of State and Commonwealth Governments.
- If required, arrange formal debriefs and support for the primary care workforce involved in the emergency or disaster response and recovery phases.

## 5. The role of the PHN in disaster management

The Disaster Management Framework is one of a suite of documents that set out roles and responsibilities for responding to disasters that affect our business operations. The suite of documents guiding our internal and external roles is outlined below.



### Documents for internal business response

- **PHN Disaster Management Policy** establishes Incident Management System including preparation, response and management, and provides guidance for disaster management implementation.
- **PHN Business Continuity Plan** establishes procedures to ensure critical incident and emergency management response, restoration and recovery of PHN operations and business activities.
- **PHN Emergency Plan** contains procedures outlining actions to be taken in the case of a pre-defined emergency that has, or has the potential to, compromise the health and safety of workers and people on site, eg, fire evacuation plan.

### Documents for external business response

- **Disaster Management Framework** supports primary care to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters that have a health impact on communities in our region.
- [RACGP Emergency response planning video.](#)
- [RACGP Preparing your practice for a natural disaster or other emergency toolkit.](#)
- [Managing emergencies in general practice \(RACGP\).](#)
- [RACGP Emergency Response Planning Tool \(ERPT\).](#)
- **Primary Care Extended Hours Program** (to be developed).
- **Primary Care Emergency Response Program** (to be developed).
- **HealthPathways**
  - [Darling Downs HealthPathways.](#)
  - [West Moreton HealthPathways.](#)
- **Disaster Management Checklists:**
  - GP bag contents.
  - Recovery Centre.

## 6. Monitoring, Reporting and Review

The PHN recognises there is much to learn from experiencing emergencies or disasters. Following any significant event, that requires activation of this framework, an internal debrief and review of operations will be undertaken. Elements of the framework may be updated as a result of that process.

Specifically, following any significant event the PHN will:

- Debrief, review and revise disaster management guidelines and procedures from experiences learnt through these events.
- Work to reduce the severity of impact of future events by investing in community and sector resilience and improving adaptability to climate change.

## 7. Supporting Information

Related Information	
Framework	Disaster Management Framework
Governing Policy	N/A
Supporting Documents / Resources	Disaster Response Activation Procedure Disaster Preparedness Checklist Disaster Response Checklist. Disaster Recovery Checklist Disaster Office Checklist Closure. Appendix A External Disaster Management Action Plan. Crisis Management Team Terms of Reference (to be developed) Training Framework (to be developed).

# phn

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