



Te Kāhui Tika Tangata
Human Rights Commission

Inclusion is preparedness

Evidence guide

**Effectively partner with disabled people,
tāngata whaikaha Māori and iwi for an
Emergency Management system we can
all rely on**



The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is established and operates under the Crown Entities Act 2004 and the Human Rights Act 1993. Independent of government, the Commission is accredited as an ‘A status’ national human rights institution under the Paris Principles. Information about the Commission’s activities can be found on our website:

tikatangata.org.nz

Disclaimer

This resource provides some recommendations and information. It is not legal advice and should not be relied on as legal advice.

Published by Te Kāhui Tika Tangata | Human Rights Commission,
July 2026.

ISBN 978-0-478-35688-5 (digital)

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A vision for a fair and inclusive Emergency Management system

When emergencies occur, every person in Aotearoa New Zealand should be able to trust help will be timely, accessible, and meet the range of needs. But for many disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori, our Emergency Management systems have not consistently delivered this confidence or security.

How our Emergency Management system works can literally be a matter of life and death. All around the world, disabled people do worse in emergencies, experiencing higher mortality and injury. Local evidence shows that disabled people are at greater risk in emergencies because barriers in planning, communication, transport, and shelter limit safety, dignity, and participation when it matters most.

This resource aims to help change that. Grounded in human rights and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, it provides evidence for the effectiveness of a rights-based approach that draws on knowledge, experiences, and leadership of disabled people, Disabled People's Organisations, tāngata whaikaha Māori and Māori communities. It offers practical guidance for emergency management practitioners who want systems that truly work for everyone.

At Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission, our purpose is he whakamana tāngata – a life of dignity for us all. It is the Commission's responsibility to work for the common good by reminding decision-makers that disabled people have the same rights and freedoms as non-disabled people, and by providing practical support and guidance for the best ways to reach this goal. We do this by working within the dual frameworks of human rights and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which help us affirm the value of every human life and the collective rights and responsibilities established by our founding document.

As climate change increases the frequency and severity of emergencies, inclusive planning is not optional – it is essential. Getting ready together means building systems based on partnership. This resource is an invitation to do that work, collectively and intentionally.



Prudence Walker

Kaihautū Tika Hauātanga | Disability Rights Commissioner

1

Disability rights and emergency management

When disasters happen, each and every one of us should know that we have an Emergency Management system we can rely on. That means a system that is designed and built to work for everyone living in our communities.

What would this kind of Emergency Management system look like?



It would be focused on the inherent dignity and rights that each of us has as a human being, no matter who we are, and on the commitments to mutual care and respect made under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.



It would be built on the knowledge and skills that disabled people rely on every day and the mana and experience of iwi, hapū, and whānau in their rohe (tribal areas). Because every part of the system would be grounded in the rich diversity of people's real lives it would be effective in meeting real needs.



It would be a resilient system that supports us to recover and rebuild more inclusively, because it would be based on a foundation of active and respectful collaboration with the people it affects the most.

The result?

Confidence that no matter who we are or where we live, all of us have access to the resources we need, with clear communication, accessible planning, and safe outcomes across the system.

Disabled people have a right to expect that Emergency Management systems will be adequate to meet disabled people's needs. In an emergency, disabled people should be able to feel confident of experiencing dignity, respect, and an equal opportunity for safety alongside neighbours and wider communities.



See tikatangata.org.nz/our-work/inclusive-emergency-management for the links to information in this document and other resources.

Why do we all need to act?

Currently, our Emergency Management system is not built to be a good fit for many people who have physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychosocial impairments. This includes people who live independently; people who rely on others for support with day-to-day needs; people who live in isolated areas; people whose impairments may not be apparent to others. Our system does not offer disabled people and whānau the confidence needed and deserved. To make a system that is a good fit for us all, the varied ways we will use that system need to be front of mind. Instead, currently:



When planning for emergencies does not actively involve disabled people or Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), critical measures that safeguard effective communication, access to safe and functional spaces, and safe ways to get to them can easily be overlooked;



A strategic emphasis on individual responsibility can lead to the presumption that everyone can use the same pathways to act regardless of our life experiences, mobility, the support systems we rely on, or the ways we process information;



While as a nation:

- we are committed to partnership under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and
- evidence shows us that Māori-led approaches result in better outcomes for disabled people, and
- we have some initiatives underway, Iwi and kaupapa Māori organisations are not formally recognised with a guaranteed seat at the table and the resourcing needed.

An ageing population and a rise in the frequency and severity of emergency events due to climate change show us that a reliable and resilient Emergency Management system is needed now more than ever. However, despite best intentions, gaps in the ways we plan for, deliver, and offer support through our Emergency Management system can weaken the system at the very time we need it to be strong and resilient. Every day, disabled people already contend with barriers to participation and wellbeing. In an emergency, these everyday barriers quickly become life-threatening. Emergency management practitioners are stuck without the resources they need to empower communities while the safety, dignity, and wellbeing of disabled people in our communities is increasingly put at risk, both during emergency events and in the recovery period after the immediate crisis has passed.

How this resource can help

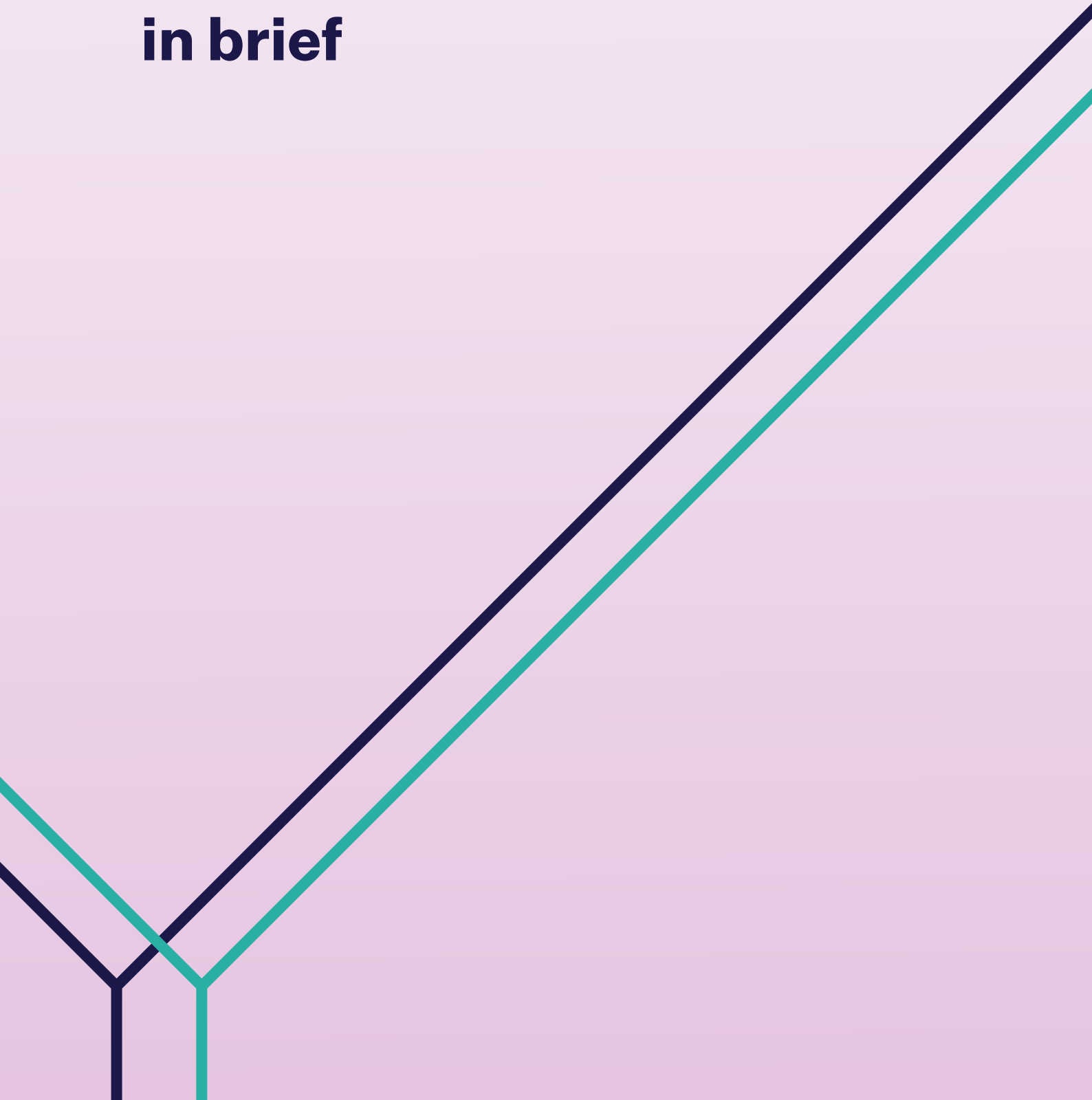
This resource is intended to support emergency management practitioners in the essential work they do. Specifically, it should help emergency management personnel to understand why and how our Emergency Management system is not currently a good fit for disabled people. The resource also offers evidence-based guidelines and recommendations for practical improvements to that system. Following these recommendations will lead to a more reliable, resilient system in which disabled people's experience is not disregarded, nor is protecting wellbeing and safety left to chance.

The recommendations in this resource are based on engagement with disabled people and DPOs and a scan of relevant literature that draws on research papers, hui reports, government inquiry findings, and current legislation. They are necessarily broad principles that emergency management practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand can consider and apply in their own work and local context, in consultation with disabled people. As such, the recommendations offer a starting point for community planning toward an Emergency Management system we all know we can rely on.

Our intention is that these recommendations will help open up ways of planning and working that reliably and consistently meet the needs of disabled people, their whānau, and their communities before, during, and after an emergency occurs. While pandemics, floods, and earthquakes are inevitable, the outcomes for our society are not. With the knowledge that our systems are reliable we can feel secure that when an emergency happens, we'll be ready for it together.

2

Our recommendations in brief



The four recommendations in this resource offer guidelines for improving our Emergency Management system in ways that will be fair, just, and reliable for everyone who lives in our communities. Following these recommendations will help emergency management practitioners meet their obligations – to community members, as partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and internationally. We offer the recommendations first in brief, for easy reference, and later in fuller discussions supported by evidence.

Recommendation

1



Plan for and implement whole-of-community solutions for fair, just, and effective outcomes across the board

Whole-of-community solutions improve safety and wellbeing for everyone in emergency situations and avoid the disproportionate burden that an over emphasis on individual preparedness places on disabled people.

Recommendation

2



Commit to co-designed, collaborative planning processes to increase people's trust in the system and empower communities to lead

Regular, well-resourced, and early collaboration with disabled people, whānau, iwi, hapū, and Disabled People's Organisations builds trust and capacity at the community level. In turn, it leads to better outcomes in emergency situations.

Recommendation

3

**Recognise disabled people's life experiences and build on expertise**

Disabled people are experts in the risks that emergency situations pose and the ways to address those risks. Recognising the expertise that comes from disabled people's life experience allows for a more responsive, robust, and effective Emergency Management system and builds confidence and capacity among Disabled People's Organisations and emergency management practitioners.

Recommendation

4

**Partner with iwi, hapū and kaupapa Māori organisations to learn from the inclusive, community-centred emergency planning and response work already happening**

Iwi, hapū, and kaupapa Māori organisations are already on the frontline of emergency response, providing essential care with minimal barriers for tāngata whaikaha Māori. Formal partnerships would meet obligations under Te Tiriti and lead to a stronger Emergency Management system that honours and learns from this work.

3

Key terms used in this resource



What we mean by ‘disabled people’ and ‘tāngata whaikaha’

The term ‘disabled people’ encompasses a huge range of life experiences. Like other members of our communities, disabled people come from every culture and background, live in every kind of community in Aotearoa New Zealand, participate in the formal work force, or not, live alone or with others. Disabled people may experience one or multiple impairments. There is no one model of a ‘disabled person’.

We use ‘disabled people’ and ‘tāngata whaikaha’ interchangeably in this resource. Where we mean to refer specifically to disabled people who are Māori, we use ‘tāngata whaikaha Māori’. Tāngata whaikaha is commonly defined as meaning ‘People who are determined to do well’. It offers a strengths-based framing and reflects common practice in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand.¹

We refer to ‘disabled people’ following the social model of disability as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This recognises that:



disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”²

Rather than being focused on individual impairments, this definition is about the barriers to participation that people encounter in the built environment, the provision of information and services, and social attitudes and behaviour. It recognises that people are not disabled by their impairments, but by the barriers that society puts in their way.

Many disabled people also experience barriers to full and equal participation in society based on race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, or other aspects of identity. Different needs mean different solutions – the advice in this resource may help fill the gaps.



Human Rights and Te Tiriti: the building blocks for an Emergency Management system we can all rely on

Our Emergency Management system must be built on the stable foundation of human rights and Te Tiriti. Human rights – as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – describe the basic rights and freedoms that every person should enjoy, regardless of who we are or where and how we live, while Te Tiriti is Aotearoa New Zealand’s founding document and our own unique statement of human rights. The two complement each other: both govern relationships between peoples in New Zealand and between peoples and the Crown, and both underpin our constitutional framework. In doing so, they set out a foundation for government that works for the common good.

Te Tiriti is grounded in mutual, collective commitments to care and mana tangata, while human rights provide us with tools that we can use to ensure that our systems are set up to treat every one of us with dignity, equality, and respect. More specifically, a commitment to human rights and Te Tiriti provides a framework to use to insist that our Emergency Management system should be based on genuine and active partnership with iwi, hapū, and whānau, and that disabled people should have the same rights and freedoms as non-disabled people as well as the practical and strategic support to realise these goals.



Aotearoa New Zealand's international obligations to ensure the safety, inclusion, and participation of disabled people in emergency management are grounded in three key agreements:

- 1** The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which we signed in 2008
- 2** The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-30
- 3** The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2016³

Our commitment to the UNCRPD requires:

- ✓ ongoing improvement of disabled people's rights including safety during disasters,
- ✓ meaningful involvement in emergency management, and
- ✓ accessibility of information and resources.

These obligations are reinforced by the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and the Sendai Framework, which call for inclusive planning for emergencies, leadership by disabled people in the planning and operationalising of emergency response, processes and resources that are accessible to disabled people, and the use of community-specific data to support emergency management processes and protocols that are fair and just.

In addition, our obligations under Te Tiriti are reinforced by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 (UNDRIP), which affirms that Te Tiriti is foundational to our nationhood, and that tangata whenua have the right to its recognition, observance, and enforcement.

4

Barriers that stand in the way of a fair, just, and reliable system



The recommendations in this resource are intended to offer broad principles for improvements to our systems and can be put into action in different ways depending on context. One certainty, however, is that emergency management practitioners will need to plan and budget for the changes that a fair, just, and reliable system will rely on.

The most urgent changes for disabled people's safety and wellbeing can be grouped under three categories:

1**Timely access to useful information****2****Fit-for-purpose evacuation and transport logistics****3****Civil defence centres and shelters that meet disabled people's needs**

To take action on these issues at a local level CDEM practitioners will need support – including specific funding and resources – from regional and national bodies. The following provides a guide to where that funding and resource should be directed.

1



Timely access to useful information

Access to good information makes it possible for disabled people to make informed, life-saving decisions. It supports people's right to make choices on their own behalf and builds trust in the Emergency Management system and systemic resilience in the longer-term. However, although unequal access to information is one of the greatest risks the disabled community faces, emergency information and resources to support preparedness are consistently unavailable, inaccessible, or simply difficult for disabled people to understand.⁴ While there has been improvement in recent years – for example, the provision of emergency preparedness information in alternate formats on the Get Ready website – access to disability-specific, regional, and timely information remains limited.⁵

Disabled people's lack of access to information is typically worse in the response phase of emergencies when events unfold quickly and information is constantly updated. For example, although accessible formats for information were produced during the Covid-19 pandemic response, they were often published two to three weeks after the information was made available to the general population.⁶ Similarly, during the severe weather events of 2023 there were initially no sign language interpreters on live television, they were not given prominence once included, and the online relay interpreting service was unavailable as the floods occurred outside its operating hours.⁷ Specific planning and resourcing for an accessible information system – producing timely information in a variety of accessible formats (such as Easy Read, Braille, and NZSL videos) is an essential part of a just and inclusive preparedness and response system.

2



Fit-for-purpose evacuation and transport logistics

During an emergency response, having fit-for-purpose ways to evacuate home, school, or work – including transport that disabled people can access and use – is a key factor in preserving dignity and saving lives. However, research shows that disabled people face significant barriers to safe and sustainable mobility during evacuations. These result from:

- an absence of government-mandated disaster management systems for disabled people,
- buildings that lack accessible evacuation routes,
- a lack of specialised evacuation equipment, and
- emergency responders who are not trained in evacuating disabled people.

An over-emphasis on individual preparedness can obscure the fact that disabled people have fewer options for safe and accessible movement than others, both during emergencies and at other times.⁸ When disabled people are able to call on support, this frequently comes from informal networks such as family or friends who may not be available when disasters strike.⁹ Research points to many disabled people feeling left behind, anxious about evacuating, underprepared, and abandoned during disasters. In fact, disabled people often need additional support and are less likely to evacuate than others, with substantial implications for their safety and wellbeing.¹⁰



[During the 2023 severe weather events in Tairāwhiti and Hawke's Bay] some [people] just stayed in their room until somebody turned up. For instance, there was a lady she was stuck in her wheelchair and by the time people found her, the water was at her neck.”¹¹

Support for disabled people to build stronger, more resilient networks in their communities, where possible, is an important part of addressing this barrier to participation and safety. However, emergency management planning also needs to more actively account for disabled people's needs through DPO-led training of emergency responders and planning of accessible evacuation routes; evacuation training for disabled people prior to a disaster taking place; and planning for accessible vehicles, for example, in collaboration with disabled people and DPOs.¹²

3



Civil Defence centres and shelters that meet disabled people's needs

Civil Defence centres and shelters provide safe places for community members who have been displaced. At a minimum and in collaboration with health and disability supports if needed, there should be options that reliably meet the life-sustaining needs for safety, water, sanitation, and health care. Disabled people's most basic needs include:

- ✓ physical access in and out of buildings and structures
- ✓ storage for medications and equipment
- ✓ food that caters to dietary requirements
- ✓ disability rights trained health care workers
- ✓ private spaces for intimate care
- ✓ accessible bathrooms and facilities
- ✓ accommodations for support people and assistance animals
- ✓ specialised equipment; and
- ✓ accessible signs and communications.¹³

However, the Report of the Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events found that some Civil Defence Centres were not accessible nor adequately provisioned to meet the diversity of needs in the communities they served, including those of elderly people and those with dementia and other complex health conditions.¹⁴



Again, for disabled people, a lack of planning presents substantial challenges to dignity, wellbeing and safety as well as producing a likely loss of trust in the system.



[A tetraplegic man had to be evacuated from his home] but then no hospital would take him, no rest homes would take him. So finally, the police took him in and kept him there for the night. No services were available... they should've been set up when we were given flood warnings that day.”¹⁵

Not only do centres and shelters need to be accessible, but disabled people also need timely, reliable information about their accessibility. Disabled people may be hesitant to evacuate when there is insufficient information about Civil Defence Centres and shelters. People may require detailed and specific information, such as whether kitchen facilities include a blender for those who need food prepared in a particular way or whether there is a quiet space available for people who are neurodiverse. Consistent planning with the disabled community in advance of emergency events will help provide:

- disabled people with the information that will be most useful to them,
- the reassurance that once they reach shelter, it will provide the safe space they need, and
- time to work through back up options, if the planned for approaches also become disrupted.

5

Evidence to support our recommendations



Recommendation

1

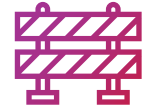
Plan for and implement whole-of-community solutions for fair, just, and effective outcomes across the board

Traditionally, Aotearoa New Zealand's emergency preparedness planning and messaging has stressed individual responsibility.¹⁶ Given the limited resources that emergency management practitioners must work with, and the unpredictability and complexity of emergency events, this focus is understandable. However, building a system that is fair, just, and effective for us all and remains resilient under increasing pressure requires thinking beyond individual behaviour changes.

In recent years, expert advice has moved toward whole-of-community solutions as best practice in emergency management. For example, reforms to our Emergency Management system in response to a series of natural disasters over the last 15 years show a growing focus on a whole-of-society approach that prioritises community wellbeing in recognition that this approach is effective and impactful.¹⁷ A 2017 study looking at Aotearoa New Zealand wheelchair users' preparedness for emergencies provides proof of this concept for the safety and wellbeing of disabled people. The researchers found that tāngata whaikaha Māori were better prepared than other participants in the study and suggested that this may be because Māori had an emergency plan based on the collective preparedness of their iwi or whānau, rather than on the individual.¹⁸



What gets in the way?



A strong focus on individual preparedness in emergency management planning and provision can overlook the very real barriers that already disproportionately impact disabled people's daily lives: their wellbeing, housing, education, employment, and income security.¹⁹ These everyday barriers in turn create barriers to people's ability to prepare for emergencies. For example:



The overrepresentation of disabled people in poverty – particularly among Māori and Pacific communities – means that purchasing emergency supplies is often a low priority in the face of more immediate needs.²⁰



While connecting with neighbours and building support networks are commonly recommended strategies to prepare for emergencies, these strategies are not always accessible to disabled people because:

- the legacy of institutionalisation and ongoing prejudice means that many disabled people have limited social networks, and
- many disabled people hesitate to reach out to others for support because they worry their needs are too high or that they will be viewed as a burden.²¹

In short, the capacity to prepare as an individual is built on an experience of privilege that many disabled people do not have.

Disabled people also experience barriers to self-reliance and self-management in our built environment, transport system, and communication media that cannot be overcome through personal planning. When we recall that disability is defined as resulting from the interactions between the person and the environment in which they live we are reminded that these barriers are at the heart of what it means to be a disabled person.²² For example:



Information may not be provided in formats that disabled people can use;



Alternative transport or accommodation – either public or private – may not be available to disabled people due to a lack of physical access, the presence of pets, or an absence of the essentials that are required to meet their most basic needs for food, rest, and hygiene;



The expectation of organising individualised plans can feel overwhelming, especially if it will require coordination between multiple services or sources of support.²³

What's a solution?



One way to address the shortcomings of an emphasis on individual preparedness may be through a Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness framework such as that designed in Australia and subsequently adapted for Aotearoa New Zealand.²⁴

The framework aims to support the collaborative creation of emergency plans tailored to the specific support needs of individual disabled people. However, disabled people continue to experience barriers in the built, social, and information environment that cannot be resolved through personal planning. At the least, addressing these barriers demands others' cooperation; more often, it requires systemic solutions. For instance, disabled people are unable to personally prepare an evacuation plan if their environment is inaccessible as this participant in an emergency management focused disability community hui noted:



The most important thing to me is to have the same access of being able to get myself out of that emergency as everybody else in my building. [...] I bought an apartment seven years ago, and they still have not created a plan to get me out of the building. [...] I can't create a plan on my floor; I can't do it. And the building won't do it, and they say, "Well, there's sprinklers in the ceiling" and I say, "So nobody needs to leave?" and they say, "Oh, yes, everybody must evacuate." I say, "Then why aren't you helping me evacuate? What is so hard?"²⁵

In this quote, we can see that the idea of individual preparedness is inadequate to the circumstances of the person's life. To be prepared as an individual necessarily means relying on the acknowledgement and cooperation of others, not only when making plans for the future but from the very earliest stages of planning the environment in which the person now lives.

The evidence shows us that a system that is too focused on individual preparedness would be neither effective, nor fair and just. While some degree of individual or whānau preparedness will always be part of our Emergency Management system, to reliably support disabled people we need to recognise that our capacity to prepare as individuals is always determined by our larger social and environmental context. Whole-of-community solutions not only offer benefits to the whole community but are more likely to lead to outcomes which meet that community's real needs.

Recommendation

2

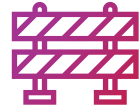
Commit to co-designed, collaborative planning processes to increase people's trust in the system and empower communities to lead

Trust in the Emergency Management system can be built on a foundation of early, respectful, and substantial collaboration. When our Emergency Management system is shown to be reliable, people will feel safer and more encouraged to cooperate with Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) practitioners before, during, and after times of crisis. While disabled people are willing and able to engage with the system, working on building trust among the community should be a priority for emergency management practitioners.

The value of such a collaborative approach is increasingly recognised in policy goals. A recent discussion document on government reforms to the Emergency Management system states that one objective of the proposed reforms is 'to create and shape stronger alliances with iwi Māori, to the benefit of everyone' and to 'achieve a whole-of-society approach to emergency management, where communities are enabled and empowered to act alongside the 'official' emergency system.'²⁶ In recent severe weather events, community organisations – notably, although not exclusively iwi and hapū – have shown that they are indeed ready to act, taking up essential roles in the emergency response.



What gets in the way?

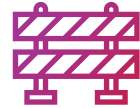


Despite the essential roles they played, community leaders told the 2024 inquiry into the response to severe weather events in the North Island that their actions were ad hoc: they did not feel like they were a part of a formal response and simply stepped up because they saw a need.²⁷ This reflects a wider source of instability in our Emergency Management system. The inquiry found that because Māori inclusion in local government emergency management structures is discretionary, in some places the role of Māori is well recognised while in others it is non-existent.²⁸ Likewise, reviews of specific emergency events have found that engagement with iwi Māori and Māori communities is generally based on informal, ad hoc relationships rather than resulting from systematic and formalised effort, and that contributions to an emergency response can be delayed by the marginalisation of Māori from CDEM systems and processes. This in turn hampers the ability of Māori agencies and marae to deliver welfare services at scale, slows down the delivery of essential services to communities in need, and discourages or complicates the involvement of Māori volunteers in the emergency response.²⁹



The risk to our Emergency Management system is that the trust placed in iwi, hapū, and community organisations – the extent to which their active cooperation is expected and relied upon as part of our emergency response – is not systematically reciprocated or resourced.

In general, trust in institutions – including Government agencies – is low among disabled people.³⁰ During Covid-19, for instance, researchers found that disabled people had a higher level of trust in information they received from local groups or DPOs than from the government, with some disabled people reporting that they received most or all of their information from a community organisation or DPO.³¹ This lack of trust is amplified when disabled people do not see themselves represented in official planning bodies and processes.³²



The stakes are high. Disasters both create new disabilities and can worsen existing impairments.³³ Moreover, disabled people are more at risk in times of disaster, with research showing that they are two to four times more likely to die or experience injuries in disasters than non-disabled people.³⁴



A striking example was seen during the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, when disabled people made up:



24.6%

24.6% of the disaster-related deaths



7%

in areas in which they comprised only around 7% of the population.³⁵

Disabled people's dignity and wellbeing is also disproportionately impacted by barriers to accessing emergency resources like information or evacuation centres, an experience of exclusion which is compounded by language or cultural barriers such as women having to share sleeping quarters with men.³⁶

What's a solution?



Co-design processes – where disabled people and their representative organisations actively participate in planning and decision-making for emergency events – have been shown to result in better outcomes. An example can again be found in northeastern Japan where local government worked with community members – particularly people with psychosocial disabilities – to design best-case scenarios for disaster response, resulting in accessible multimedia manuals designed for the whole community.



When the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit in 2011 a group of residents with psychosocial disabilities was among the first to evacuate due to the training they had received through their social skills development programme, using the manuals they had designed.³⁷ This example suggests that effective processes are developed and led in collaboration with disabled people and their representative organisations and, moreover, focus on subjects that are identified as important by disabled people.



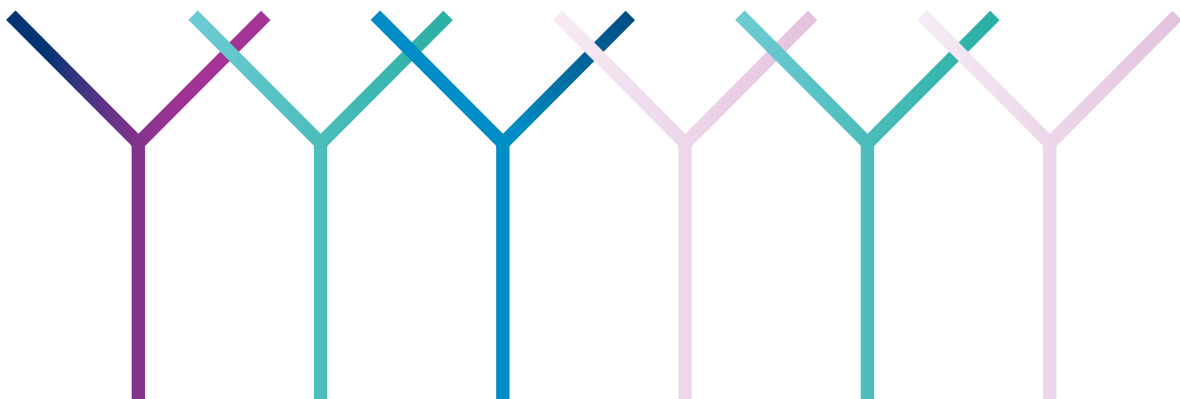
Closer to home, in its work on marae emergency preparedness Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu has identified the need to include everyone, including tāngata whaikaha Māori, in the process, leading to a whānau-centric approach to emergency response planning. To this end, the rūnanga is expanding the number of trained emergency staff with the introduction of Mana Whenua Emergency Facilitators. Part of the facilitators' role is to integrate everyone into their marae emergency plans and to ensure that the voices of everyone, including disabled whānau, are represented in decision making.³⁸ Likewise, the report of the Auckland Disability Community Hui on Planning for Emergencies Hui 2024 features co-design amongst its recommendations.³⁹



Such collaborations are most effective when interactions are early, regular, involve a variety of stakeholders, and are properly resourced.

Research shows that when DPO-led disaster preparedness initiatives have access to funding, confidence in the value of their activities, and backing from disaster risk recovery experts they can raise public awareness of disabled people's experiences, influence policy decisions, and support community readiness for disasters.⁴⁰ Other benefits include fostering relationships between disabled people, emergency management practitioners, and local government staff and elected representatives.⁴¹ By requiring networking and relationship-building between disabled people, their representative organisations, and all levels of Government, such processes provide the opportunity to build trusted relationships before an emergency happens.

These kinds of solutions allow disabled people to participate in planning for emergencies as equals to their neighbours, with dignity and mana. Committing to co-designed processes and collaboration with disabled people, their whānau, iwi and hapū, and Disabled People's Organisations builds trust and capacity at the same time.



Recommendation

3

Recognise disabled people's life experiences and build on their expertise

Living as a disabled person requires ingenuity, creativity, and grit.

Disabled people cannot help but become experts in working around the barriers that stand in the way of their full and equal participation in society thanks to their long experience of simply being in a world which was not built to fit.

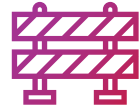
Committing to co-designed, collaborative planning processes is a way to benefit from and build on these rich life experiences.

A shift in practice must be supported by a shift in thinking: in this case, a re-framing of expertise. By definition, co-design involves people 'in the design of the services, strategies, environments, policies, and processes that affect them.'⁴² Because it is a process focused on the end user of a process or system, successful co-design depends on the knowledge and insight that is born of lived experience of that system. Disabled people are not only experts in their own needs and experiences but also experts in seeing the systems that place barriers in their way, and which a fair and just approach to emergency management sets out to address.

Excluding disabled people's lived experience from the emergency planning process thus 'represents a loss of critical knowledge and expertise.'⁴³



What gets in the way?



The lack of investment in co-design with disabled people no doubt happens for a variety of reasons, including simple habit and a lack of legislative mandate.⁴⁴ One consequence, however, is that disabled people feel disempowered by a system that treats them as passive recipients of support, rather than empowered contributors to the system.⁴⁵ One study names exclusion as a key factor ‘preventing disabled participants from being able to grow towards having the status of “expert” or “active contributor” in the area of environmental hazard preparedness.’⁴⁶ This contradicts what disabled people, globally, say they want and need: namely, ‘simply be involved in disaster risk management and reduction activities.’⁴⁷

What’s a solution?



In fact, while simple involvement would be an improvement on exclusion, effective processes are those in which disabled people and DPOs are recognised and resourced to lead, beginning with identifying the problem to be considered.⁴⁸ By signing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, Aotearoa New Zealand has committed to draw on the leadership and expertise of disabled people and their representative organisations in all stages of emergency planning and response, and acknowledges that disabled people should ‘publicly lead and promote... universally accessible approaches during the response and reconstruction phases’ of an emergency response.⁴⁹

Empowering and resourcing DPOs to lead inclusive practices alongside disabled people builds on the trust that tāngata whaikaha Māori already hold in DPOs by allowing for ‘a genuinely bottom-up, ground-driven approach [to emergency planning and preparedness] ... where people with disabilities are leading the whole process.’⁵⁰



For disabled people, processes that recognise life experience as expertise provide dual benefits: visible representation of the disability community – and, therefore, greater trust in the process – and the opportunity to participate and contribute. As one participant in the Auckland Hui noted, disabled leadership draws directly on the life experience that disabled people bring to the planning and response process.



Council needs the voice of disabled leadership. We need to take leadership in those spaces, because we have often seen things created, and they're not suitable for all of our disabled whānau.”⁵¹

Community engagement initiatives, such as the Auckland Hui, illustrate that disabled people can, when resourced, build relationships between community and emergency management and offer their leadership and expertise to support disability-inclusive emergency management.⁵²

Acknowledging that disabled people's life experience is a valuable form of expertise is also recognised as best practice in advice aimed at CDEM practitioners. For example, Civil Defence Director's Guidelines [PDF 3.6 MB] for including people with disabilities describes disabled people's lived experience as expertise and notes the benefits of working in partnership with disabled people and DPOs. It hints at the range of expertise that life as a disabled person creates, naming 'expertise on the impact of disability,' 'technical and professional expertise,' and specific 'resources that may be drawn upon in an emergency.'⁵³



The advice goes further than recommending consultation, proposing that disabled people should be employed in CDEM offices, as advisors, or as educators about the experiences of disabled people, and recognising networks of support and expertise that disabled people draw on, including, for instance, disability service providers.⁵⁴ Similarly, international conventions advocate for empowering disabled people and their representatives to participate in planning and response precisely on the basis of disabled people's 'leadership, skills, experience, and other capabilities.'⁵⁵

Disabled people's daily negotiation of risks and barriers makes them extremely well placed to be at the heart of emergency management planning. A shift in thinking to recognise disabled people's life experience as expertise will both support greater involvement for better outcomes and allow for more disabled people to step into leadership roles in the emergency planning process.

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Recommendation

4

Partner with iwi, hapū, and kaupapa Māori organisations to learn from the inclusive, community-centred emergency planning and response work they are already doing

Recent events have acted as a reminder that planning for, and response to emergencies by Māori is grounded in collective, whānau-centric values like manaakitanga. During the July 2021 Blenheim floods, for example, Omaka Marae opened its doors to those who were stranded, in an act of practical care and manaakitanga for the whole community.



Our marae are a safe haven, and we know that when disaster strikes, with one phone call, they will be there; Omaka Marae demonstrated this last year during the July floods when over 50 people were stranded on State Highway 1. In the space of half an hour they had opened the marae, the heaters were on, beds were ready, and kai prepped. This is what our marae do, manaaki and care for people.”⁵⁶

Following the principle and value of manaakitanga means that care is extended equally to everyone who may be in need, as the moment demands. We hear this again in the following description of the approach that Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu take to planning for emergency events:



...more often than not, our kaumātua of their age have picked up a few ailments along the way, and many of our kaumātua turn up in either wheelchairs or other support things to help them along their way. And as far as we're concerned, when we respond and when we help whānau, we're helping everyone, and in particular our kaumātua come first.”⁵⁷



As these statements demonstrate, processes that are grounded in manaakitanga are oriented towards collective care and demand that our response is determined by the needs that people present with when an emergency occurs. This kind of response focuses on removing barriers to participation. The benefits of such an approach for disabled people are clear: as noted, research shows that tāngata whaikaha Māori fare better in emergency situations than their non-Māori counterparts, possibly as a result of planning that focuses on the collective rather than the individual.⁵⁸ Likewise, Whaikaha Ministry of Disabled People told the government inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events that disabled communities were often well supported by local iwi, who were highly responsive, ‘providing support with minimal, if any barriers’.⁵⁹

Iwi and marae are, moreover, consistently some of the first to respond in times of disaster, providing timely and effective support to the whole community.

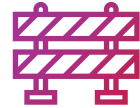
Early activation of marae, community networks, and support structures in emergency situations can enable iwi to respond more efficiently to local needs than some local councils.

In places where CDEM response may be stretched, slow or lacking, iwi step in, using their broad networks to deploy supplies.

Reflecting these facts, the Report of the Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events found that “some of the most effective and rapid responses to the severe weather events were coordinated and carried out by iwi Māori’, who provided manaakitanga, critical equipment, response and wellbeing support, money, and facilities for welfare to all people in their rohe.”⁶⁰

Similarly, within 24 hours of the 22 February 2011 earthquake, a Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu-led Māori Recovery Network was established. This network contacted or provided shelter, food, water, clothing, toys, finance and other goods to more than 20,000 households. Marae were made available to government agencies and communities alike; Ngāi Tahu whānau assisted people who were displaced or in need with practical support; and medical professionals sent to Christchurch by Te Arawa, Tainui, and Raukawa provided door-to-door primary health care. From the outset it was agreed the Māori response would be driven by Māori values, with a theme – ‘aroha nui ki te tangata’ (love to all people) – signalling that local Māori intended to provide support to the entire community, not just the local Māori community. Māori response to the Christchurch earthquakes has been recognised by the United Nations as an exemplar of community-led disaster risk management.⁶¹

What gets in the way?



Despite the commitment to partnership under Te Tiriti and the essential role that they play in emergency response, recognition of iwi, hapū, and kaupapa Māori organisations' role in emergency management remains informal and inconsistent. Māori do not have a legislated role in emergency management and may be marginalised by emergency management agencies on the ground. These barriers to Māori participation are contrary to the expectation of partnership established by Te Tiriti and weaken our emergency response overall.



A 2015 research project on Māori responses to the Christchurch earthquakes found that although iwi and hapū response to the emergency was understood to be exemplary, Māori were 'marginalised' in formal processes, with an impact on their participation and on the effectiveness of response efforts overall.

This extended beyond responses from kaupapa Māori organisations, also affecting Māori volunteers' efforts to help.⁶² These barriers to participation get in the way of a timely, effective response to emergency situations, and fail to recognise the rich resources – including social connection, local knowledge, access to safe spaces, and the cultural practice of manaakitanga – that Māori organisations are ready to offer.

What's a solution?



Collaboration between the Crown and Māori in our emergency response system is an obligation under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Recognising and properly resourcing the model that taha Māori already offers our Emergency Management system – modelling manaakitanga and care for people as they are – is also a responsible and practical path to a system that is more inclusive of disabled, and non-disabled people. As our exposure to emergency events increases in frequency and complexity and our population ages, this collaborative approach will only become more important as meaningful collaboration builds capacity and resilience into the system well beyond the initial response phase.



As one example, we could look to the response and early recovery phase of the 2011 Christchurch earthquake when positive collaboration with the government and its agencies served as a catalyst for stronger engagement and ongoing partnership between iwi, local authorities, and central government. Lessons learned from that partnership have informed emergency management planning and contributions to programmes to strengthen community resilience, both locally and nationally.⁶³

However, honouring the partnership we committed to under Te Tiriti o Waitangi will require more formal, consistent, and well-resourced relationships than are currently the norm in our Emergency Management system. A model can again be found in the response to the 2011 earthquake, when Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu secured a statutory governance role in the rebuild, having the same status as the city and regional councils in legislation.

The following year, Ngāi Tahu and Disabled Persons Assembly co-hosted a symposium for disabled people, DPOs, health and disability service providers, and people from a range of organisations working in emergency management including CDEM and emergency services. This led to the publication of an issues paper by the then named, Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management (MCDEM) [Including People With Disabilities \[PDF 480KB\]](#).⁶⁴ **This example points to how formal, well-resourced partnerships with iwi, hapū, and Kaupapa Māori organisations unlock the potential to build trust, resilience, and know-how into the way our Emergency Management system works for us all.**

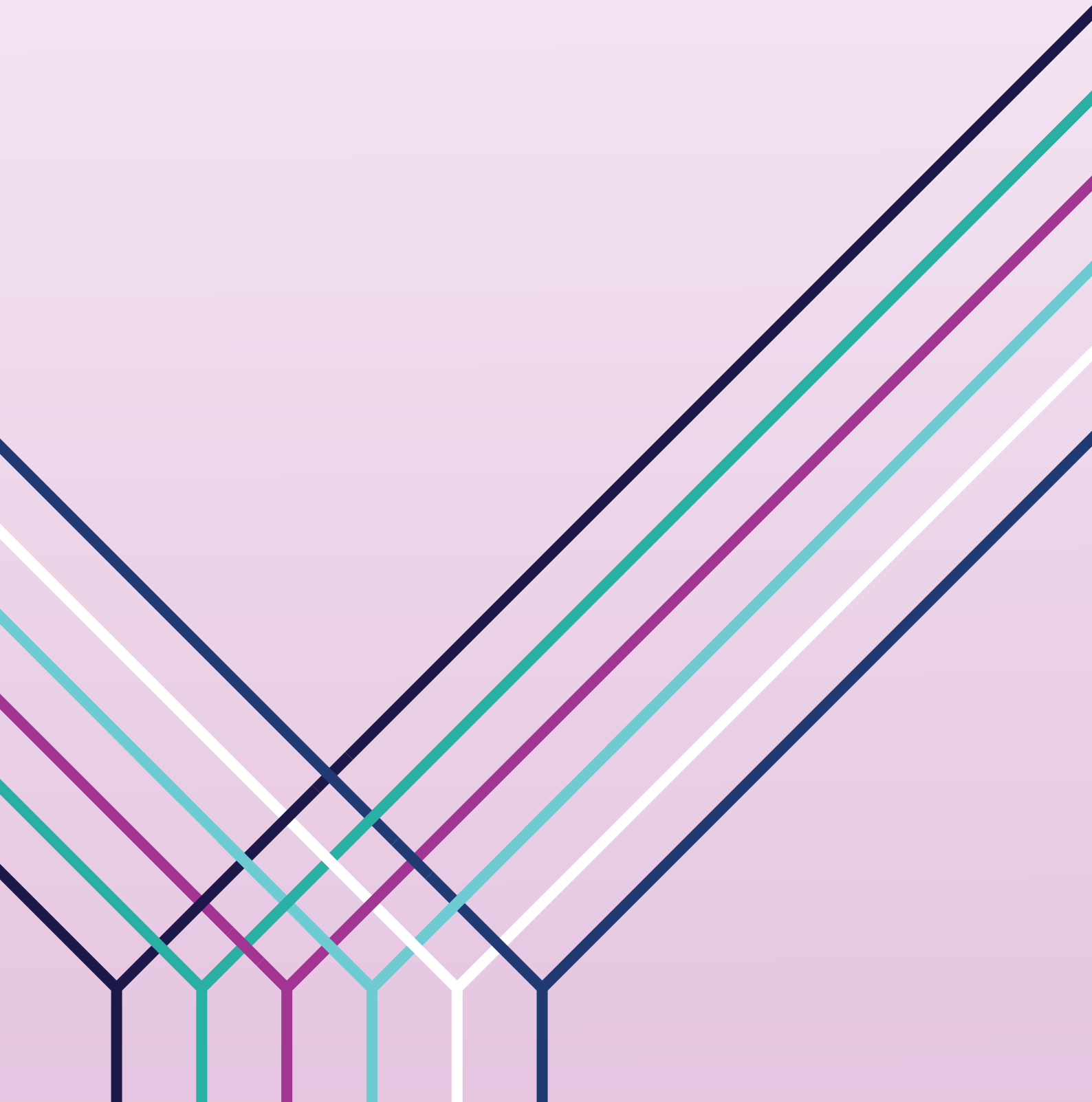
As the [Report of the Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events](#) notes,



(i)wi-led readiness, response and recovery efforts are already in effect, and provide a living example of what could be done... The system needs to support the significant capacity and capability of iwi Māori to be deployed in an emergency⁶⁵. Active and deliberate investment in relationships with iwi, hapū, and Kaupapa Māori organisations will make for a more robust, effective, fair and just Emergency Management system.

6

Where to next?



This resource provides evidence-based advice for CDEM professionals and others who want to make sure that our Emergency Management systems are reliable, effective, and trustworthy for everyone who lives in our communities. This advice is grounded in our commitments to mutual care and respect under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and to ensuring that disabled people have access to the same rights and freedoms as non-disabled people. This includes the right to participate as equals in decisions that affect our lives; the right to safety and dignity; and the right to access the information and resources that we all need.

Taking meaningful action on the guidance offered here will require active collaboration between emergency management practitioners and disabled people and DPOs, whānau and communities, and iwi, hapū, and kaupapa Māori organisations. It asks that people working in emergency management recognise and learn from the mana and knowledge held in communities, and disabled people's unique expertise. Meaningful action will also require collaboration between local and national CDEM practitioners to secure the funding and resources to carry out this work.

The changes we advise in this resource are intended to be practical and actionable. However, they are not one-time fixes. Making sure that our systems are fit for purpose for all of us, no matter who we are or where we live, will be an ongoing process. The advice is designed to establish a firm foundation for what may be a new way of working together.

This way of working will support dignity and mana tangata for disabled people as our communities prepare for, experience, and recover from emergency events. It is, however, just one part of a larger puzzle. Disabled people continue to face disproportionate barriers to full and meaningful participation in our communities and safety and wellbeing in everyday life. Poverty, limited opportunities to work, socialise, and contribute, and isolation born of prejudice and reinforced by inadequate information, transport, and housing systems put disabled people and their whānau at a disadvantage well before disasters strike. These everyday burdens make it particularly hard for disabled people to take on the work of personal preparedness for emergency events. Building a truly reliable Emergency Management system, in which each and every one of us feels confident that we are ready and assured that we will experience timely, relevant support, will only be supported by addressing these larger barriers.

Disabled people are more than ready to participate in the essential work of preparing for emergency events.

Making changes to our systems and ways of working will create space for participation and wellbeing that will benefit everyone living in our communities.

**Getting ready together is our pathway to an Emergency Management system that
we can all rely on.**

Acronyms used in this document

CDEM Civil Defence Emergency Management

DPOs Disabled People's Organisations

MCDEM The Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency
Management

NZSL New Zealand Sign Language

UNCRPD United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons
with Disabilities

Other useful resources



[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#)

social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd

[The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-30](#)

undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework

[The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2016](#)

hi.org/en/humanitarian-and-disability-charter

[The Right to be Rescued](#) Video documentary

yalelawjournal.org/note/the-right-to-be-rescued

Podcast yalelawjournal.org/note/the-right-to-be-rescued

knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/disability-inclusion-and-disasters-planning-for-disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction

For more information and resources

tikatangata.org.nz/our-work/inclusive-emergency-management

Endnotes

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