

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

DISCUSSION PAPER

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Resilience is a broad concept, however the scope of the work conducted by the Wellbeing and Resilience Team within the City of Adelaide relates to the daily challenges faced by the individual, businesses and community, and its significance to public health outcomes, as well as preparedness for minor and major emergencies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing an unprecedented level of social, economic and physical change, and the City of Adelaide is not immune to the impacts of these changes or from the risk of a serious emergency.

From the effects of climate change to increased demand on infrastructure, pandemics or cyber-attacks – the disruptions to services affecting the community have the potential to be severe. Resilience is what allows communities to adapt and transform in the face of these challenges, helping them to prepare for both the expected and the unexpected.

Resilience is a broad concept, however the scope of the work conducted by the Wellbeing and Resilience Team within the City of Adelaide will include community resilience as it relates to the daily challenges faced by the individual, small to medium businesses and the community, and its significance to public health outcomes, as well as resilience in emergencies.

The actions in the City of Adelaide Strategic Plan 2016-2020 under the 'Liveable' theme relate directly to Council's role in supporting community resilience and include:

- Develop and celebrate strong and resilient City communities that are welcoming and encourage people of all ages, cultures and means to participate in City life, including through volunteer opportunities; and
- Work with the State Government, community leaders and community organisations to support vulnerable members of the community.

In line with global frameworks, an ethos of shared responsibility will underpin the City of Adelaide's approach to building resilient communities.

1.1 Background

A wide body of international evidence exists highlighting the importance of increased investment in resilience from all levels of Government, strengthening organisational, community and individual resilience.

The importance of building resilience in Australia was acknowledged in 2011 when the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed a National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, developed by the National Emergency Disaster Committee. The Strategy acknowledged that effectively managing 'shock' events, both natural and man-made, requires government, non-government, business and community to work together.

Since then, there has been substantial growth and development in resilience thinking and resourcing, and organisations such as The Rockefeller Foundation's '100 Resilient Cities' movement have made it their core business to develop resilience in cities around the globe.

Much of this work has focussed on the capacity to prepare for and respond to an emergency or natural disaster. This is however only one aspect of resilience and much of this research and work can be adapted to apply to everyday resilience of individuals to chronic stressors.

The importance of resilience in relation to public health outcomes is also starting to be acknowledged, particularly as it relates to the changing climate as identified in the framework for the State Public Health Plan due to be released in late 2018.

1.2 Resilience Definition

Resilience can be defined in a number of ways depending on the context. 100 Resilient Cities offers a holistic definition that captures the many aspects of resilience relevant to a city environment. They define resilience in an urban environment as: “the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow, regardless of the chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.”¹

Chronic stressors are the everyday pressures that create challenges for individuals and families such as illness, mental illness, unemployment, financial stress, social isolation, and domestic violence. Chronic stressors can also include issues that impact on a community more broadly such as climate change or high crime rates.

Over time, these issues can wear away at an individual’s ability to cope and negatively impact on their health and wellbeing.

Acute shocks are unforeseen natural or man-made incidents such as bushfires, earthquakes, storms, power blackouts, heatwaves, pandemics or terrorist attacks. They can be disruptive over varying lengths of time and can affect small or large geographical areas and varying sections of the population.

Individuals experiencing higher levels of chronic stresses are likely to be more significantly impacted by shock events and may have fewer resources to support their response and recovery.

2. INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The characteristics of resilience are consistent, whether they are relied on to undertake daily tasks or drawn on during emergencies, and generally include maintaining good relationships, support networks and social connections for mental wellbeing, staying physically active, having a self-awareness and positive self-care habits, identifying purpose, and knowing when to seek assistance from others. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviour, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

One of the main factors contributing to resilience is an individual’s wellbeing. The two concepts go hand in hand – the greater our sense of wellbeing, the more resilient we are. An individual’s wellbeing is influenced by factors such as having a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Having caring, supportive relationships both within and outside the family is also a key contributor to both resilience and wellbeing.

Personal skills associated with higher levels of resilience include the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out, a positive view of self and confidence in strengths and abilities, skills in communication and problem solving, and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Community resilience is more than the collective individual resilience of its population. It also encompasses community cohesion, trust and engagement in decision making.

As a community, resilience is attained by forging strong connections to support everyone who identifies with a specific community. Being informed, continuously building skills and knowledge, and fostering a self-reliance during times of adversity, ensures that everyone can contribute and/or benefit from a collective action.

¹ 100 Resilient Cities, <http://www.100resilientcities.org/resources/#section-2>

2.1 Vulnerable populations

Although we all experience different levels of vulnerability and resilience at varying times, every community has individuals and groups that may be considered more vulnerable or at risk.

Some individuals may be experiencing life factors that undermine their wellbeing, knowledge, connectedness or security. They may have additional difficulties coping with stressors, and potentially emergencies or shocks, should they occur.

Unfortunately, people living with vulnerability or certain risk factors are over-represented in emergency impacts globally and have a longer recovery journey. During the extreme heat events and Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009, of the 173 people who died as a result of the fire, 44 per cent had chronic or acute clinical health conditions, 16 percent were aged 70 years or more and 9 percent were aged less than 12.²

Within the City of Adelaide, more vulnerable populations could include people with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness, newly arrived migrants or people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds, international students, and older people. Others may generally be resilient, but find themselves more at risk following a life disruption, such as moving to a new community or coming home after an operation.

It must be acknowledged that whilst those living with risk factors or life challenges may be impacted more acutely by a shock event, they have also developed adaptive skills and strengths that can be built on to support their resilience.

3. BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Businesses and small to medium enterprise (SME) owners are also vulnerable to stressors and shocks and although initial impacts are quantified in economic terms, there are also social and human impacts stemming from business pressures. These impacts can affect individuals and extend through to their families and personal lives.

In a recent report undertaken by HLB Mann Judd to examine the issues that concern SME owners, it was found that concerns primarily relate to business planning or lack thereof, the need to be more competitive and efficient in operations, the protection of personal and business assets through adequate risk management, and attaining work/life balance.

For SME owners, business and family issues are often closely related. The increasing importance of this concern reflects the personal impact on business owners who are having to process and adapt to a rapidly changing environment.³

Of less priority but equal importance to these businesses is the issue of addressing business continuity or contingency planning for emergencies or shock events. A significant event could have the potential to overwhelm a business, however this is generally not recognised or planned for. Many small to medium enterprises also do not have the resources, whether it be the time or expertise to undertake these tasks.

With over 5,100 SMEs operating in the City of Adelaide, the matter of being prepared for sudden disruptions to business due to emergencies, becomes an important topic for consideration.

² Blinko, Z 2012 *Vulnerable People in Emergencies* Presentation to the Community Services Disaster Recovery Sub-committee, Victoria, Australia

³ HLB Mann Judd, *SME Research Report 2017-2018*

4. RESILIENCE IN EMERGENCIES

Local Governments in South Australia play a fundamental role in emergency management because of their strong relationship with their local community networks and knowledge of locally available resources. Where Local Government powers exist, there are defined responsibilities in partnership with respective state and territory governments, to contribute to the safety and wellbeing of their communities by participating in local emergency management.

A resilience based approach to emergency management places community and the notion of shared responsibility at its centre.

Communities throughout the world are experiencing an increase in emergency events that are impacting more people. Many of these events are increasingly difficult to predict. As we experience the impacts of climate change, the increasing frequency and severity of events will place more pressure on services exceeding the capacity for governments alone to act.

Growing evidence suggests that increased investment in preparedness and mitigation is crucial and will become even more so in the future - firstly as a moral obligation to keep our communities safe and secondly as an economic imperative.

An independent review, commissioned by the State Government into the extreme weather event which resulted in a South Australian state-wide blackout in 2016, found that a multi-faceted and long term commitment would be required to ensure disaster resilience is understood and the principles embedded within communities and across whole of Government.⁴ The review also highlighted the need for significant work to be undertaken in South Australia to support government and communities' adoption of a resilience based approach to managing emergencies.

The concept of building resilience to emergencies and disasters aligns with the following State and National strategies and frameworks:

- [The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030](#)
- [National Strategy for Disaster Resilience \(NSDR\)](#) – The most significant issue identified during workshops conducted related to resilience: If a community is not resilient, they are at greater risk during an event and their recovery is delayed.
- [State Emergency Management Committee \(SEMC\) Strategic Plan 2017-2022](#) - Resilience sits at the forefront of the Plan with the Vision being: A safe and strong South Australia through a shared commitment to resilience.

5. RESILIENCE IN THE CITY OF ADELAIDE

At the City of Adelaide, residents and small to medium businesses, will be targeted for involvement in resilience building and emergency preparedness activities.

The focus will be to nurture good, cooperative relationships and support networks, emphasise the importance of social connections for mental wellbeing, promote physical activity, self-awareness and positive self-care habits, as well as encouraging the use of support services when required.

⁴ Burns, G et al 2016 *Independent Review of the Extreme Weather Event South Australia 28 September – 5 October 2016* Report presented to the Premier of South Australia

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During emergencies, which can be highly distressing, disruptive and emotive events, these characteristics are tested to the extreme, making preparedness even more important.

The following diagram shows the relationship between resilience in residents and small to medium businesses as two complementary aspects of a resilient City community. It also shows the way in which building 'everyday' resilience also assists in developing resilience to shock events and vice versa.



Figure 1 City of Adelaide Resilience Framework

5.1 Existing Council activities supporting resilience in individuals and communities

The City has an existing network of community facilities which include community centres, libraries, sporting clubs and parks. These spaces host both Council and community-led events, programs and social groups, and provide the community with opportunities to either run or get involved in activities focused on health and wellbeing, sport, culture, the arts and the environment.

Some of the programs offered include a variety of craft or computing classes, shared dinners to welcome newly arrived migrants, support groups, yoga and wellbeing lessons, conversational language sessions, and workshops for finance and budgeting.

Enabling people to socialise and pursue their interests nurtures relationships and increases connectedness. Gatherings also facilitate the exchange of information and build skills which contribute to the strengthening of both individual and community resilience.

The City also has an extensive grants program to support and encourage participation and community connectedness across a wide range of interest areas, from sporting club involvement to creating greener spaces across the City.

5.2 Existing Council activities supporting resilience in vulnerable or at risk communities

The City of Adelaide already coordinates or supports programs to build resilience for some of its most vulnerable community members. The Wellbeing and Resilience Team, as an example, administers the Commonwealth Home Support Program to assist senior residents to receive services in their home, and supports the delivery of sessions across community centres to

address health and wellbeing. Other programs enable people with mobility issues to engage with the wider community through organised activities and transport provision.

Council officers ensure that people experiencing homelessness in the City are acquainted with services to ensure they have access to basic needs, and cooperative work practises with other agencies address issues that may arise.

The Access and Inclusion Advisory Panel is tasked to help shape access and inclusion outcomes for key projects across the City. They ensure that consideration is given to make city spaces accessible and friendly to all users.

5.3 Existing Council activities supporting resilience in small to medium businesses

The City of Adelaide is home to a large variety of businesses offering a range of products and services that contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of the City. Meeting the needs of city-based businesses is an important part of ensuring the ongoing prosperity and sustainability of the City.

Enterprise Adelaide, as an advisory service is supporting local businesses by providing information and advice to small business owners within the City area. Running a business requires broad skills, and experienced Business Advisors help with free, tailored advice and support. The service also provides linkages to business events, training and networking opportunities.

5.4 Building and supporting resilience through targeted activities

Local councils are well-positioned to facilitate community-driven and based resilience building activities because of their strong relationship with their local community networks and knowledge of locally available resources.

There are a range of ways the City of Adelaide can support businesses and communities to build their resilience. As identified in this paper, various teams and programs in Council already undertake activities, programs and projects with residents and businesses that support their resilience. Building on this, Council's Wellbeing and Resilience Team will coordinate initiatives that work alongside business and residents to specifically build on existing strengths and support resilience, or address potential resilience 'gaps'.

Some of these initiatives are identified in Figure 2.

5.5 Measuring and tracking resilience

The importance of measuring and evaluating our efforts in building community resilience is key to ensuring continuing, meaningful progress and sustainability. The Wellbeing and Resilience Team is exploring models of measuring resilience.

One potential measure of broad resilience is the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). The brief resilience scale was created to assess the ability to bounce back or recover from stress.⁵ It was used as part of the PERMA+ survey of City of Adelaide residents undertaken by the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) in 2016.

At the time of the survey the average resilience score for residents participating in the survey was 3.7 (out of a possible 5.0). This is considered within the 'Normal resilience' band.

⁵ Smith, B.W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P. and Bernard, J. (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the Ability to Bounce Back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 15, 194-200.

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The possible score range on the BRS is from 1 (low resilience) to 5 (high resilience).⁶

BRS score	1.00-2.99	3.00-4.30	4.31-5.00
Interpretation	Low resilience	Normal resilience	High resilience

Council will continue to explore opportunities to reliably and consistently measure both the general and emergency specific resilience of our community to help track our progress and the impact of our work.

6. CONCLUSION

Communities will increasingly experience a diverse range of stressors and pressures. It is therefore more important than ever that individuals and communities experience high levels of wellbeing and resilience to adapt and transform in the face of these challenges, helping them to better prepare for both the expected and the unexpected.

All levels of government have a responsibility to work alongside communities to build on existing strengths and support resilience. Local Government, as the level of government closest to community, is particularly well placed to facilitate the shared responsibility approach to resilience building.

Across the City of Adelaide’s community programs there are a range of existing activities that support resilience through facilitating community connections and personal capacity building. The Wellbeing and Resilience Team have a role in building on and expanding these existing activities; using targeted approaches to strengthen resilience to both everyday stressors and acute shocks.

⁶ Smith, B.W., Epstein, E.E., Ortiz, J.A., Christopher, P.K., & Tooley, E.M. (2013). The Foundations of Resilience: What are the critical resources for bouncing back from stress? In Prince-Embury, S. & Saklofske, D.H. (Eds.), *Resilience in children, adolescents, and adults: Translating research into practice*, The Springer series on human exceptionality (pp. 167-187). New York, NY: Springer.

Figure 2 City of Adelaide Resilience Activities

Area	Rationale	Example Activities
Wellbeing	Wellbeing and resilience are highly interrelated. Supporting Council's wellbeing work will naturally contribute to individual and community resilience and vice versa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and build on activities undertaken as part of the City of Adelaide Wellbeing Roadmap.
Personal skill development	Potential and existing community leaders can be trained to build and support resilience in their communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a program of internal and external training, capacity and skills building that foster resilience – 'Resilience Leaders'.
Community cohesion, trust and engagement	Having high functioning local communities that know each other and have a sense of trust is critical to resilience. Work already undertaken by Council to achieve this outcome can be supported and built upon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on existing opportunities for people to meet others in their community and develop supportive relationships (eg expand Neighbour Day Program). Encourage community connection through volunteering opportunities. Create awareness and promote existing services that support resilience. Engage and consult with communities on ways Council can support community building and resilience.
Supporting resilience in vulnerable populations	Specifically working alongside vulnerable populations to identify existing resilience skills and strengths and build on those as well as develop new skills and capacities will benefit individuals and the whole community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information tailored and targeted to be accessible and relevant to vulnerable populations. Tailor programs to the resilience needs of different communities. Deliver tailored skill and capacity building opportunities that foster resilience. Work with those providing services to more vulnerable populations (including accommodation providers) to promote planning around emergencies.
Supporting mental health and wellbeing of SME business owners	Acknowledging the stress and strain associated with running a small to medium business, increasing business owners' mental and emotional health literacy and providing timely, relevant resources will help to build their everyday resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver training to address the psychosocial wellbeing and resilience of small to medium business owners. Develop information for Enterprise Adelaide to provide to clients on mental health support and services.
Building individual, business and community preparedness for shock events	Local governments have a responsibility to ensure their communities are informed about emergency risks and prepared to respond and recover from shock events. Activities in this area will also contribute to broader resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide targeted, relevant, timely and accessible information (eg emergency preparedness website, promotion of Emergency Preparedness Week). Deliver training and develop templates to support small to medium businesses to develop their own business continuity plans and practical preparedness. Identify and work with existing Community leaders to promote preparedness
Preparing for community recovery from a shock event/emergency	Local governments have a responsibility to have plans in place to support their communities to recover from significant shock events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a CoA Community Recovery Operating Guide. Ensure relevant staff are appropriately trained to respond and support the community following an emergency event. Develop a pool of appropriately trained recovery community volunteers that can be called upon to support the community following an emergency event. Establish a network of service providers to represent vulnerable groups, preparing for recovery after an emergency.