

Foreword



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I continue to reflect on the conversations and ideas shared at the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference in August, and am pleased that the Australian Red Cross could contribute to the success of this year’s event through the steering committee, presentations, panel sessions and attendance.

This year saw the largest number of abstracts submitted to the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference, and the resulting program reflected a diversity of people, experiences and perspectives. The scale of interest in the conference and the significant increase in attendance highlights the growing role of resilience and its relevance to the broader emergency management sector. This was reinforced with the introduction of Resilience Lane into the AFAC23 Exhibition, a great initiative that showcased grassroots and community-based resilience initiatives, and created another resilience touchpoint within the wider AFAC23 Conference.

We welcomed a record 569 delegates in Brisbane this year, spanning representation from state and local government, fire and emergency services, non-government organisations and not for profits, community, consultancy, health and academia. Notably, 75% of delegates were attending the conference for the first time and we were delighted to welcome so many new people to the conversation. It was a valuable opportunity to connect with a diverse array of people and will no doubt lead to further collaborative efforts in the future.

I was honoured to chair a session on creative recovery that featured a number of compelling presentations to inspire new ways of thinking and seek creative ways to build disaster resilience at the community level. The power of the arts and storytelling at every stage of the disaster cycle, and the role they play in fostering transformative healing and change, was felt across the room.

The conference focus this year was to ‘reimagine resilience’ and it was fitting that the event was preceded by the inaugural National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Summit to open the week with First Nations knowledge and perspectives. The themes of the summit carried through to the conference, including a presentation from the Australian Red Cross First Nations Recovery team who shared the importance of mutual trust and commitment for restoring identity and cultural ties to land after disaster.

For another perspective, we looked at resilience through the lens of people living with disability, and challenged ourselves to rethink the concepts of strength, vulnerability and agency. Often individuals are held back not by a disability, but by the structures, conditions and spaces that exclude them. We heard of the progress made toward embedding disability inclusive disaster risk reduction across Australia, and the value of adopting more inclusive approaches to ensure we can bring more people on the disaster resilience journey.

The program spanned youth, cultural and linguistic diversity, investment and insurance, collaboration and nature-based solutions. We are grateful to everyone who presented, participated, and made possible the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference this year. Prominent across all sessions was that people are at the heart of what we do, and why we do it. Read on in this edition of the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* for articles aligned to the theme of reimagining resilience.



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