

Preparing yourself and your residents for Disasters or Emergencies – A Guide for Residential Aged Care Homes (RACHs) in the Nepean Blue Mountains PHN

Our region has a very high risk profile for a range of hazards including bushfires, severe storms, flash flooding, riverine flooding, heatwaves, power and communications outages and more.

These events can occur with little warning and have serious impacts on the safety and wellbeing of residents and staff.

It is important that all Residential Aged Care Homes have a comprehensive, localised Emergency Plan to enact in emergency or disaster events.

This Plan should identify the specific risks relevant to your location, outline clear procedures for staff and residents, and ensure continuity of care during emergencies. Consider:

- Does your home have a current emergency and disaster plan?
- Has it been recently reviewed and practised?
- Has your home considered the 'what ifs' that could impact residents and operations?

Please ensure you have an Emergency Coordinator to manage what will happen in your workplace should there be an emergency or disaster event.

Please participate in training and practice exercises.

RACHs and staff that **know their risks, are prepared** and **stay informed**, respond and recover better from emergency and disaster events.

Visit our Disaster and Emergency webpages here nbmphn.com.au/Disaster-Planning-and-Recovery for more information.

*The **Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards** (Outcome 2.10) require residential aged care homes to demonstrate that their emergency and disaster management planning identifies and manages risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of residents and aged care workers.*

IMPORTANT

All the websites and resources following are linked on our new Residential Aged Care Home Disaster and Emergency Page on the NBMPHN website nbmphn.com.au/PrepareYourRACH



Tips for being prepared

Know your risk

It is important to plan for the full range of hazards that might impact your RACH.

Emergency services have tools to help identify risks:

State Emergency Services (SES) | 132 500 | ses.nsw.gov.au/flood-resources/before-a-flood/know-your-risk/

Rural Fire Service (RFS) | 1800 679 737 | rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/know-your-risk

Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) | bom.gov.au/knowyourweather/

Speak with local experts about your risks via local emergency service contact details

- **Local RFS** 1800 679 737 rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-districts
- **Local SES** 132 500 ses.nsw.gov.au/local-information
- **Local Fire and Rescue** 9265 2999 fire.nsw.gov.au

Stay informed

Our local City Council Emergency Dashboards are a one-stop shop and source of truth that will connect you to the emergency management services, road closures, traffic access etc. It's helpful to bookmark these on your computer.

Hawkesbury City Council disaster.hawkesbury.nsw.gov.au

Penrith City Council penrith.disasterdashboards.com

Lithgow City Council alerts.lithgow.nsw.gov.au

Blue Mountains City Council emergency.bmcc.nsw.gov.au

For up-to-date information on your mobile, install the Hazards Near Me, Emergency Plus and BOM Weather Apps. You can find all the Apps here nsw.gov.au/emergency/prepare.

Track the most up to date warnings:

SES Warnings ses.nsw.gov.au

RFS Fires Near Me rfs.nsw.gov.au

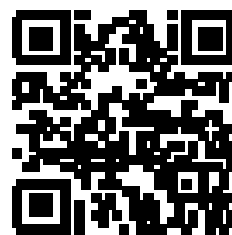
BOM Warnings bom.gov.au

For regular updates from NBMPHN (including Disaster Updates) register for our News Updates at nbmphn.com.au/contact

Understanding warnings

Visit the NSW Get Ready pages to understand what different warning levels mean, from staying informed (Advice), to preparing to act (Watch and Act) to taking immediate action (Emergency Warning).

nsw.gov.au/emergency/get-ready



HealthPathways

Our HealthPathways team lead the suite of pathways addressing Disaster Planning and Management addressing issues related to patients and general practice preparedness and recovery.

nbm.communityhealthpathways.org

Make or review an emergency plan

There are various templates available to help develop an emergency plan. While using a template is not required, it can be a useful tool to identify potential gaps you may not have considered. Reviewing your existing plan against a template can also help strengthen and refine it.

- A general emergency plan template is available at business.gov.au
- An aged care specific template is available via [Ageing Australia - ageingaustralia.asn.au](https://ageingaustralia.asn.au)

The [Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards](#) outline that residential aged care homes must:

- Develop emergency and disaster management plans that describe how the provider and aged care workers will respond to an emergency or disaster, and to manage risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of residents and aged care workers.
- Implement strategies to prepare for and respond to an emergency or disaster.
- Engage with residents, their families and aged care workers about the emergency and disaster management plans.
- Regularly test and review the emergency and disaster management plans in partnership with residents, their families, aged care workers and other response partners.

What your emergency plan should include

- Plan for evacuation and shelter-in-place scenarios
- Identify suitable transport options: arrange accessible transport for residents, including those with mobility needs
- Establish communication protocols: maintain clear communication with staff, families and emergency services
- Coordinate with local agencies: build relationships with your local emergency, community and government services before an event
- Ensure adequate supplies: stockpile necessary medications, food, water and personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Implement infection control measures: adhere to protocols to prevent outbreaks
- Maintain power and communication lines: have backup generators or a plan to access a generator and communication devices
- Contact other RACHs in your local area and agree on how you can offer mutual support (e.g. if your RACH is affected by a fire or another emergency and needs to close, you can have a plan in place to direct your patients to a nearby RACH until the risk has been averted)
- Many of your staff may live close to the RACH. It is important to encourage them to have their own emergency plan and to consider, in your emergency planning, which staff may be impacted by an event that affects your facility
- Talk to your residents and their families about your plan and encourage them to prepare too. Evacuation can be scary and unpredictable. By giving the resident or their family members a level of autonomy in preparing their own “go bag”, it allows them to have a sense of control in an otherwise unpredictable situation. Pillowcases can even be used for this purpose. We can provide examples of checklists if needed.

Training and exercises are vital

- Evacuation exercises: regularly conduct drills to ensure all staff are prepared
- Training is essential for all staff within the facility to ensure they are prepared
- Emergency management plans: regularly testing and reviewing emergency management plans will improve your outcomes in an event

Mental health support for yourself in disasters and emergencies

Thinking about disasters or emergencies can be challenging and particularly hard for those who have been previously affected, regardless of how much time has passed.



Support for health professionals is available here

nbmphn.com.au/Health-Professionals/Looking-After-Yourself.

Mental health support for staff and residents

If you need support, we offer a range of community-based mental health services that are free to access for people of all ages.

For staff, your Employee Assistance Program may be helpful. Or a range of other services are available at nbmphn.com.au/talktoyourdoctor or call the Medicare Mental Health Phonenumber on 1800 595 212.

For residents, the [WiseMind](#) program assists residents at RACHs with mild to moderate symptoms of common mental illness, or who are experiencing early symptoms and are assessed as ‘at risk’ of developing a diagnosable mental illness over the following 12 months.

Services are delivered by mental health professionals including psychologists, social workers and mental health nurses.

Responding to an emergency

- If there is an immediate threat to life or property, call 000 and follow the instructions from emergency services.
- Activate your Business Continuity Plan or Emergency Management Plan as needed.
- For non-emergency assistance, escalate through the appropriate support in the table listed below.

Organisation	Assistance with	Contact
Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to resources • Information on current operational status and hours of general practice and pharmacy in an emergency • Liaison with general practice and community support services 	Phone: 4708 8100 0405 506 989 – 7 days 0402 729 416 – 7 days For more information email
Head office of organisation/or head management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with service delivery • Access to resources e.g. staff, stuff • Communication 	-
Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District – Public Health Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notifiable disease surveillance, infectious disease outbreak investigation and control • Environmental health risk investigation and management including a range of hazards impacting on public health 	Phone (in hours): 4734 2022 Phone (after hours): 4734 2000 For more information email
Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District – Disaster Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing issues with utility outage e.g. electricity, gas, water • Issues with service delivery due to current bushfire, flood, snow, heatwave • Evacuation of facility • Shelter in place activities 	Phone: 0408 062 455 – 24/7 For more information email NBMLHD HSFAC 24/7: 02 4734 2020

For assistance with finding accommodation for aged care residents due to an evacuation or if your service cannot meet its obligations under the Aged Care Quality Standards, your grant or aged care funding arrangement contact the [Australian Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#)

[Emergency NSW](#) EmergencyNSW@health.gov.au Monday to Friday only - not 24/7. For more information health.gov.au/resources/publications/temporary-relocation-of-residents-in-emergency-situations

For the most current contact details go to nbmphn.com.au/PrepareyourRACH

Useful tools and templates

Your emergency plan, checklists (including evacuation, shelter-in-place and recovery procedures) and up-to-date contact lists – such as emergency services, suppliers and family members – will be key during an emergency response. Remember, these are all linked at nbmphn.com.au/PrepareyourRACH

The following provide guidance to support emergency planning and response in aged care:

- Ageingaustralia.asn.au/emergency-preparedness-planning/ – Resources covering all aspects of emergency management in aged care settings.
- [Service continuity and emergency events in aged care – Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#) – National guidance and tools to support aged care providers.
- [Temporary Relocation of Residents in Emergency Situations](#) – Commonwealth guide for relocating residents during emergencies.
- [Residential Aged Care Services: Caring for Older People in Heatwaves](#) – Checklist to help care for older people during extreme heat.
- [Preparing for an Emergency Event in Aged Care](#) – Practical checklist to help maintain service delivery during emergencies.
- [Temporary Relocation of Residents in Emergency Situations – Department of Health and Aged Care](#) – Official relocation guidelines for aged care providers.
- [NSW RFS Development Planning: Guide to Developing a Bushfire Emergency Management and Evacuation Plan](#) – Guidance on developing bushfire-specific plans.

How we can help your RACH plan for an emergency

We can support your home to stay operational and continue caring for residents by:

- Helping you make an emergency plan with specialised tools and support
- Helping you review and practice your emergency plan (it's vital that once you have a plan you regularly review and practise it with your team).
- Helping connect you with local emergency and community services and to ensure your plan has identified risks and information appropriate for your location.
- A range of training and support opportunities are available online and face-to-face.
- We can visit your home to support you on site.

More information

If you would like support or if we can help in any way, contact your Healthy Ageing Program Development Officer or our Disaster and Emergency Coordinator via email or phone on 4708 8100.