



Australian Government
National Emergency
Management Agency

Funding for this project was provided by the Australian Government's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

Creating Safe Shelter Spaces



Gender and Disaster Australia



Acknowledgement of Country

With deep respect, we acknowledge and honour the elders of the past who held and passed on the wisdom of 60,000 years of care for the land we live and work on today.

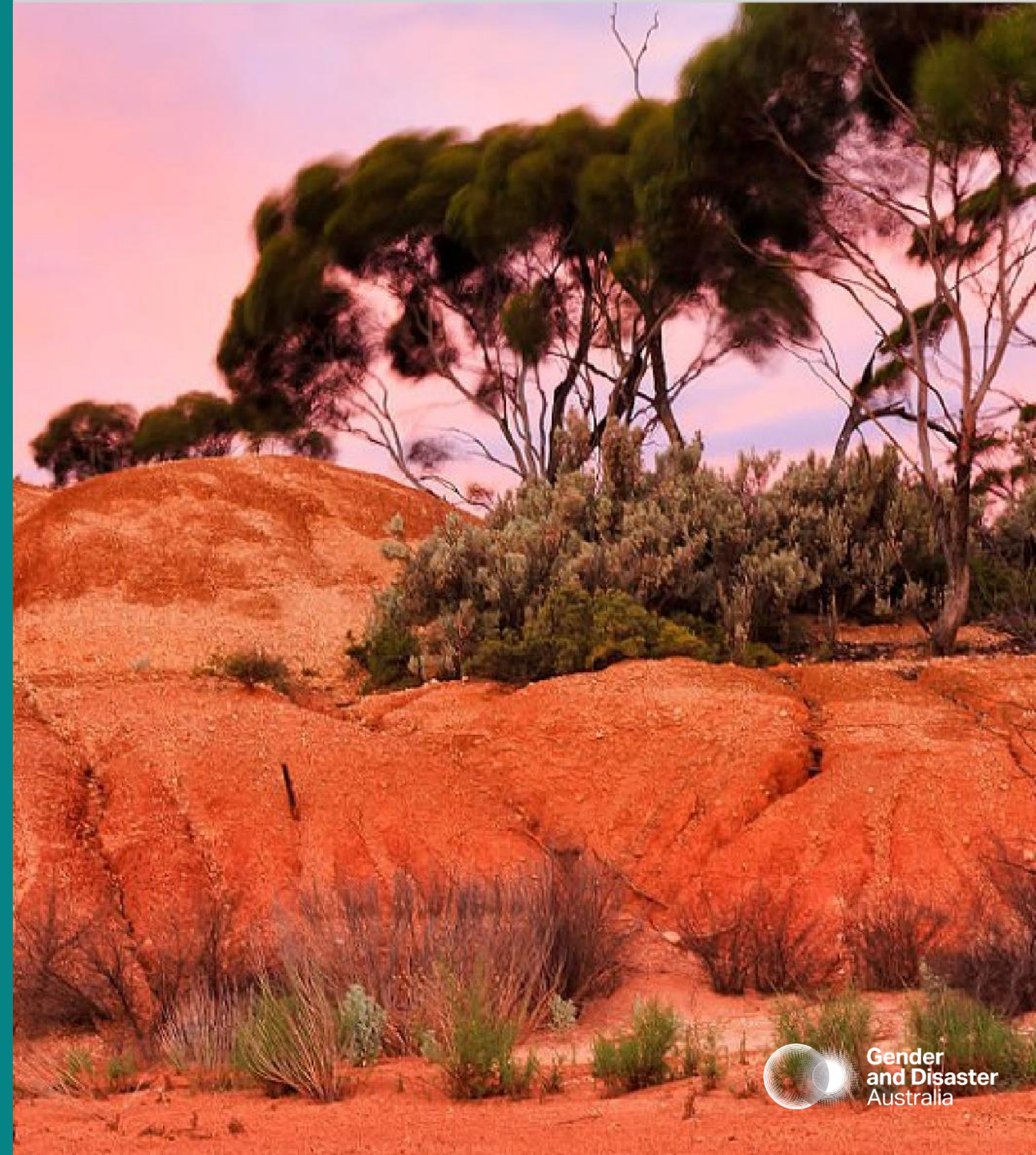
We acknowledge the endeavours of elders in our time, who demonstrate strength, insight, and tenacity when faced with the intensifying disasters that challenge us all.

We also acknowledge the future leaders, the inheritors of this wisdom, who will carry forward the legacy of care for Country, culture, and people.

They are our hope for a future where disasters and violence no longer disproportionately affect First Nations communities, where cultural practices are preserved, and where the deep connection to the land endures.

Through this acknowledgement Gender and Disaster Australia commits to honouring this connection, learning from First Nations wisdom and practice, and working together to address the unique challenges faced by First Nations people at the intersection of gender and disaster.

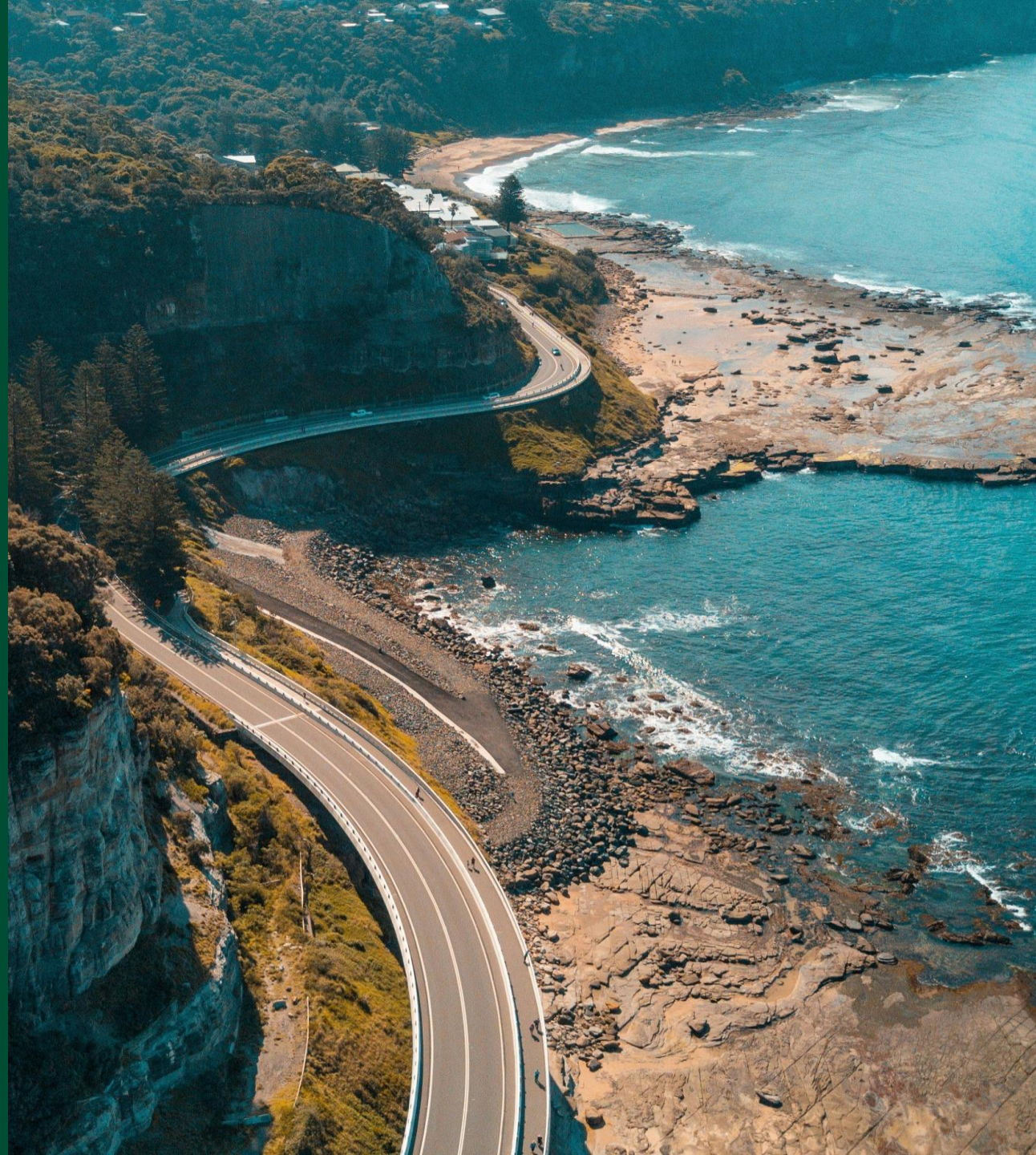
In unity and respect we stand on unceded Country and acknowledge the importance of centering Indigenous perspectives and voices in our striving towards genuine disaster resilience and gender equity.



Who is Gender and Disaster Australia?

Gender and Disaster Australia is the leading national organisation working at the intersection of gender and disaster.

- We conduct research on the disaster experiences of women, men and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Gender Diverse, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Sistergirl, and Brotherboy (LGBTIQASB+) people
- We provide Lessons in Disaster training for people working across the disaster and emergency management sector
- We develop key resources such as the Gender and Emergency Management (GEM) Guidelines
- We work in partnership to improve inclusion and reduce the harms experienced by women, men and LGBTIQASB+ people before, during and after disaster



Our Vision

A society where all people are seen, heard, safe and supported, through gender-informed action before, during and after disasters.



Creating Safe Shelter Spaces Project

Project Overview

- Funded by the Disaster Ready Fund (2025)
- Aims to improve safety and reduce risk in emergency evacuation centres
- Focus on women, children, LGBTIQASB+ communities, and other gender-diverse groups

Approach

- Victoria: Decentralised delivery across all councils
- NSW: Centralised training with Department of Communities and Justice and Red Cross
- Developed in response to research findings

Key Insight

Emergency evacuation centres are critical during emergencies, yet they are not always experienced as safe, accessible, or inclusive for everyone who needs them.



How This Work Was Done



Community-led evidence base:

- Surveys and stakeholder discussions
- GADAus and partner research
- Lived experience insights
- Partnerships

Voices included:

- Women and children (Women's Health networks and UWS research)
- DFV specialists
- LGBTIQASB+ people (organisations and research)
- First Nations
- Multicultural communities
- People with disability (organisations and research)
- Young Australians
- Older Australians

Key Findings

Across all population groups, the same enablers came up: Emergency evacuation centres work best when they feel **calm, respectful and human**, not chaotic or institutional.

This means:

Clear, Predictable Communication

Trauma-informed Interactions

Privacy and Dignity

Gender and Cultural Safety

Trust –Built Through People, Not Just Processes





Women, children and families

Key risks

- Women carry primary responsibility for caregiving and emotional support during displacement, often at the cost of their own wellbeing
- Infant feeding, sleep and hygiene are often critical stress points
- Night-time safety (toilets, showers, sleeping areas)
- Lack of child-friendly spaces

What makes a difference?

- Women-only and family sleeping zones
- Safe and clean infant feeding and care spaces
- Menstrual and hygiene supports built into operations
- Support organisations 'wandering with intent'
- Safe spaces for very young children



People experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV)

Key risks

- Disasters increase the frequency and severity of DFV
- Survivors fear:
 - Being overheard
 - Being identified
 - Being found by perpetrators
- Public intake processes can unintentionally expose people
- Unequal impacts across different communities

What makes a difference?

- Private intake spaces
- Confidential conversation rooms
- Alias name options
- Secure entry points
- Female staff and interpreters
- Clear, specialist referral pathways
- Staff and agencies trained and practiced in procedure



LGBTIQASB+ People

Key risks

- Disasters amplify existing inequalities
- Misgendering
- Being 'outed' through forms or sleeping arrangements
- Homophobia, transphobia and discrimination
- Lack of Privacy

What makes a difference?

- Gender-neutral language
- Recognition of chosen family
- Respect for names and pronouns
- Private intake processes
- Visible inclusion backed by behaviour
- Gender neutral bathrooms and toilets
- Giving people choice of sleeping arrangements



First Nations People

Key risks

- Trauma reactivation
- Mistrust of government spaces
- Lack of cultural respect
- Disruption to country and kinship
- First Nations women and gender-diverse people may face heightened risks relating to privacy, violence, shame and disclosure

What makes a difference?

- First Nations involvement in planning and practice
- First Nations workers and Elders present
- Kinship-aware processes
- Trauma aware, non-policing approaches
- Visible welcome and inclusion supported by behaviour



Multicultural Communities

Key risks

- Language gaps
- Fear of discrimination
- Unfamiliar systems
- Gender norms around privacy
- Inadequate accommodation for cultural and religious practices

What makes a difference?

- Interpreters (including female interpreters)
- Simple English, multilingual and visual signage
- Trusted community messengers
- Culturally appropriate food and spaces
- Signage indicating zero tolerance for racism – and policy to support this



People with disability

Key risks

- Loss of power for equipment
- Inaccessible bathrooms/showers
- Communication breakdown
- Sensory overload
- Heightened risk of violence
- Reliance on carers who may also be perpetrators

What makes a difference?

- Designed-in accessibility
- Reliable power and medication storage
- Easy read, Auslan, visual supports
- Quiet, low-stimulus spaces
- Service providers 'wandering with intent'



Younger people

Key risks

- Disrupted routines, schooling and peer networks
- Expose to predatory behaviour in evacuation centres
- Limited agency and participation
- Gender safety and inclusion gaps

What makes a difference?

- Strengthen Child-Safe and Youth-Safe Practices
- Create youth friendly spaces
- Improve Accessibility and Sensory Support
- Embed Gender-Inclusive and LGBTQIA+-Affirming Practices
- Provide Youth-Appropriate Information and Resources



Older people

Key risks

- Disrupted routines and care
- Inaccessible bathrooms/showers
- Care responsibilities can lead some older people to delay or avoid evacuation
- Inaccessible communication and information

What makes a difference?

- Designed-in accessibility
- Gender-responsive practice
- Communication, Cognitive and decision-making support
- Spaces that support safety, privacy and dignity
- Opportunities to enhance social connection and wellbeing

Key Take-Aways

SAFETY IS GENDERED

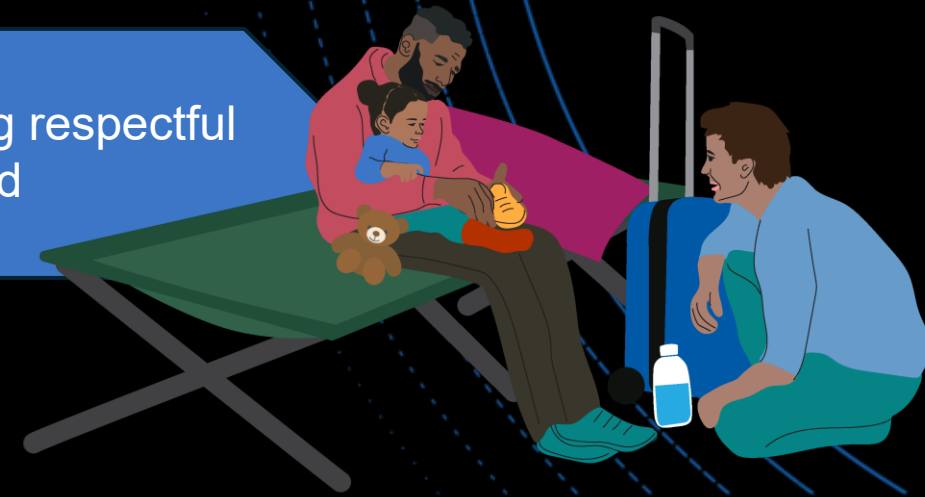
Women, children and gender-diverse people experience emergency evacuation centres differently, with distinct privacy, safety and dignity needs.

INCLUSION CREATES THE CONDITIONS FOR SAFETY

Safety is strengthened through inclusive design, communication and procedures that make evacuation centres accessible, respectful and welcoming to all.

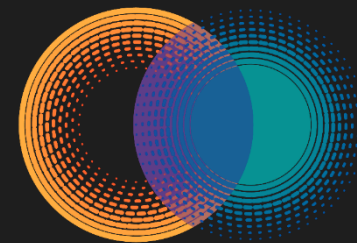
SAFETY IS BROUGHT TO LIFE THROUGH EVERYDAY ACTIONS

Safety depends on how staff behave in real time: offering privacy, using respectful language, and responding to people's needs with care, consistency and trauma-informed practice.



Thank you 😊

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**Gender
and Disaster
Australia**