

FIRE to
FLOURISH



Strength through community-led action

NATIONAL SURVEY:
DISASTER
PREPAREDNESS AND
RESILIENCE

2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia. This report was created by people living on Awabakal, Boon Wurrung, Cammeraygal, Gadigal, Peramangk, Wurundjeri and Yaegl Country.

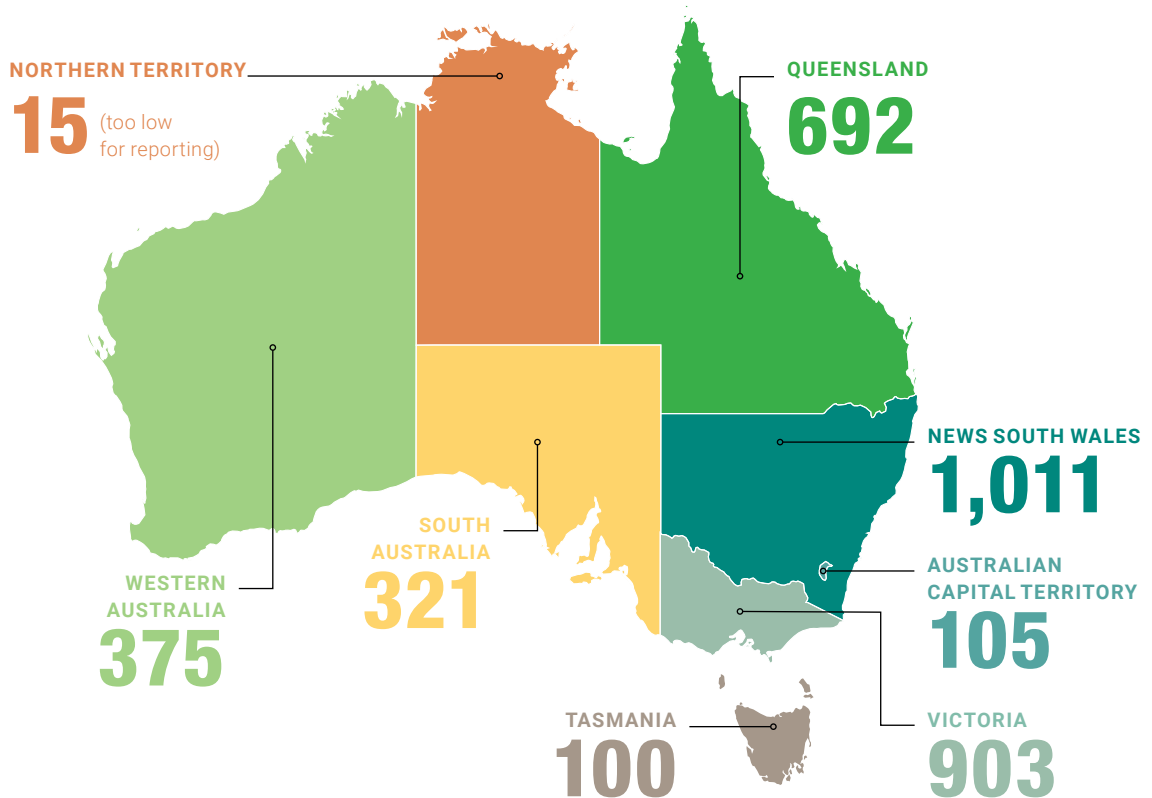
We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.



RESPONDENT PROFILE

About two-thirds of the people surveyed lived in capital cities (2,367) and 1,155 lived regionally.

The number of respondents living in each state:



Australian states with more respondents reporting prior disaster experiences were ACT (72%), Queensland (62%) and New South Wales (51%), with ACT and New South Wales disasters more likely to have been in the prior 2 years, and Queensland more likely to have been longer ago.

The age range was skewed towards older people with half of respondents aged 55 and over (1,774) and towards those with tertiary education – over 2,000 respondents held a diploma or higher degree. Older people were more likely to have experienced a disaster event, and more likely to respond positively to statements about their communities.

The vast majority of participants spoke English as their first language, with only 545 people having a language other than English as their first language. Participants were evenly spread over socioeconomic ranges and the split between genders was also fairly even, with slightly more women surveyed than men.

Nearly half (47%) of the people surveyed said they had previously experienced a disaster event near where they live, and 36% of those people had experienced a disaster in the last 2 years. Natural disasters include bushfires, floods, earthquakes and major storms.

KEY FINDINGS

Nearly half of survey respondents said they wouldn't cope well, or at all, if they experienced a natural disaster event in the next year. Almost one-third of people living in high disaster risk areas believe their community is not prepared for future disasters.

Over one third of all respondents reported low levels of disaster resilience and preparedness (across all measures). Taken together, these results suggest that there is significant opportunity to better support communities to build resilience in the face of future natural disasters.

The greatest differences across groups were observed between people who reported previous experience of a disaster event and those who had no such experience. Differences were also observed among disaster survivors across the time that has passed since. Previous disaster experiences appear to be the strongest predictor of other survey results.

For the purposes of this report, we have focused on three areas that revealed important differences between participants who had experienced a natural disaster and those who had not.



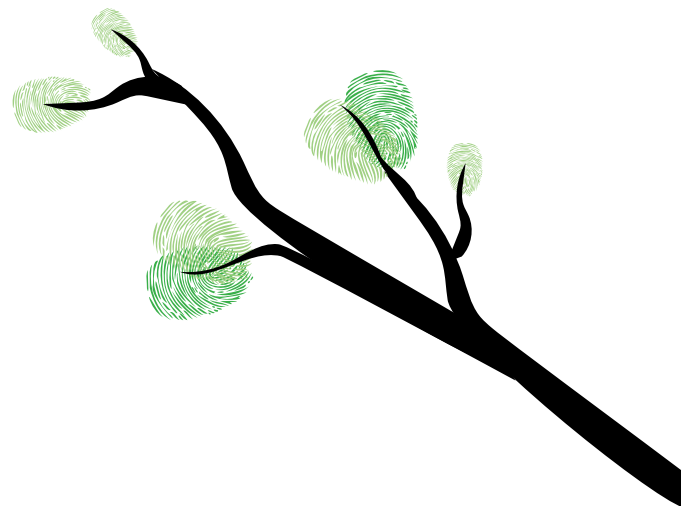
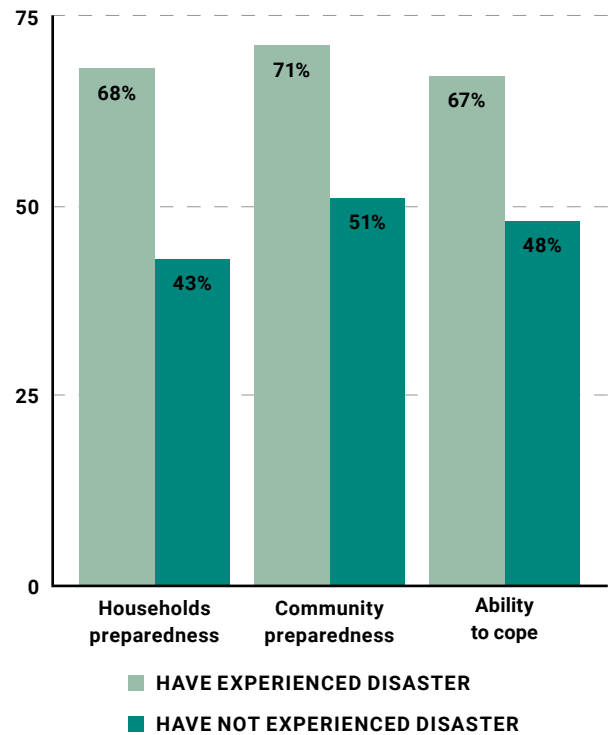
1. Experience makes us more capable

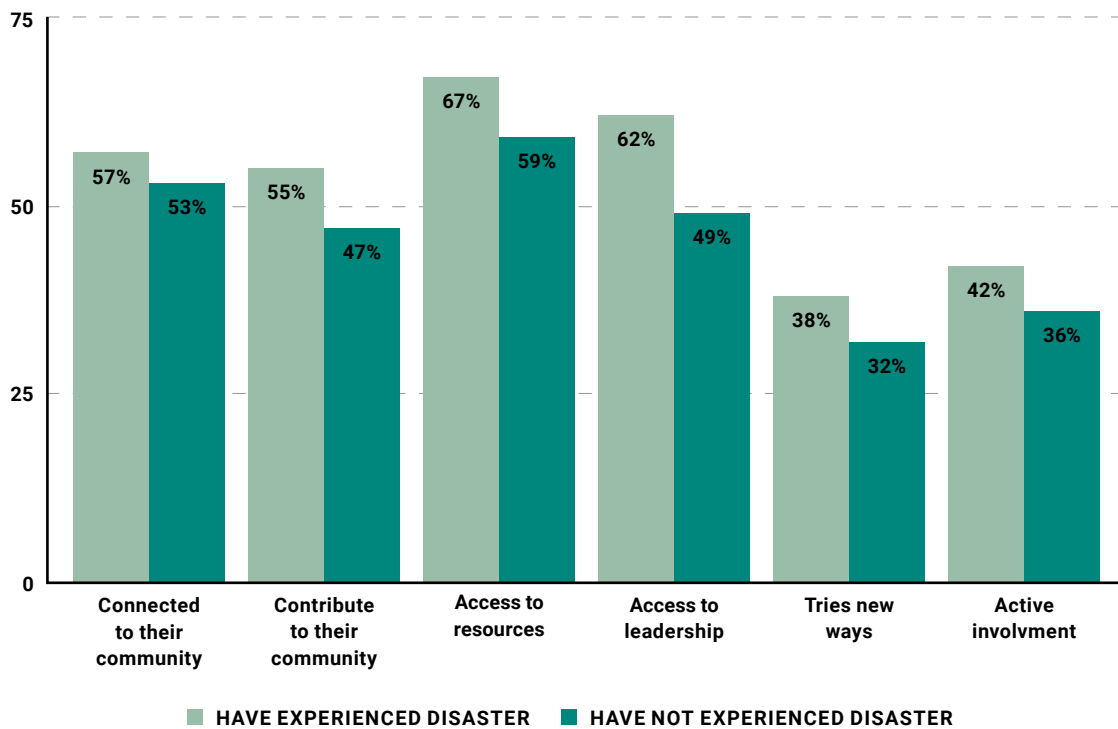
The survey revealed that prior experience of disasters is associated with an individual's confidence in their ability to handle future disaster events.

Compared with 43% of people who had not experienced a disaster event, 68% of people who had previous experience said they felt prepared for another disaster. They had greater confidence that their household was prepared (68% vs 43%) and that their local community was prepared (71% vs 51%).

In fact, their perception about their ability to cope overall was higher – 67% said they would cope 'well' or 'very well' with another disaster, compared with 48% of people who had never faced such an event.

It's important to note that almost one third of people who live in high disaster risk areas do not feel their household or community is prepared for future disaster events. This is a significant figure and suggests there is considerable work to be done in strengthening the disaster preparedness and resilience of individuals and communities likely to face a natural disaster in the coming years.





2. Even connected community members feel a lack of agency

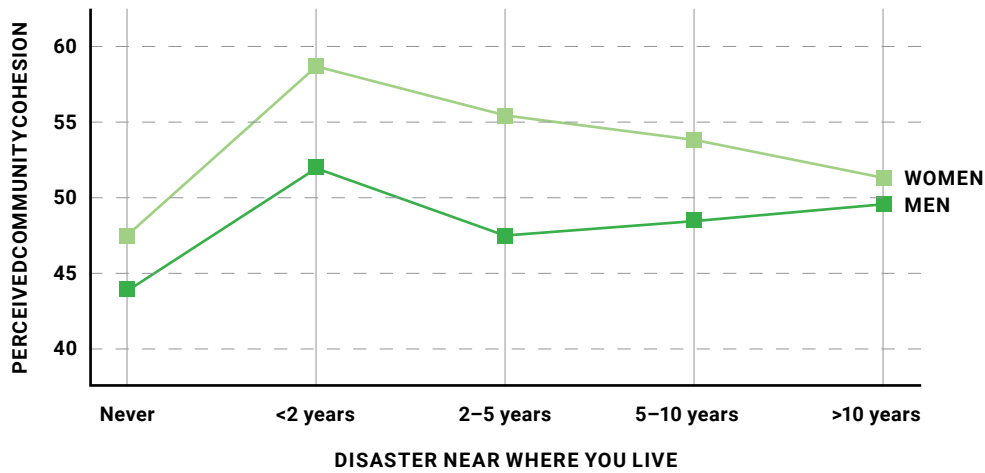
The majority of people surveyed feel connected to their community (57% of those who had experienced disaster / 53% of those who had not) and believe they can make positive contributions to their community. Those who had previously experienced disaster expressed greater confidence in their contributions when compared with those who had not experienced disaster (55% vs 47%). 67% of disaster survivors believe their community has access to the support services they would require in a crisis, and has people who will step up to lead when needed (62%). For people who have not experienced a natural disaster, those numbers drop to 59% and 49% respectively.

However, nearly half of all people surveyed don't believe they have the agency to improve their community, and over 60% do not believe their community learns from past experiences. Only a minority believes their community tries new ways of dealing with crises (38%/32%), or that their community has the opportunity to be actively involved in the planning of its own future (42%/36%).

This reveals a disconnect between people's sense of connection to their community and sense of agency. It is unclear why they feel they do not have influence – whether it's lack of opportunity or perceived lack of interest from those in power – but those who feel disempowered may welcome community-led initiatives that give them a voice and build capability, especially as the majority of the population feel they have something to offer their community.



DISASTERS EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNITY COHESION



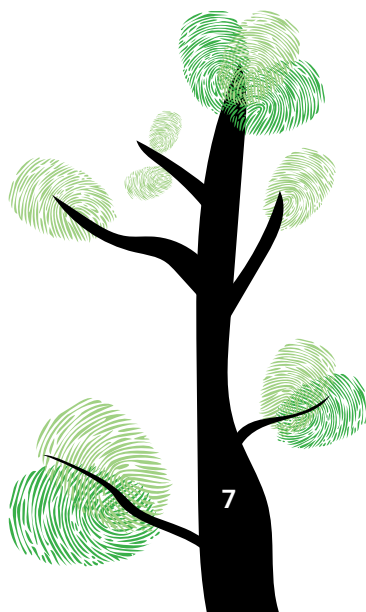
3. Disasters bring a community together

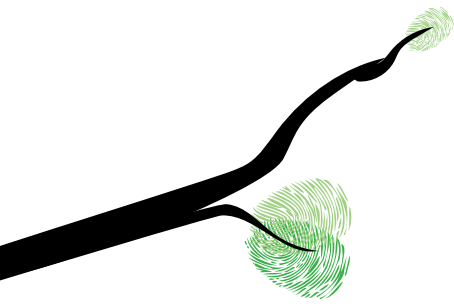
There is a greater sense of community connection and information sharing after a disaster event. All participants reported greater community cohesion in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, women more so than men. Women’s perceived community cohesion significantly increases within the first two years post disaster and then steadily declines over the next 10+ years. However, 10 years post disaster, both genders still reported higher levels of community cohesion than before the disaster event. People who

have experienced a disaster feel more connected to their communities – they share information about local issues and initiatives more regularly (61% vs 49%) and feel better equipped to step up and lead recovery efforts if they need to (62% vs 49%).

Those who believed their community was less cohesive also believed they wouldn’t cope well following a disaster event.

A disaster brings a community together immediately and strongly. The question remains – how do we harness this response and make it last?





CONCLUSION

The survey revealed that while disaster survivors are often depicted as victims with reduced capacities, this is not how they see themselves. In fact, people who have gone through a natural disaster report more confidence in their ability to cope with future disaster events.

Fire to Flourish focuses on transformative resilience – this holistic approach seeks to coordinate community resources and build capacities for coping and adapting to disaster events in ways that facilitate larger scale transformative change – shifting individuals and groups from a state of vulnerability and dependency toward one of increased resilience, and potentially out of disadvantage.

The Fire to Flourish community-led approach is trauma-informed and forward-focused, and can be utilised and shared across all Australian communities. The program will build an evidence base to demonstrate what can be achieved when communities are not just recipients of recovery funds, but are supported to lead their own recovery and resilience-building.



NATIONAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

QUESTION	SCALE			
	<i>Very</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Not very</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
How prepared do you believe your household is for future disaster events?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How prepared do you believe your local community is for future disaster events?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you experienced a disaster event in the next 12 months, how well do you think you would cope?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTION	SCALE				
	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
Risk perception					
It is likely that a disaster event will occur near where I live in the next 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Built form					
I'm worried about the vulnerability of critical infrastructure in my community if a disaster occurs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Financial					
I would struggle financially if my home was damaged in a disaster event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Community capital					
People in my community routinely share information about local issues and initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My community has people that step up to lead when needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My community would be capable of leading recovery action following a disaster	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that I belong to my local community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agency					
People in my community are able to access support services in a time of crisis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My community tries new ways to deal with challenges and learns from experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My community is actively involved in planning and decision processes for its future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel I can make positive contributions to improve my community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

FIRE to FLOURISH



Strength through community-led action

Fire to Flourish is a five-year transdisciplinary program working at the intersection of disaster resilience and community development. In partnership with communities affected by the 2019/20 Australian bushfire season, Fire to Flourish aims to support communities to lead their own recovery, co-create foundations for long-term resilience and wellbeing, and disrupt cycles of entrenched disadvantage. The program will trial and scale a new model of community-led resilience, amplified through partnerships with government, philanthropic, not-for-profit and private sector organisations.

For more information, please contact:

Firetoflourish@monash.edu

A partnership between:

