



Seeking the ideal in the realm of reality: Community-led recovery

Professor Lisa Gibbs
University of Melbourne



Andrew Coghlan
Australian Red Cross



Co-authors: Robyn Molyneux, Colin
Gallagher, Kate Brady, John Richardson,
Phoebe Quinn, Claire Leppold, Louise Harms

Context

Recovery Evolution

- Ash Wednesday
 - Multiple communities impacted across Victoria
 - Community based recovery
- Queen & Hoddle St. Shootings
 - Non-natural disasters
 - Disparate communities
- Port Arthur
 - Work place/Tourist destination/Local community
 - Disbursed community
- 9/11, Bali Bombings
 - Multiple communities of type and geography
 - Focus on counter terror funding
- Black Saturday
 - Multiple communities impacted across Victoria
 - Case management
 - Long term recovery programs
 - Research and evaluation
- Martin Place/Bourke Street
- Black Summer
- COVID

10 YEARS BEYOND BUSHFIRES REPORT



Contributors:

Lisa Gibbs, Robyn Molyneaux, Louise Harms, H. Colin Gallagher, Karen Block, John Richardson, Vaughn Brandenburg, Meaghan O'Donnell, Connie Kellett, Phoebe Quinn, Lauren Kosta, Kate Brady, Greg Ireton, Colin MacDougall, Richard Bryant.

Funding partners:



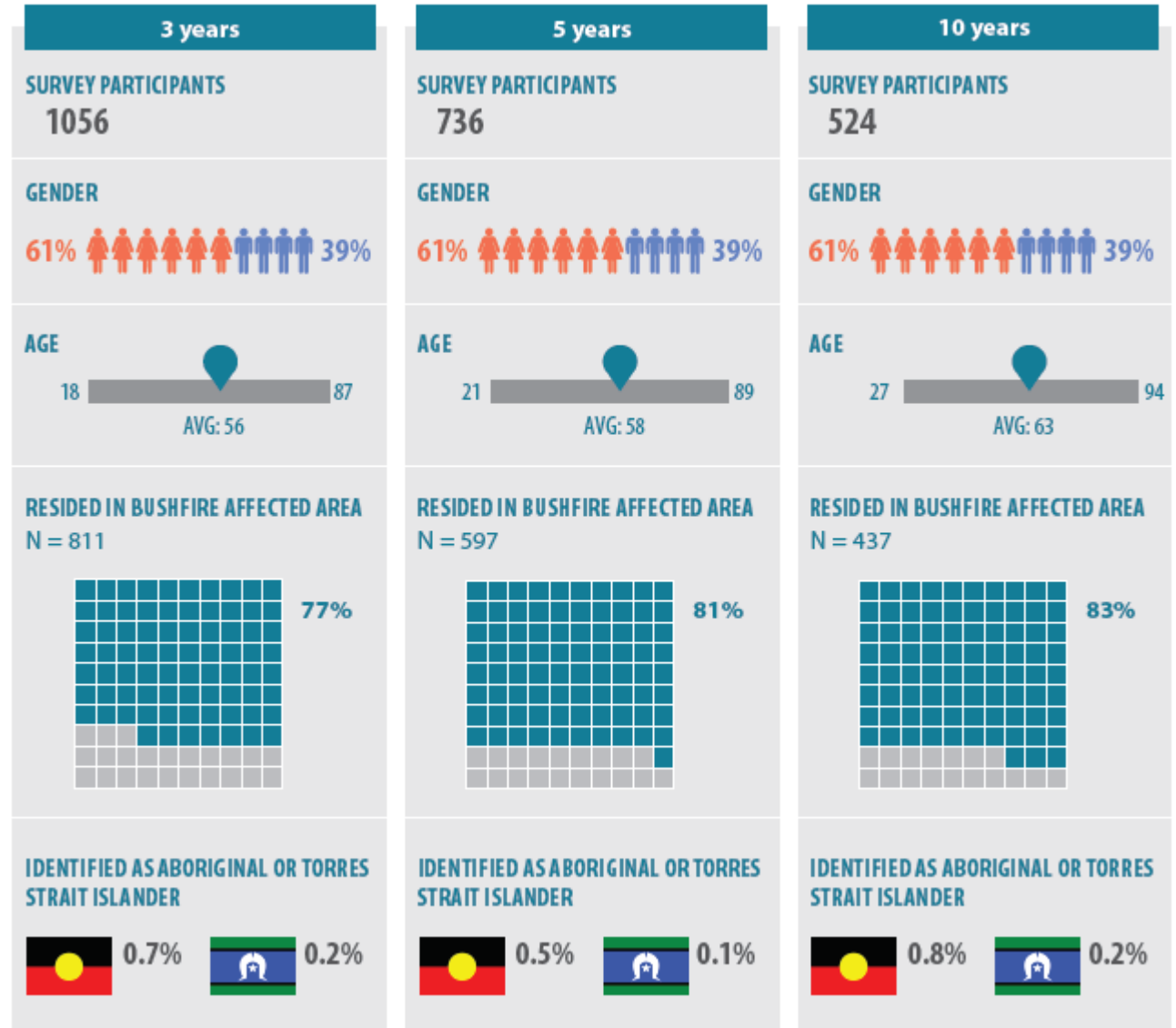
Partner organisations:



MARCH 2021



Overview of methods



35 in-depth interviews 2013-2014
Ongoing community visits, forums and information sharing

Deliberative democracy

– partnering with the public in decision-making

- **Influence:** genuine ability to influence policy and decision-making
- **Inclusion:** representative, inclusive and encourage equal opportunity to participate
- **Deliberation:** open discussion, access to information and movement towards consensus

(Dibley et al., 2019: 28; Hartz-Karp, 2004)

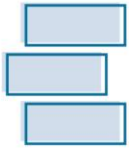
3 years post bushfires (high impact communities)

Challenges



26%

report symptoms of **serious mental health** disorders



+ 16%

are having some **difficulties with adjustment**



7%

women are **experiencing violence**



Risks are linked to both **disaster exposure** and **subsequent disruptions**



Children are getting behind in **reading** and **maths**



Multiple exposures associated with **increased mental health** risks

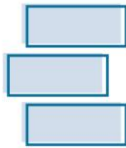
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Opportunities

6.8

Average **life satisfaction** levels **6.8** (on a scale of 1-10)



Most people have **commenced their rebuild**, and are satisfied with it when it is completed

55%

belong to a **community group**



Strong **sense of community**

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Providing support in the short term

(Hobfoll et al 2007)



A sense of safety



Calming



A sense of self-
and community
efficacy



Connectedness



Hope

Self Assessment Tool for Community Recovery Committees

May 2021



COMMUNITY RECOVERY COMMITTEE SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL: STEP 1 - IDENTIFY THE PREFERRED MODEL

Disaster affected communities can use this tool to identify how particular elements of CRCs could be structured to best suit their community.

FORMATION AND SCOPE	
One well defined location	District level, multiple locations
Single issue focus	Whole of recovery focus
Pre-existing group	Completely new group
Self-appointed group	Formal election process
No clear objectives for the group	Clear, deliberate goals and parameters of the group
Do not manage projects	Manage all projects
Group formed / adapted very soon after the disaster event	Group formed / adapted some time after the disaster event
No financial responsibility	Complex financial responsibility
No legal status of group	Clear legal status of group

Research conducted by Dr Kate Brady et al, University of Melbourne for Bushfire Recovery Victoria and Emergency Management Victoria, funded by BNHCRC - <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-8194>

A Janus-faced resource: social capital and resilience trade-offs

Aldrich DP, Page-Tan C, Fraser T. 2018

In: Trump BD, Florin M-V, Linkov I, editors. IRGC resource guide on resilience (vol 2):
Domains of resilience for complex interconnected systems. Lausanne, CH: EPFL
International Risk Governance Center



Aboriginal experiences of bushfires and recovery

Williamson B, Markham F, Weir JK. Aboriginal Peoples and the Response to the 2019-2020 Bushfires. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University; 2020



Life satisfaction



Most people rated their own satisfaction as **higher** than their **community**



Community leaders tended to rate **community satisfaction lower** than others

The most accurate ratings were from those who reported-

“I think I agree with most people in my community about what is important in life.”

10 YEARS BEYOND BUSHFIRES REPORT



MARCH 2021



www.beyondbushfires.org.au

Guide to Disaster Recovery Capitals (ReCap)



Australian edition

www.recoverycapitals.org.au

What do we do with the research findings?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

These recommendations have been co-developed by the research investigators and partners, based on the findings from the 10 years Beyond Bushfires and related disaster research studies being led by University of Melbourne.

1. **Consider mental health planning.** When planning for bushfire emergencies, be mindful that your decision will impact on both your physical and mental health. Exposure to a bushfire for you and your family can increase risk of mental health problems.
2. **Plan ahead for how to find each other.** Separation from family members during a disaster is highly stressful. This stress can have a lasting impact, even when everything turns out (relatively) okay. Have a plan about where or how you will reconnect, especially if communication and road systems are affected. The Australian Red Cross provides the Register Find Reunite service.
3. **Be kind to yourself and others.** It can take more than five years for some people to recover from a disaster experience and its aftermath, particularly in high impact communities.
4. **We are all different.** People can respond differently to the same experience and have different recovery needs, including within families.
5. **Be open to the possibility of positives.** Positive outcomes can come from a disaster experience, even for those who have had the most severe losses. This is referred to as posttraumatic growth.
6. **Community groups can make a difference.** Being involved in community groups can lead to better mental health outcomes for many. However, share the load: Don't leave it to just a few people to make sure these local groups keep going.
7. Seek professional support. If you or someone close to you is having ongoing mental health or emotional difficulties, there are mental health professionals available to help.
8. **Changes in the natural environment recovery.** Many people find spending time outdoors and watching it regrow and recover improves their wellbeing.
9. **Remember the children.** Even very young children can be affected by the disaster and will be affected for years afterwards. Ensure that recovery decisions and activities take into account the needs of people of all ages feel safe and supported.
10. **Supporting parents.** Being a parent during a disaster is a challenging experience in positive and challenging times. Parenting may even feel different. Remember other parents have been through this. It might not always seem easy to do the best you can, but there are others when you need support. It is needed, can help you, and can help you raise a child.
11. **Explore resources.** There are many resources available for children from many organisations Emergency, Australian Red Cross, and other organisations.
12. **Make decisions that fit your family.** Early decisions can have benefits for your family. Consideration of important decisions that you are making. There are many options. Staying in community is often the best if connection to your community is important. Moving away may be an option if processes are too stressful.
13. **Commemoration of the disaster anniversary.** Commemorating the disaster anniversary as a way of acknowledging the loss and preferences about how to remember the disaster.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT¹ AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

1. Establish a staged **5 year framework** for recovery from major disasters to account for extended mental health impacts and support short and long term recovery, resilience and community connectedness.
2. Provide advisory and support services within bushfire affected communities that focus on **reducing the compounding impacts of major life stressors** (e.g. financial advice, guide to building regulations, relationship counselling, job retraining).
3. **Deliver services with care and flexibility** to accommodate diversity in experiences and responses. Allow people to recover at their own pace, including at least 4 years for people to begin rebuilding.
4. Embed **community-based strategies** in disaster mental health planning, in addition to mental health services, to maximise the contribution of social networks and community groups to recovery
 - a. **Support the supporters:** Provide community information sessions about post-trauma support strategies to help people to take care of themselves and their family and friends.
 - b. **Community groups:** Support the capacity of local groups to continue operating. This may require funds for facilities, equipment and/or activities.
 - c. **Promote connection:** Initiate opportunities for people throughout the community to become involved and connected with each other in new ways, to build ties within and outside existing groups.
 - d. **Community group leaders:** support leaders with the practical and emotional demands of leadership, including strategies for dealing with extreme emotions, to ensure their mental health and wellbeing is not compromised by their efforts to maintain group activities.
5. Prioritise **restoration of place and connection**, such as school and arts facilities and thriving local economies.
6. Use social indicators of individual and community wellbeing and resilience, such as **group membership**, for recovery planning.
7. Establish a **cross-sectoral** online platform that is available to people after each major disaster to share relevant resources, services and support people, including those in remote communities (e.g. family holidaymakers trapped in remote areas).
8. **Extend trauma support services** to include information dissemination with information dissemination and communication systems.
9. Involve **school communities** in recovery plans.
10. Increase provision of services and support strategies and support services to communities.
11. Build capacity of communities to **recognise and respond** to disaster and potentially to disaster potential force a factor.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

1. Provide **school-based bushfire education programs** that teach children and teenagers how to live in bushfire risk environments and involve them in local bushfire preparedness and recovery initiatives.
2. Provide **training for health professionals and educators** in disaster and trauma impacts.
3. Provide **support sessions** for school staff and early learning educators before students return and at key recovery intervals to support staff wellbeing and their capacity to meet the needs of students.
4. Provide **access for impacted schools to experienced psychologists and relevant health professionals** with appropriate expertise in disaster and trauma impacts, and/or training and mentoring.
5. Provide **appropriate information and resources for parents and caregivers** including support information for their own health and wellbeing as well as for their children (see the Australian Red Cross resources - 'Parenting: coping with crisis' and 'Guide to resources for children and families').
6. Provide schools with **access to additional learning supports**, particularly for:
 - a. Students in early primary school targeting numeracy and reading.
 - b. Students in upper primary and secondary school addressing all academic domains.
7. Provide secondary school students with vocational education and training (VET) to **support transition to the workplace.**
8. Establish appropriate strategies and services for the referral of **high risk students.**
9. Provide both **school and community-based trauma support programs** for students showing sub-clinical signs of trauma.
10. Provide access to **evidence informed universal school-based programs** to promote all students' social and emotional wellbeing mental health post disaster.
11. Provide appropriate **psychosocial recovery programs for early learning settings.**
12. Ensure schools have **access to family violence practitioners** and guidance on referral options.
13. Appoint **additional support staff and/or volunteers** to educational settings to help meet the extra administrative, social, emotional and learning demands post disaster.
14. **Adjust departmental administrative requirements** and timelines for disaster affected educational settings to acknowledge the additional demands on staff and students.

¹ 'Government' refers to all tiers of government (local, state and national) responsible for relevant policy and services, according to the location, nature and scale of the disaster event.

Recovery Capitals (ReCap)



Natural | key considerations



Risk and barriers

What we know

Certain features of the natural environment can increase exposure to risk e.g. proximity to bushland or floodplains⁹⁻¹¹. The natural environment can also pose barriers to recovery e.g. lack of services in remote locations¹²; insurance difficulties in high-risk areas¹³; lack of financial resources for recovery if local industries are highly dependent on the natural environment¹⁴.



Consider

- ▶ **What features of the natural environment increase exposure to risk, or pose barriers to recovery? What mitigation strategies are in place, or need to be developed?**

Remaining and relocating

What we know

Connection to the natural environment is an important part of people's sense of place, and as such people may be more likely to remain in the community after a disaster event^{9,15}.

Decisions about relocation may be further complicated for Aboriginal people whose rights, interest and connection to Country remain specific to the disaster-affected area², and who may experience negative effects of relocating including an inability to maintain proper relations with Country^{16,17}.



Consider

- ▶ **Restore local features that enable people to connect to the natural environment, such as walkways, parks or recreational facilities.**
- ▶ **Provide information about the history of the local area and, where appropriate, Indigenous knowledge and stories about the land.**

Restoration

What we know

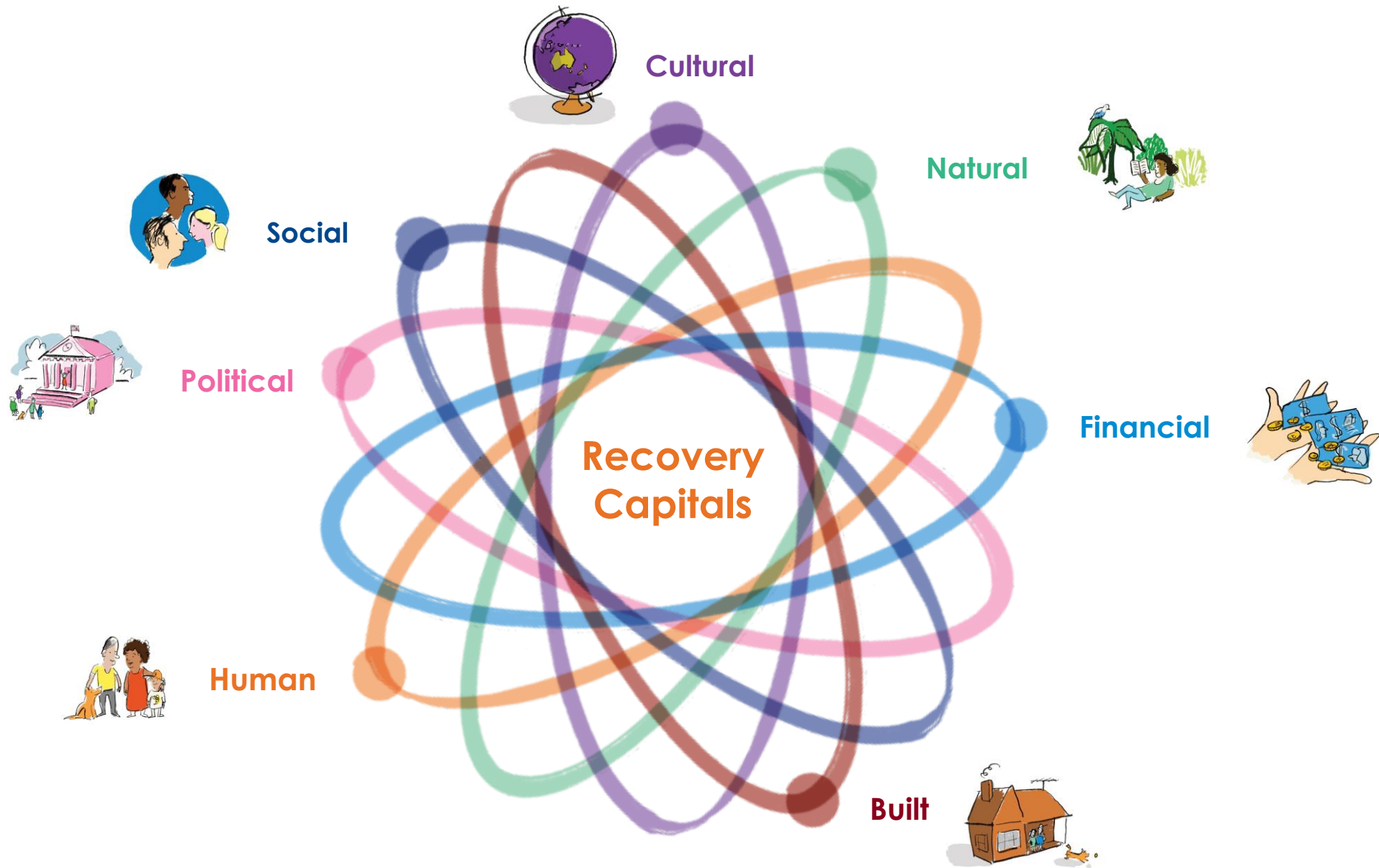
Restoration of the natural environment can be a source of solace⁷. It can also provide other benefits including financial boost to local economies¹⁴.



Consider

- ▶ **How might the natural environment be protected, restored and drawn upon to foster local activity in industries such as tourism and agriculture?**
- ▶ **Create diverse opportunities for connection with nature. Attention should be paid to appropriate engagement with places of particular significance to Indigenous peoples.**





Adapted from Community Capitals Framework, Emery M, Fey S, Flora C. (2006)

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Guide to Disaster **Recovery Capitals (ReCap)**



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Australian Government

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience



#ADRC21



Professor Lisa Gibbs

Child & Community Wellbeing
Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
Centre for Disaster Management & Public Safety
The University of Melbourne

lgibbs@unimelb.edu.au

www.beyondbushfires.org.au



Mr Andrew Coghlan

Head of Emergency Services
Australian Red Cross

acoghlan@redcross.org.au

www.redcross.org.au

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