

2/11/2023

Governance and Administration Select Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

## Submission on the Emergency Management Bill

Tēnā koutou

Age Concern New Zealand He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the *Emergency Management Bill*.

Age Concern New Zealand **supports** updating legislation to guide our preparation, response and recovery from emergency events. Aotearoa has been experiencing severe weather events which are extremely challenging for people living in affected communities, as well as for the organisations responsible for responding to those events.

Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023 was one of New Zealand's worst weather disasters with the North Island experiencing extreme rainfall and flooding, wind damage, and storm surges across the North Island.<sup>1</sup> Some regions are being hit repeatedly by severe weather events and there are many learnings that can help shape our preparation and response to future emergencies. The impact of climate change is affecting the severity and frequency of emergency weather events; we all need to be prepared and protected as we face this challenge together.

Age Concern New Zealand's submission focuses on issues for older people as one of the communities that may be disproportionately affected by emergencies. We will also make recommendations about the support required by organisations, including Age Concerns, when supporting emergency responses in their local communities.

### Who we are

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Age Concern is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa to support older people, their friends and whānau. Our values – Dignity, Wellbeing, Equity, and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do. We aim to ensure older New Zealanders get the best advice and support no matter where they live in Aotearoa. With a network of 30 local Age Concerns operating in 40 locations, and

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<sup>1</sup><https://blog.metservice.com/TropicalCycloneGabrielleSummary#:~:text=Head%20of%20Weather%20Communications%20Lisa,impacts%20to%20the%20North%20Island.%22>

a national office based in Wellington, we are the place to go for services and information about getting older.

We are proud of our heritage in standing up for the rights of older New Zealanders for more than 75 years. As an organisation, our focus is on contributing to the overall wellbeing of older New Zealanders. We work to prevent the abuse and neglect of older adults; improve their health and wellbeing; end loneliness and social isolation; and advocate for older people's rights.

## Background

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Older New Zealanders are a diverse, resilient and valued part of every community. The over 65 population is growing across all ethnicities with Asian, Māori and Pacific older populations growing at significant rates. Older women living alone are another group that is rapidly increasing. New Zealanders in general are living longer; and within a decade, it is estimated there will be 1.2 million people aged 65+, over a fifth of the population. This needs to be taken into consideration in emergency management planning.

Some of the older adults in our communities will need greater support and help in an emergency, others will be amongst the helpers. Older people are not all the same, any more than any other population group. However, older people that are frail, have a disability or live alone may require extra help in an emergency. Some may not have whānau or friends living nearby, or they may need help to evacuate their home or get to higher ground. They may be less able to move their possessions, including precious irreplaceable possessions, to safety. If injured, they are likely to take longer to recover. Older adults may not use digital technology as regularly as others, or at all, which is a disadvantage in a time where much information and connection happens online. This all combines with older New Zealanders have a stoic attitude toward hardship and being reluctant to seek help, often thinking others are worse off than them.

We will comment further on some of these issues in our comments and recommendations, based on our experience of working with older adults across Aotearoa. Some of our local Age Concerns, for example, have commented that welfare support for older people worked much better during Covid 19 than after flooding events as civil defence appointed a lead person for older people's welfare during the pandemic, but not for Cyclone Gabrielle.

## Our Comments

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1. Age Concern is generally supportive of the following aspects of the Bill:
  - a. Clarifying roles and responsibilities across the sector
  - b. Enhancing the role of Māori in emergency management
  - c. Enabling equitable outcomes for communities disproportionately impacted by emergencies
  - d. Strengthening the resilience and accountability of critical infrastructure
  - e. Establishing a more responsive regulatory framework for setting standards.
2. Some older New Zealanders may be disproportionately affected in an emergency event. They may not have the physical ability to get to safety without help, even within their own home. For example, in recent flood events, people spoke of how quickly flood waters rose and many were rescued from the roof top of their home.<sup>2</sup> Getting on to the roof of their home or into the ceiling cavity to escape rising flood waters would be impossible for many older people.
3. Displacement and disruption resulting from emergency events make it difficult for older adults to access healthcare, obtain medication, receive home support or have access to equipment they require, including spectacles, hearing aids, and walkers.<sup>3</sup>
4. Some older people do not drive, which along with the loss of normal public transport systems and road closures, add to the difficulty seniors face to collect essential supplies, attend medical appointments or get to a nearby pharmacy.
5. Dealing with damage or loss to your home, finding new accommodation and dealing with insurance claims are challenging processes for anyone to negotiate. It can be especially distressing for older adults and can lead to a sense of isolation as well as an erosion of their limited savings, with no chance of them regaining a sound financial position.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/484254/cyclone-gabrielle-batters-hawke-s-bay-rescued-worker-stranded-for-hours-on-roof-as-floodwaters-rise>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/132293344/campaign-to-provide-emergency-bags-for-older-people>

## Our recommendations

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1. Create supportive environments that foster collaboration and working together, encourage people to look out for one another, and provide mutual support. Organisations with specific emergency management responsibilities clearly play a vital role responding to emergency events, but they will always depend on communities helping themselves as well. Relationships cannot be mandated; they must be mutually respectful and play out in the spirit of trust and reciprocity. This can best be achieved by setting up collaborative networks.
2. Use multiple methods to alert communities of an emergency event. Some Age Concerns report that many people were unaware that a civil defence emergency had been called during Cyclone Gabrielle, as the only warning given was through mobile phone alerts. Sirens are a useful additional method, as is using existing networks that can immediately activate support for older people after the emergency is declared, and during the recovery period.
3. Protect and provide for older people but also recognise their strengths, the benefit of their past experiences coping with emergencies and their ability to contribute to helping others.<sup>4</sup>
4. Recognise that some older New Zealanders may be disproportionately affected by emergency events. Put in place measures that will help to mitigate the risk faced by older community members, including kaumātua, Pacific people, people with disabilities or chronic conditions, and older women.
5. Appoint a lead person for older people's welfare in each area who can co-ordinate activity, share information and set up an ongoing network of organisations that work with older people in their local community. This network can maintain regular contact and activate a coordinated response when any emergency occurs. This way welfare checks can be methodical and thorough, avoiding duplication. We have heard accounts of some older people receiving multiple welfare checks and others coping on their own for over a week with no contact.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ageing in Aotearoa, The New Zealand Health Work and Retirement Study (2023)* by Health and Ageing Research Team (HART) Massey University

6. Retain and extend a successful Community Connector model initiated by the Ministry of Social Development during the pandemic. Some Age Concerns and other community organisations were funded through Community Connector contracts, which enabled them to provide a high level of welfare support through both Covid and cyclone emergencies. It also enabled them to support older adults over the long road of recovery. Keeping up with welfare checks in communities would be beneficial in preparation for future emergency events, as organisations would already have a portfolio of the most vulnerable that would need assistance.
7. Advise communities about who to contact for emergency home repairs and link them with offers of help to clean up after an emergency, for example cleaning up silt in and around their property, removing fallen trees, mending broken fences.
8. Provide additional funding to superannuitants to carry out repairs to their property if they are dependent solely on their superannuation with little, if any, additional income. Forty percent of superannuitants have no other income and have nothing left to use for repairs or emergency situations.
9. Prioritise preparedness and talking about the ‘what ifs’ for emergency events, particularly for those living alone. Age Concern Nelson-Tasman’s ‘Just in Case’ campaign is an example of a successful initiative to sit down and have ‘what if’ discussions with vulnerable older adults, getting them to think about who they would call in the event of a disaster and what they should take with them.<sup>5</sup> The Age Concern carried out this initiative without direct funding, simply fundraising the cost of emergency bags and spending staff time delivering them and having the conversations. The Grab and Go emergency bags were well received and gave some peace of mind to people who don’t have a lot of family or friends nearby, and who have little disposable income. Community initiatives like this one should be encouraged and receive at least partial funding to help seniors and low-income people to have emergency supplies when disasters strike.
10. Clear communication must take place before, during, and after an emergency event. Communication must be clear, use simple language, and be in multiple formats and languages. Some older people are less likely to access online information and internet and power may not be available initially anyway during an emergency event.

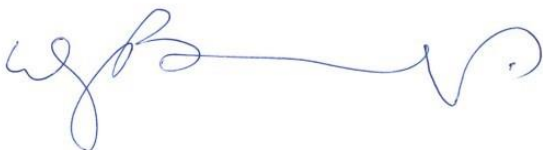
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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/132293344/campaign-to-provide-emergency-bags-for-older-people>

11. Ensure that timeframes and processes for processing insurance claims are fair and reasonable. The Christchurch earthquake response demonstrated the distress and harm caused by prolonged settlements.<sup>6</sup> Some older adults may not live to see a claim settled or, at the very least, lose quiet enjoyment of their retirement years.
12. Provide extra funding to marae, iwi, non-government and community organisations such as Age Concerns, during the emergency event and for a time during recovery. Many organisations would be willing to play a greater role in emergency events, linking people with the services they need and carrying out welfare checks, if they were funded to help cover the extra responsibility and hours involved.
13. Provide free emergency management training for Māori and Pacific providers, community organisations and the not-for-profit sector who will all play a key role in any emergency response, albeit often an unofficial one.
14. Provide free counselling for the staff of Māori and Pacific providers, community organisations and the not-for-profit sector who may experience trauma during their emergency response activities, while also potentially handling disruption to their own home and workplace.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission on the *Emergency Management Bill*, we are very interested in seeing this legislation updated and fit for purpose.

Nāku noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen  
Chief Executive  
Age Concern New Zealand

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/101036282/nearly-seven-years-on-thousands-of-christchurch-earthquake-insurance-claims-remain>