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Committee Secretariat  
Governance and Administration Select Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

## **Submission on the Emergency Management Bill (No 2)**

Tēnā koutou

Age Concern New Zealand He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the *Emergency Management Bill (No 2)*.

Age Concern New Zealand (ACNZ) **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 all the organisations responsible for responding to those events.

Flooding and slips in January 2026 are front of mind for us all as we remember those whose lives have been lost and consider what could have been done differently. The plight of those whose homes and livelihoods have been devastated is of huge concern. We know it will take many months for repairs to be made to roads and homes, some of which have been red stickered and are unsafe for people to return.

It was only three years ago in February 2023 that Cyclone Gabrielle was the emergency event we were focused on and in December 2019 lives were lost and others forever changed by the eruption of Whakaari White Island. The city of Christchurch is still recovering from the effects of earthquakes back in 2011. These are some of the more memorable emergency events but there have been many more effecting our people and our land. It is vital that we are well prepared to manage current and future emergency events, we therefore welcome this Bill (2) and express our appreciation of all those in formal emergency management roles and the unsung heroes from within our communities.

Age Concern New Zealand's submission focuses particularly on issues for older people as one of the population groups in our communities that may be disproportionately affected by emergency events.

### **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 28 local Age Concerns operating in 38 locations, and a national office based in Wellington, we are the place to go for services and information about issues for older New Zealanders.

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 contributing to the overall health and 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 to advocate for older people's rights.

## Background

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Older New Zealanders are a diverse, resilient and valuable part of every neighbourhood and local 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, with the 2023 Census indicating two-thirds of all people over 65 living alone are female. <sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> The 85+ age cohort is the fastest growing group with projections that by 2073 they could number 500,000. <sup>3</sup> These demographic factors need to be taken into account in emergency management planning and responses.

Some of the older adults in our communities will need greater support and help in an emergency, others will be actively helping their neighbours and communities. Older people are not a homogenous group, any more than other age groups. However, older people that are frail, have a disability or live alone may require extra help in an emergency.

They may have limited mobility or limited sight that mean they need assistance to move to safety or get to higher ground. They may be less able to move their possessions, including precious items or get their pets to safety. Many older people have hearing impairments which reduces their capacity to hear instructions or what is going on around them. And if

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/how-we-live-a-look-at-families-and-households-from-the-2023-census/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/older-people-experiencing-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage-in-new-zealand/older-people-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage-june.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/older-people-experiencing-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage-in-new-zealand/older-people-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage-june.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/long-term-insights-briefings/long-term-insights-briefing-consultation-doc.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/long-term-insights-briefings/long-term-insights-briefing-consultation-doc.pdf)

injured, older adults are likely to take longer to recover. The various impairments older people may have need to be considered during all phases of an emergency event, from the warning stage, through the initial response and into recovery.

Many older New Zealanders have a stoic attitude toward hardship, having lived through many events over their lifetime, locally, nationally and worldwide. This contributes to their resilience but can also mean they are reluctant to seek help, often thinking others are worse off than them.

Communication is important during an emergency and some older adults may not use digital technology as confidently or regularly as others, or at all, which is a disadvantage in an era where information is increasingly online. A lower percentage of older New Zealanders own a smartphone, and this will impact on their ability to receive early warnings or be in contact with others during an emergency event. The Ministry of Social Development reported in 2019 that about 50% of those over 65 owned a smartphone.<sup>4</sup> Even if this proportion has increased, it would not be equal to the ownership rates of younger generations.

We would like changes to the Emergency Management Bill (No 2) to consider the needs of older New Zealanders in any emergency event and recognise them as a population that is likely to be disproportionately affected. The situation is further exacerbated by the high proportion (35%) of people aged 65+ with a disability. This makes their needs even more pressing in an emergency event.<sup>5</sup>

We will comment further on some of the issues we've raised in our comments and recommendations, based on our experience of working with older adults across Aotearoa.

## Our Comments

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1. Age Concern is broadly supportive of the following aspects of the Bill:
  - a. Strengthening the role of communities and iwi Māori in emergency management
  - b. Providing clear responsibilities at the national, regional, and local levels
  - c. Enabling a higher minimum standard of emergency management
  - d. Minimising disruption to essential services
  - e. Ensuring that agencies have the tools to do their job effectively when an emergency happens.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/newsroom/kotahitanga/2019/improving-the-lives-of-our-seniors-dec-2019.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/1-in-6-new-zealanders-are-disabled/>

2. ACNZ agrees with recognising that some population groups have vulnerabilities or specific needs that mean they may be disproportionately affected by emergency events. This will lead to more effective and targeted planning to address the respective needs of these groups. We agree with the Bill identifying older people, rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, disabled people, children and those experiencing socio-economic hardship or isolation. “Older people” are not only a group who will be disproportionately impacted in themselves, they also make up a cross section of those living in rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, disabled people, and experiencing hardship and isolation. This puts some older New Zealanders at increased risk.
3. Emergency agencies and emergency management committees at all levels must be aware that some older New Zealanders will 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 including Cyclone Gabrielle, people spoke of how quickly flood water rose and some were rescued from the roof top of their home.<sup>6,7,8</sup> During Cyclone Gabrielle a 59-year-old woman drowned in the ceiling cavity of her home trying to get above the floodwaters.<sup>9</sup> Getting on to the roof of their home or to high ground to escape rising flood waters would be impossible for some older people.
4. ACNZ supports increased recognition of the role of iwi Māori in emergency management. We strongly agree with Māori representation on Emergency Management Committees and in the Co-ordinating Executive Groups. We also support engagement with iwi Māori on the development of regional and national emergency management plans by the Director-General and emergency committees. We recommend this representation and engagement includes kaumātua and tāngata Whaikaha, acknowledging that they are important knowledge holders and experienced in their local region.
5. We recognise and appreciate the role iwi Māori play in emergency events opening marae and providing food, shelter and other support to all.
6. Likewise, ACNZ supports strengthening the role of communities in emergency planning and responses. Agencies and personnel with specific emergency management roles will always be dependent on communities helping one another,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.1news.co.nz/2026/01/22/family-traumatised-after-five-hours-huddled-on-te-araroa-roof/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.1news.co.nz/2023/02/14/orchard-workers-trapped-on-roofs-amid-gabrielle-flooding/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/131260089/cyclone-gabrielle-the-quiet-heroes-who-answered-the-call-for-help>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/weather-news/300814352/cyclone-gabrielle-everything-we-know-about-the-11-people-whove-died>

especially initially. We have all seen wonderful examples of communities supporting one another in times of floods, landslides and earthquakes. We agree with the requirement for Emergency Management Committees to engage with local people and have them represented in Co-ordinating Executive Groups. We recommend this engagement and representation includes older members of the community and people with disabilities.

7. ACNZ agrees with the Bill (2) putting in place mechanisms to lift minimum standards and enforce compliance. With increasingly regular emergency events it is important for every community to be prepared. This demands skill and preparedness not only by community members but also from the emergency management committees, mayors, councils and first responders.
8. We wish to raise awareness of the challenge for some older people, especially those living alone, to deal with the aftermath of an emergency event that has damaged their home or left them homeless. Disruption resulting from emergency events makes it difficult for older adults to access healthcare, obtain medication, purchase groceries and other essential supplies, receive home support or have access to equipment they require including spectacles, hearing aids, and walkers.<sup>10</sup> Timely support and clear, transparent and fair processes must be implemented to enable recovery to occur as soon as practicable to enable people's immediate and longer term needs to be met.
9. Age Concerns in some localities are part of the emergency response management in their region and work together with others to locate and support older people during emergencies. Several Age Concerns have arranged for isolated older people in their region to have emergency 'grab bags' ready and many Age Concerns provide emergency management information at their premises.
10. Dealing with damage or loss of 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.

## Our recommendations

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1. ACNZ recommends identifying older people as one of the population groups that is likely to be disproportionately affected by emergency events.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/132293344/campaign-to-provide-emergency-bags-for-older-people>

2. We recommend that action is taken to protect and provide for older people in an emergency event while also recognising their strengths, resilience and the benefit of their past experiences coping with emergencies and their ability to contribute to helping others.<sup>11</sup>
3. We recommend identifying other groups that may be disproportionately affected by emergency events as stated in the Bill (2) – rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, disabled people, children and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation or isolation. We do not consider this to be a mutually exclusive list; others may be at risk of more harm dependent on the location and nature of the emergency.
4. We recommend increased recognition of the role of iwi Māori in emergency management. We strongly support Māori representation on Emergency Management Committees and in the Co-ordinating Executive Groups. Iwi Māori must be recognised and valued for their contribution to emergency management at local, regional and national level.
5. We recommend strengthening the role of communities in emergency planning and responses. We agree with the requirement for emergency management committees to engage with local people and have them represented in Co-ordinating Executive Groups.
6. We recommend Involving older people, kaumātua, disabled people and tāngata whaikaha in emergency management committees and in engagement regarding emergency management at local, regional and national levels.
7. We recommend mechanisms are put in place to lift minimum standards and enforce compliance. With increasingly regular severe weather events and the cost of emergency events to individuals, communities and the economy, we need to be skilled in our response preparedness, risk mitigation, and emergency management across all phases.
8. We recommend that clear communication takes place before, during, and after an emergency event. Communication must be clear, use simple language, and be in

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<sup>11</sup> *Ageing in Aotearoa, The New Zealand Health Work and Retirement Study (2023)* by Health and Ageing Research Team (HART) Massey University

multiple languages and formats (including radio and television broadcasts). Some older people are less likely to access online information and regardless of that limitation the internet and power may not be available when an emergency event initially occurs. We further suggest that sirens are a useful emergency warning system as it alerts people who do not have a smartphone, such as 50% of people aged 65+.

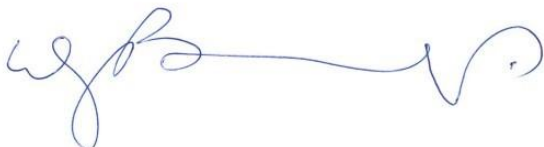
9. We recommend that communities are advised about who to contact for emergency home repairs and link them with offers of help to clean up after an emergency, for example cleaning up silt and mud in and around their property, removing fallen trees and mending fences.
10. We recommend that free emergency management training is provided for community organisations like Age Concerns, and the not-for-profit sector, who will all play a key role in any emergency response, albeit often an unofficial one.

### Closing comment

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Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission on the *Emergency Management Bill (2)*, we are vitally interested in the outcome of the consultation and implementation of the final version Bill once enacted.

Nāku noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen  
Chief Executive  
Age Concern New Zealand