



Disaster and Emergency Management Framework



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN), operates in one of Australia's most disaster-prone regions, covering the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith local government areas.

This Disaster and Emergency Management Framework provides a clear, organisation-wide strategy for strengthening primary healthcare preparedness, supporting a coordinated health response and contributing to community recovery during and after disaster and emergency events.

The Framework sets out our role within NSW emergency management arrangements, articulates seven strategic objectives across the disaster and emergency management continuum and outlines the enablers required to deliver continuity of resilient and integrated primary healthcare.

We have supported primary healthcare in our region through disaster and emergency events since major bushfires impacted the greater Blue Mountains in October 2013. The response to these fires was notable for its inclusion of NSW general practice networks within the emergency response system, including our organisation. The lessons we learned during these fires highlighted the need for improved primary care preparedness to improve response and recovery outcomes.

This Framework builds on lessons learned, subsequent efforts and achievements where we have continued to demonstrate the critical role that primary healthcare can play in disaster and emergency management, notably:

- The development of a living discussion document 'Emergency management: the role of the GP', created with input from various general practice groups.
- The compilation of our procedures, resources and templates into the shared Planning Disaster Management Guide, to support Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and general practice responses to disasters and emergencies.
- Successful advocacy for inclusion of PHNs in the NSW Health Service Functional Area Supporting Plan (NSW HEALTHPLAN) for disaster response.
- Establishment and continued provision of the executive lead of the NSW-ACT PHN Disaster Management Network.



INTRODUCTION

Disaster and Emergency Management is a strategic priority for Wentworth Healthcare, articulated within our [Strategic Plan 2024–2029](#). Our region experiences frequent, complex, and often compounding disasters that significantly affect community health, service continuity and system capacity.

This Disaster and Emergency Management Framework sets out our strategic approach to supporting primary healthcare continuity across all phases of disaster and emergency events. It guides how the organisation works internally and with partners to ensure the right care is available in the right place at the right time before, during and after emergencies.

The Framework is underpinned by a whole-of-organisation approach and a ‘one health system’ mindset, recognising that effective disaster and emergency management requires collaboration across primary healthcare, with our local health district, emergency services, government and community organisations.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT: REGIONAL RISK PROFILE

Australia’s climate and disaster risk profile is changing. ***“Changes in weather and climate extremes – such as extreme heat, heavy rainfall, coastal inundation, fire weather and drought – exacerbate existing pressures on the health and wellbeing of our communities and ecosystems”***.¹ The Nepean Blue Mountains region is one of the most disaster-prone regions in Australia. From 2018 to 2025 there were thirteen formal disaster declarations in the region including bushfire, storm, flood and extreme weather events.²

Key risk characteristics include:

- **Bushfire:** Extensive exposure, including the 2019–20 bushfires where the region burnt for 79 days, 80% of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area burnt and there was estimated damage to the region of over \$100 million.³
- **Flooding:** The Hawkesbury-Nepean is identified as an incredibly complex floodplain and is considered one of the highest flood-risk regions in Australia.⁴
- **Extreme heat:** Penrith regularly experiences prolonged extreme heat events with significant population health impacts. Extreme heat has been shown to kill more people in Australia than other natural disasters combined.⁵
- **Cumulative impact:** Communities experiencing overlapping and repeated disasters, resulting in prolonged disruption, compounding trauma and sustained pressure on health services. In the last ten years, the region has been subject to multiple disaster and emergency events, including drought, fire, pandemic, severe storms, heatwave, repeated flooding, landslides, and significant transport, infrastructure and extended utility outages.

These risks within the region are further exacerbated by constraints in transport and communications infrastructure and digital inequities. These conditions increase demand for accessible, flexible and person centred primary healthcare across all disaster phases.

The RACGP statement on the role of general practitioners in emergency particularly notes ***“GPs hold a unique place in communities. They are a trusted source of information, connection and support, particularly for people most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and emergencies. They are connected to people often requiring additional support to prepare, respond and recover from events in ways that other emergency service providers are not.”***⁶



DISASTER AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONTEXT AND GOVERNANCE

Disaster and emergency management in NSW operates under established legislative and planning frameworks, including:

- [The National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework](#)
- [Australia's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience](#)
- [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#)
- [NSW State Emergency Management Plan \(EMPLAN\)](#)
- [NSW Health Services Functional Area Supporting Plan \(HEALTHPLAN\)](#) in which PHNs are Participating Organisations
- [NSW Recovery Plan](#)
- State, Regional and Local Emergency Management Committees.

At a regional level, we are a participating organisation in the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District (NBMLHD) HEALTHPLAN.

We participate in these structures through liaison, representation, information sharing and support across the emergency management continuum. We work closely with our Local Health District, local resilience and recovery networks, and as part of the State Health Services Functional Area Sub Committee.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Framework is to:

- define our role in disaster and emergency management
- provide a consistent, strategic approach across preparedness, response and recovery
- guide the prioritisation of activities, partnerships and investment
- strengthen resilience within primary healthcare to respond to disasters and emergencies and maintain continuity of care
- guide collaboration across service providers and sectors to best support communities
- support continuous learning and improvement.



SCOPE

This Framework applies to:

- our internal processes and delivered services
- commissioned programs and contracted providers
- initiatives that support, strengthen and integrate primary healthcare disaster and emergency management across the region.

The Framework adopts an all-hazards approach, encompassing disasters (eg. bushfires, floods, heatwaves) and other emergencies such as prolonged utility outages, mass casualty events and large-scale mental health impacts requiring a coordinated response.

We do not hold legislative responsibility for emergency response operations. Instead, we support formal emergency management arrangements under NSW legislation, plans including the NSW HEALTHPLAN, and work as part of a coordinated health response with the NSW Health Services Functional Area Coordinator (HSFAC) and our Local Health District.

While we do not have a formal role in the accreditation of primary healthcare providers for disaster and emergency management, we support providers to meet relevant requirements within the [Standards for General Practice \(current edition\) and the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards](#).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Disaster and emergency management activities are guided by:

- 1. whole-of-system, coordinated approaches**
- 2. community-centred and trauma-informed practice**
- 3. equity-focused decision-making**
- 4. preparedness embedded in routine practice**
- 5. shared responsibility and strong partnerships**
- 6. clear, accessible and consistent communication**
- 7. continuous improvement and shared learning.**



ROLE OF WENTWORTH HEALTHCARE

We fulfil a vital role in all stages of disaster and emergency management, from preparation to response and recovery.

Our work complements and supports the work of local, state and Australian governments, and emergency services who are primarily responsible for leading 'on the ground' response and recovery efforts.

We do this by supporting primary healthcare services to remain accessible, coordinated and responsive in our high-risk region.

Our primary objectives in emergency planning and preparedness are to:

- **Coordinate:** Support and coordinate the primary healthcare contribution to disaster and emergency management in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas.
- **Build capacity:** Assist local primary healthcare providers in health emergency planning, response and recovery.
- **Support continuity of access:** Assist local primary healthcare providers to plan for and maintain continuity of operation during emergencies where safe to do so.
- **Support community resilience:** Work with primary healthcare and partners to support the preparedness of the most at-risk patients.
- **Maintain strong relationships:** Work closely with NBMLHD, primary healthcare providers, local councils and other disaster and emergency management and community stakeholders.
- **Be a trusted conduit for information sharing:** Facilitate the two-way exchange of information between primary healthcare providers and emergency management partners to support a shared understanding of healthcare service availability, identify gaps in service delivery and help communities maintain continuity of care.

As a PHN, our role is informed by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's Guidance for PHNs in Health Emergency Preparedness (October 2025).

SUPPORTING CONTINUITY OF PRIMARY CARE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES

Disaster and Emergency Priorities

- Continuity of primary care
- Reducing health inequities during disasters
- Stronger system coordination
- Improving community resilience and recovery



Key Enablers

- Leadership and organisational commitment
- Governance and accountability
- Workforce capability and development
- Partnerships and engagement
- Communication systems
- Sustained and flexible funding

Objective 1: A Coordinated Health Response

Integrate primary care effectively into formal emergency planning and response structures through good governance, communication and organisational readiness.

Objective 2: Well Prepared Primary Care

Build capacity and capability of primary care providers to effectively prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster and emergency events.

Objective 3: Embedded Emergency Planning

Embed disaster and emergency planning and preparedness into the core functions of Wentworth Healthcare: commissioning, capacity building and coordination of primary healthcare.

Objective 4: Supporting Vulnerable Communities and Priority Populations

Improve preparedness, response, and recovery outcomes for populations most vulnerable to disaster and emergency impacts.

Objective 5: Strong Relationships and Collaboration

Strengthen partnerships across health, emergency services, government, and community to collaborate to improve preparedness and disaster and emergency outcomes.

Objective 6: Continuous Improvement and Advocacy

Embed evaluation, learning and innovation following disaster and emergency events and advocate, through a systems improvement approach, to improve disaster and emergency management for primary care and priority populations.

Objective 7: Community Recovery

Support coordinated recovery through timely information, services and engagement. Collaborate with key stakeholders to ensure effective access to supports for primary care and community.



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Wentworth Healthcare

Blg BR, Level 1, Suite 1
Werrington Park Corporate Centre
14 Great Western Highway
Kingswood NSW 2747

P 4708 8100

POSTAL ADDRESS

Wentworth Healthcare
Blg BR, Level 1, Suite 1
Werrington Park Corporate Centre
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751

For more information about Wentworth Healthcare
or Nepean Blue Mountains PHN visit
nbmphn.com.au

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