

Reviews into the 2025 North Queensland Floods, Tropical Cyclone Alfred, and the Western Queensland Floods

PeakCare's Submission to the Inspector-General of Emergency Management

21 July 2025

Contents

Introduction..... 3

About Peakcare..... 3

Peakcare’s Submission 3

Conclusion 6

Introduction

PeakCare Queensland Incorporated (PeakCare) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inspector-General of Emergency Management's reviews of the 2025 North Queensland Floods, Tropical Cyclone Alfred, and the Western Queensland Floods. As the peak body for Queensland's child and family services sector, PeakCare advocates for policies and systems that safeguard the rights, wellbeing, and safety of children, young people, and families across Queensland. Our submission is grounded in our strategic intent to ensure that every child and family has access to support when and where it is needed.

This submission draws upon the Thriving Kids in Disasters Report delivered by the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership and the views of our member organisations across Queensland.¹ In particular, it highlights a significant evidence gap: the impacts of disasters on children and young people living in out-of-home settings, a population too often overlooked in disaster planning and response.

About Peakcare

PeakCare is a not-for-profit peak body for child and family services in Queensland, providing an independent voice representing and promoting matters of interest to the non-government sector. Across Queensland, PeakCare represents small, medium, and large local, state-wide and national non-government organisations which provide prevention and early intervention, generic, targeted, and intensive family support to children, young people, families, and communities. Member organisations also provide child protection services, foster care, kinship care and residential care for children and young people who are at risk of entry to, or who are in the statutory child protection system and youth justice systems.

A large network of associate members and supporters also subscribe to PeakCare. This includes individuals with an interest in child protection, youth justice and related services, and who are supportive of PeakCare's policy platform around the rights and entitlements of children, young people and their families to safety, wellbeing, and equitable access to life opportunities.

Peakcare's Submission

PeakCare believes Queensland's disaster management arrangements must explicitly recognise and respond to the distinct needs and voices of children and young people. This includes those living in out-of-home care, boarding schools, youth detention centres or unstable housing. These young people are often separated from their home communities and families and may experience the emotional toll of disasters in complex and unacknowledged ways. Whether they are cut off from information about the safety of loved ones, required to return to disaster-affected regions during school breaks, or managing disaster stress on top of pre-existing trauma, these children experience compounding harm and must be formally considered in preparedness and response strategies.

¹ Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership. (2024). Thriving kids in disasters: Full report. ARACY.
<https://www.tgkp.org.au>

Recommendations

Include children in out-of-home settings in all phases of disaster management

Children and young people living in out-of-home settings are frequently overlooked in disaster planning and response. These children may be physically distant from their home communities but remain emotionally and culturally connected. Their distress may be invisible to those around them if they are not directly in the disaster zone, yet they still experience grief, fear, and uncertainty. In some cases, they return home temporarily to devastated communities, take part in recovery efforts, and must then re-enter settings that feel disconnected or 'normal'. These scenarios can create profound disruptions, particularly for children already affected by trauma and systemic disadvantage. Failing to account for these dynamics results in inequitable care and missed opportunities to protect and support some of Queensland's most vulnerable young people.

Children and young people away from home during disaster events must be recognised as a priority group. This includes:

- Ensuring that children in youth detention, out-of-home care or boarding schools receive timely and appropriate information about their families and communities during disasters
- Acknowledging the emotional labour placed on children returning home post-disaster and then re-entering settings that have not experienced the same crisis
- Embedding trauma-informed responses for children already experiencing adversity, such as placement instability, systemic disadvantage, or ongoing care arrangements.

Strengthen child- and youth-focused planning in pre-season activities

Pre-season planning offers an opportunity to embed resilience, service continuity, and child safety practices into the foundational stages of disaster preparedness. Currently, disaster planning documents such as Local Disaster Management Plans and risk assessments rarely include child-specific considerations or contingencies for those in formal care or custody arrangements. The absence of such planning has consequences such as delays in response, disconnection from services, and uncoordinated evacuations. These can increase risk and anxiety for children and carers. Embedding specific, developmentally appropriate considerations into planning documents ensures better outcomes when disasters occur.

Pre-season planning must include detailed protocols for maintaining care continuity, education, and psychosocial support for children in out-of-home and institutional settings. Local Disaster Management Plans should require explicit provisions for residential care facilities, youth justice centres, and boarding schools.

Improve cross-system coordination and data sharing

Disaster management systems in Queensland operate across multiple levels of government and service systems. However, our member organisations consistently report fragmentation in how these systems interact, particularly where non-government organisations and child-focused services are concerned.² When child protection, education, youth justice, and health systems are not aligned in disaster response, the result is confusion, duplication, and gaps in service for affected children and families. This

² PeakCare Queensland Inc. (2024). Sector voices 2024: Insights report – Issues of importance to the child and family sector. <https://www.peakcare.org.au>

fragmentation is especially dangerous for children with complex needs or who cross multiple systems of support. Effective coordination and data sharing enables rapid risk assessment, appropriate referrals, and improved service delivery under pressure.

Child protection, youth justice, education, and health services must be active partners in disaster planning and response. Shared data protocols are essential to quickly identify and support children separated from family, children with disability, and those with mental health needs during disasters.

Expand trauma-informed disaster workforce capability

The wellbeing and preparedness of the workforce supporting children and families during disasters is critical to the overall effectiveness of Queensland's disaster response. Care workers and community service practitioners are often frontline responders but may be under-equipped for the emotional and logistical complexities of disaster situations. Evidence from the Australian Institute of Family Studies³ and the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership⁴ highlights that supporting the workforce's own mental health and resilience is essential, not only for their wellbeing but to ensure safe, stable care for children during crises. Without consistent, trauma-informed training and support, staff may experience burnout, moral distress, and reduced capacity to provide effective care.

Training for residential carers, boarding school staff, and youth detention officers must include modules on disaster-related trauma, child development, and recovery-sensitive care. This workforce must be supported to manage children's fear, grief, and instability throughout the disaster cycle.

Develop child-appropriate communication and recovery supports

Children process disaster-related information differently depending on their developmental stage, cultural background, and prior trauma history. Communication must be direct, timely and tailored to their needs to reduce the risk of children feeling confused, frightened, and powerless. The recovery phase must also account for children's psychological transitions back to routine and safety, with services designed to reflect the social and emotional impact of the disaster. Co-designed communication tools and integrated recovery supports can make a significant difference in helping children feel safe and heard.

Children in care must receive age-appropriate, culturally sensitive information about disaster events. Post-event recovery supports should include emotional debriefing, family reconnection where safe, and guided transitions back into normal routines after experiencing or witnessing disaster trauma.

Strengthen Responses to Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Disasters

Research by Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus) shows that gender-based violence increases following disasters, as evidenced by 16 multi-country and 50 single-country studies, including in

³ Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2024). Wellbeing of workers supporting children and families after disaster [Webinar]. <https://aifs.gov.au/webinars/wellbeing-workers-supporting-children-and-families-after-disaster>

⁴ Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership. (2024). Thriving kids in disasters: Full report. ARACY. <https://www.tqkp.org.au>

Australia.⁵ The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) identified exposure to domestic violence as the most common form of maltreatment experienced by Australian children (39.6 per cent).⁶ While not all GBV is DFV, most DFV is a form of GBV. Children and young people exposed to this violence during and after disasters must be recognised as victims in their own right.

GADAus found that disaster events often provide a social context in which men's violence against women is excused or overlooked. Women may be discouraged from disclosing abuse due to pressure from family, friends, police, and even health professionals. Disasters also create or intensify conditions that contribute to increased violence, including insecure housing, substance misuse, stress and trauma, grief and loss, financial hardship, unemployment, strained relationships, complex bureaucratic processes, reduced support services, limited transport, and widespread disruption to daily life.⁷

To address these risks, GADAus recommends the local and collaborative development, adoption, and implementation of Gender and Emergency Management (GEM) guidelines that prioritise GBV and are tailored to local contexts.⁸ They also call for workforce education to ensure that recognising and responding to GBV is seen as an essential part of disaster response, rather than a competing priority.

Regional reflections

- North Queensland Floods: The region's large number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in care and rural boarding students heightened the risk of separation and isolation during this disaster. Establishing permanent disaster coordination links between local services and state agencies is critical.
- Cyclone Alfred in South-East Queensland: This urban area with high out-of-home care and youth detention populations requires enhanced communications, infrastructure and contingency planning to maintain service delivery during future extreme weather events.
- Western Queensland Floods: Boarding school students returning home during the recovery period needed support with integrated trauma-informed care upon re-entry to their schools.

Conclusion

The 2025 disaster events highlight both the strengths and the limitations of Queensland's disaster management arrangements. One of the most urgent and under-recognised gaps is the lack of systemic attention to the experiences of children and young people living in out-of-home settings. These children often navigate multiple systems and complex histories. In the face of disaster, their physical, emotional,

⁵ Parkinson, D. (2022) Gender-Based Violence and Disaster. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Natural Hazard Science. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389407.013.390>.

⁶ Queensland University of Technology. (2023) The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. <https://www.acms.au/resources/the-prevalence-and-impact-of-child-maltreatment-in-australia-findings-from-the-australian-child-maltreatment-study-2023-brief-report/>

⁷ Parkinson, D. (2022) Gender-Based Violence and Disaster. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Natural Hazard Science <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389407.013.390>

⁸ GAD Pod (WHGNE, WHIN & MUDRI) (2016) [Gender-and-Emergency-Guidelines Au.pdf](#)

and relational safety must be safeguarded with the same priority as any other member of the community.

Equally, the workers who support these children, including carers, caseworkers, and service providers, must be recognised as a disaster-affected group. Their wellbeing directly influences the stability and quality of support they provide. Evidence shows that the professional and personal wellbeing of workers is both challenged and critical in disaster contexts and should be factored into preparedness and recovery planning.⁹

PeakCare calls for immediate action to embed these children and young people in out-of-home settings into Queensland's disaster planning, preparedness, and response strategies. We urge the Inspector-General of Emergency Management to address this gap in the forthcoming reviews and stand ready to assist in developing evidence-based, trauma-informed, and child-focused improvements to the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We trust that the information and perspectives provided will be of assistance in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Tom Allsop
Chief Executive Officer
PeakCare Queensland Incorporated

⁹ Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2024). Wellbeing of workers supporting children and families after disaster [Webinar]. <https://aifs.gov.au/webinars/wellbeing-workers-supporting-children-and-families-after-disaster>