



Royal Far West
Children's health, country-wide

unicef 

AUSTRALIA

for every child

2022 FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Children's Needs Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The February/March 2022 Eastern Australia floods were one of the most severe in Australia’s history. Catastrophic and unprecedented floods came through large parts of Northern New South Wales and Southeast Queensland, impacting children, families and entire communities. The floods were the fourth most expensive disaster in our history, costing over \$4.3 billion and affecting an estimated 14 million people in the 84 Local Government Areas that were declared disasters. Tragically 22 lives were lost.

In response to the unprecedented flooding, Royal Far West received funding from the Australian Federal Government, through the Department of Health & Aged Care, to deliver an evidence-based program to support the mental health and wellbeing of children under 12 years old and the key adults around the child. This program is facilitated through 30 primary schools and preschools in the most impacted areas of Southeast Queensland (SE QLD) and Northern New South Wales (Nth NSW) with the greatest need.

This children’s Needs Assessment was undertaken by Royal Far West (RFW) in partnership with UNICEF Australia with the intention to both understand and consider the needs of children in recovery, as they are typically hidden or forgotten, and to inform the program design and delivery. RFW and UNICEF Australia visited flood-affected communities five months after the floods occurred, at a time when communities were deemed to be emotionally and practically ready to engage in the process. We directly heard from a total of 52 key informants, including school principals, educators, parents and caregivers, non-government organisations,

service providers, government officials and the communities that were flood affected. We focused on understanding children’s needs and the challenges they are facing, rather than their resilience and strengths at this time, to inform the program design. Hence, this Needs Assessment represents a snapshot in time, July–August 2022, of the experiences and needs of some children affected by the early 2022 floods.

Whilst undertaking the Needs Assessment, we saw the value of sharing what we heard and learnt with other service providers and the community to improve our collective recovery response and to reduce the burden on communities of having multiple organisations speak to them about their needs. For these reasons, we decided to release a public version of our children’s Needs Assessment.

RFW and UNICEF Australia recognise that disasters and emergencies are going to increase in frequency and intensity due to climate change, and we will continue to consult and support children and communities.

“Royal Far West and UNICEF Australia both offer its sincere condolences to children, families and communities affected by the 2022 flooding crisis. We recognise that children are particularly vulnerable to these types of extreme weather events and disasters. It’s critical that child-centred responses and children’s needs continue to be prioritised throughout any emergency response.”

Jacqueline Emery, CEO, Royal Far West and Nicole Breeze, Chief Advocate for Children, Director of Programs and Advocacy in Australia, UNICEF Australia

Children are highly exposed and uniquely vulnerable to these increasingly frequent and intense disasters.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child states that disasters threaten children’s fundamental rights to survival and development (Article 6), to health (Article 24), to an adequate standard of living (Article 27), to education (Article 28), and to recreation and play (Article 31).

States - including governments at sub-national levels - are the primary duty bearers of children’s rights and must ensure that they are protected in the context of disasters. This includes ensuring that children have a voice (Article 12) in policymaking on disaster response, recovery, and resilience-building.

States obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child are also complemented by their obligations to children in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030.

Key Areas of Impact for Children Under 12



EDUCATION

- Learning disruptions and absenteeism
- Some schools forced to co-locate with other schools and closed for periods of time
- Children disengaged and unable to concentrate on learning at schools
- Lower school readiness emotionally and socially for those children transitioning to primary school
- Family and social attachment issues
- Families without internet at home unable to access online schooling for their children



CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

- Children (and adults) with heightened anxiety about the rain, e.g., "Is nanna's house going to be ok?"
- Grief and loss over losing their home, school, pets, favourite toys, and belongings
- Changes in 2 to 4-year-olds included: regression in previously acquired developmental skills including toileting skills, separation anxiety or excessive clinginess to caregivers and teachers, increased physical complaints, changes in appetite, difficulty in concentration and paying attention, development of new fears, relationship difficulties with caregivers/siblings/peers, and appearing sad/withdrawn
- Changes in 5 to 12-year-olds included: sleep disturbance, nightmares, mood, irritability/anger outbursts, intrusive memories, difficulty concentrating, decline in school performance, somatic complaints, withdrawal, change in appetite, anxiety for loved ones
- Secondary stress and worry for and from their parents' emotional and psychological state and financial pressures



PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Children exposed to mould
- Families cut off from essential services such as their GP or mental health, disability and allied health services
- Impacts on infant and maternal nutrition due to limited access to food



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Unsafe sleeping environments due to a lack of temporary housing. Families are staying in tents inside their condemned homes, in caravans or living with relatives
- Family separation
- Crowded houses as impacted families are staying with their family/friends for many months
- Lack of stability and re-building homes as insurance claims, land buybacks and swaps are still being negotiated
- Pod Villages being built in Northern NSW don't currently have children's friendly spaces. The short- and long-term impacts are yet to be known



SAFETY

- Increases in calls for domestic violence support and the complexity of cases
- Increases in reports of peer-to-peer violence and sexual assault
- Increases in cases of alcohol and drug abuse in families



RECREATION AND PLAY

- Lack of safe places to play like playgrounds, sporting fields or bowling alleys
- Loss of toys
- Less play and socialisation with friends leading to boredom and disengagement

“When disasters occur, children may experience a range of vulnerabilities: psychological, physical and educational. These vulnerabilities tend to be interconnected and mutually reinforcing ... Moreover, vulnerability factors tend to build up over time and cluster together resulting in what we refer to as accumulative vulnerability”

Fothergill and Peek, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, Australia has experienced compounding climate-driven disasters such as bushfires, droughts, and floods. These natural disasters are occurring more frequently and with greater intensity, placing many Australian communities under significant pressure. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has only increased existing stress and disadvantage for many country children and their families.

Since 2020, UNICEF Australia and RFW have partnered to deliver customised psycho-social and learning support to children and young people impacted by these events. Together we work to develop and enhance the resilience of children in rural and remote locations who are impacted by climate change-driven disasters, and also work to strengthen the support system that surrounds them. The changes we achieve are sustainable in the long term, changing children's lives and helping them to thrive during childhood and through their path to adulthood.

Our approach

RFW and UNICEF Australia take a child-centred approach to our work, directly focusing our assistance and interventions on country children under 12 and their parents, caregivers, educators, and services that support them.

RFW and UNICEF Australia visited flood affected communities to conduct the Needs Assessment five months after the floods had occurred in July/August 2022, at a time when communities were deemed to be emotionally and practically ready to engage in the process. A total of 52 key informant interviews were conducted with primary school and early childhood education directors and educators, NSW and QLD Department of Education (Directors of Education and Mental Health advisors) and NSW and QLD departments of health key personnel, local councils, NGOs/service providers and community members across Nth NSW and SE QLD to inform this Needs Assessment.

Official data was collected from federal and state government agencies on the flood impacts, as well as existing health and socio-economic data to identify the locations most affected by the floods.

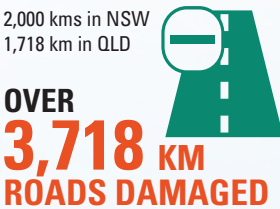
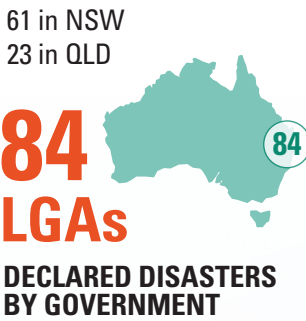
Our initial community visit was rescheduled due to another storm and flood event and major road closures. Despite five months having passed since the first major flood events, it should be noted that communities, particularly in Nth NSW, are still in recovery mode with many businesses and services still closed or only just reopening. It would have been inappropriate and possibly futile for the Needs Assessment team to have

visited any earlier, as communities would not have been ready or willing to participate in interviews. Further, to ensure children were not inadvertently harmed UNICEF Australia and RFW did not consult with children directly when conducting this assessment but liaised with the key adults around the child. However, we believe children's voices should be considered and consulted in disaster planning and recovery in a manner that is empowering and safe for them.

Scale and extent of the 2022 floods

Unprecedented flooding events impacted large parts of SE QLD and Nth NSW during February and March 2022. The flood heights were significantly greater than predicted by the Bureau of Meteorology. Due to the rapid escalation of the floods, communities did not have sufficient warning time to evacuate and were caught off guard in both states. The government declared that 61 LGAs in NSW and 23 LGAs in SE QLD were disasters from the floods. 22 people lost their lives from the floods (13 fatalities in QLD and nine in NSW), and hundreds were injured. The Insurance Council of Australia estimated it was the fourth most expensive disaster in Australia's history, with a total cost of \$4.3 billion. However, the actual costs are estimated to be significantly higher due to people not being insured and other social, health and wellbeing factors.

Scale of community impacts from the floods: official data and statistics



THERE IS CURRENTLY A LACK OF OFFICIAL DATA ON THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PEOPLE IMPACTED.

SOURCES:

Australian Red Cross (2022) Queensland and New South Wales Floods Report, February to June 2022

Department of Home Affairs (2022) 'Major Incidents Report 2021-2022', Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR).

Deloitte Access Economics (2022) The social, financial and economic costs of the 2022 South East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding Event prepared for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA)

NSW Independent Flood Inquiry Commission (2022) 2022 Flood Inquiry Volume One: Summary report, 29 July 2022



PHOTO: © UNICEF Australia / O'Dell

Key themes from our Needs Assessment

Although the floods occurred five months ago, the impacts are still being felt in communities with children and families displaced, services disrupted, and the economic effect of months of lost business, lost work, and lost livestock and crops continuing to worsen. Communities are trying to rebuild and recover as insurance money and grant assistance is received, but many remain uncertain about their future, with the impact being felt most severely by those who had pre-existing vulnerabilities or experienced structural disadvantages before the flooding events.

Further, the Australian east coast is heading into its third consecutive La Niña season. The Bureau of Meteorology has warned that the risk of more flood events this year on the east coast of Australia remains elevated. For many flood-affected people this will delay, disrupt, or even prevent rebuilding and recovery, and create heightened levels of anxiety about the rain.

Flood affected communities have experienced multiple consecutive and compounding crises

Children and families have experienced compounding and cumulative impacts from over two and half years of the global COVID-19 pandemic, previous natural disasters, and now multiple flood hazards in rapid succession in 2022. The effects of the floods cannot be considered isolated, rather situated amid a pandemic and within communities that are at the limits of their capacity. Many of the communities have recently experienced bushfires and droughts, which may have reduced the community's resilience to respond and recover from this flood event. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an economic downturn, job loss, learning disruptions, health and mental health issues, supply chain shortages for building supplies, and a rising cost of living that is making it more difficult for people to recover from the recent floods. Most parents, caregivers, and teachers are under incredible financial and emotional stress. Parents and community members expressed being physically exhausted as they try to rebuild homes and businesses after work and on weekends. Some SE QLD communities reported they have been "re-traumatised" from previous significant floods in 2011 and 2013. Key informants expressed that fewer support services were made available compared to the bushfires and earlier floods in 2011 and 2013. Also, as flood-affected communities began to rebuild and recover another flood hit the communities. SE QLD experienced three successive flood events within six months. As soon as recovery started from the first flood, another hit six weeks later. **Many flood-affected communities reported they have 'crisis fatigue'.**

At the peak of the flood events, 331 NSW schools and 151 SE QLD schools had temporarily ceased operations. In SE QLD, a total of 613 were impacted, of which six schools were closed until the commencement of Term 2 and 88 schools suffered damage. Many schools in the region had lasting damage to the entire site or some buildings and facilities, and some schools relocated to other schools temporarily.

In NSW, 14,637 homes were damaged, and 4,055 homes assessed as uninhabitable, with 7,731 people initially in emergency accommodation and many still unable to return. The NSW Flood Inquiry Commission found that close to \$4 billion in NSW and Commonwealth government support has been provided.

In SE QLD, 18,000 homes and businesses were affected by the floods, accruing \$646 million in uninsured residential and commercial losses. Deloitte Access Economics estimates the floods costs to be \$7.7 billion in social, financial, and economic impacts with long-lasting mental health, disease, and social issues making up \$4.4 billion of the costs. These unprecedented and widespread floods have been devastating with long-lasting impacts on children, families, and communities.

“ Five months later, families are homeless with some still living in tents, businesses are still waiting for long-promised assistance, and there are still unresolved policy matters involving buybacks and land swaps – to name just a few of the myriad remaining pressing problems. ”

(Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022 – Parliament of NSW)

“ Recent research in Australia found that the consequences of one disaster in Australia often erodes a community's ability to be resilient and respond to future disasters. Similarly, when disasters hit a region multiple times, this can slow recovery due to already weakened support systems and increased vulnerability to future disasters. ”

Deloitte Access Economics report

Strong grass roots community action

Nth NSW and SE QLD communities' key informants reported strong grass roots community action in the early stages of the recovery that have continued in some locations. Most communities talked about the grass roots community organising and activating to provide physical support to families and schools to clean up and access practical and physical support like vouchers, supplies and housing. For example, in Wardell NSW and Laidley QLD, the community has set up and continues to operate the community centre and recovery efforts. The strong community spirit was a protective factor and source of strength for flood affected children and families.



PHOTO: © Royal Far West



PHOTO: © Royal Far West

Children's mental health and behaviour changes

Children and their parents and caregivers are showing increased anxiety and hypervigilance about the rain and are pulling their children out of school out of fear that a flood will separate them. For example, children now dislike the sound of rain where previously they loved it and express an unwillingness to be separated from parents when it is raining and for parents to leave their children at school when it rains. Educators have also observed an increase in disruptive behaviour when it is raining. In Nth NSW, children with no previous behavioural issues have developed issues such as difficulties with concentration and learning, and are more withdrawn. Children are sleepy, tired, and irritable. Whereas in SE QLD, some children have shown behavioural escalation and regression into bed wetting, sleeping changes, nightmares and "traumatic" pictures being drawn, mostly reported by early learning centres following the floods. These changes are not uncommon, but when the behaviours continue after many months then support is required.

Children cannot access places to connect, play and develop their social skills. Children have lost places where they can play outside and in their homes. For example, sporting activities and after-school and holiday programs have been stopped for months in Nth NSW, the pool in Lismore is closed, and sporting fields have not been fixed. There are currently no safe play spaces in the established 'pod communities'. Educators reported that some children are bored, disengaged and engaging in risky behaviours. Physical exercise is important for children to discharge stress post-disaster.



PHOTO: © UNICEF Australia

Education disruptions for children

Many children experienced significant learning disruptions in both early childhood and primary schools from COVID-19, which was exacerbated by the floods. For one week, many schools were closed due to being inundated with water, or the grounds were not accessible or cut off from the floods. Many displaced schools have had to co-locate at another campus, which has been challenging for both schools, particularly for those that had to move to a new location. Schools and preschools are back but report that the floods have increased the need to support children with their wellbeing and psycho-social needs, causing delays to teaching the education curriculum.

Since the floods, when it rains, there has been increased absenteeism from schools. Parents/caregivers keep their children at home in bad weather to avoid becoming separated if it floods again, as many places become isolated and cut off in floods. The increased absenteeism and isolation have had social development impacts and learning disruptions. For example, the stop-and-start nature and inconsistent attendance at kindergarten means it takes a longer time for children to connect with peers and slows down the education program, and more children are not school ready. When children are at school their ability to pay attention and concentrate appears reduced and is affecting their academic performance.

Mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and counsellors are hard to access in most communities, with a lack of specialists, long waits, and costs being significant barriers to access. The floods have strained already inadequate paediatric health and mental health services for children. Thus, there is a pressing need for psycho-social support in flood-impacted schools due to a lack of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services pre- and post-flood, and those that are specific to the adversity and potential trauma emerging in the aftermath of disasters.

The **Emerging Minds Community Trauma Tool kit** has helpful fact sheets on trauma responses children may show aged 2-12, that can be accessed on this website emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit/

ThinkFeelDo sensory bears are an invaluable tool that help enable children struggling with trauma to regulate their emotions and talk about their feelings.



PHOTO: © Supplied by Royal Far West



Educators are overwhelmed by competing demands that stretch beyond their role

The role of schools and educators in disaster response and recovery is growing as educators seek to meet the needs of their school community. Schools were used as evacuation centres during the disaster. Educators are providing social, emotional, and physical wellbeing support for their children. For example, there is an increased need for educators to provide food and meals to children, and are dropping off learning parcels and school supplies to children whose families have lost everything or are struggling to make ends meet. Some educators had to transition to online learning when the school was closed or not accessible for an extended time, provide emotional wellbeing support to children and their parents and caregivers, and clean up their damaged homes. We heard from some educators that they are overwhelmed and fatigued, that their own self-care was put aside in order to provide support for the children. Educators have said, “I have to be ok.” Educators have identified themselves as needing more support for their own wellbeing and mental health and some have reported vicarious trauma.

The pre-existing housing crisis is causing unsafe living conditions for children

The pre-existing housing crisis and shortage in both states are exacerbating the impacts of the floods on families and children. Most of the families we spoke to lost their homes and belongings. They have been unable to find temporary housing and have unstable accommodation situations due to the housing shortages, the rising cost of living, and insurance coverage issues and costs. There is extremely limited temporary housing that is safe and affordable, and available for flood-affected families in both states.

Children and families have been displaced and are living in tenuous and unsafe accommodation with impacts to their wellbeing.

Families are still living in tents, caravans, cars and parks with relatives or friends and some have been forced into homelessness. Some families are moving around continuously, some eight times to have a roof over their heads. Some families have moved to a different town and travel/commute long distances to work and school. Many houses were not covered by insurance, or the insurance premiums were too high for people to pay. They also can't afford to cover the cost of rebuilding or repairing damages from the floods, so they are left in temporary housing and potentially exposed to mould. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families and those with a lower socio-economic status have been the most impacted and disadvantaged by the housing crisis.

“The profound disruption caused by disaster can send children in a downward spiral. Children in the most precarious positions before disaster are at special risk for these downward trajectories, those who are already living at the margins are even more susceptible to experiencing extreme cumulative vulnerability after a disaster.”

Forthergill and Peek, 2015

Children are not equally and uniformly impacted by disasters

The floods, like many natural disasters and crises, have impacted those children and families that are most vulnerable and experience higher levels of disadvantage the hardest for many reasons. Children and families with lower incomes, lower levels of education and employment, and with poorer access to health services in rural and remote areas are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters. For example, families with lower incomes may experience higher levels of food insecurity than higher income families, and children living in remote areas may have limited access to internet to access online schooling and government support services. Additionally, children with learning and neurodiverse disabilities may have greater difficulty safely adapting to a new school location and may be more likely to be kept at home.

The increase in rental pricing in areas such as Ballina and Lismore has resulted in increased competition for affordable housing. As a result, families are living in tents inside their uninhabitable homes or have moved in with family members, resulting in crowded housing and unsafe living conditions. For lower socio-economic communities it is more difficult to access equitable housing due to the increasing cost of living and rental competition post pandemic and the floods. Flood plain areas are often more affordable, with cheaper housing by the rivers. This impacts families with lower incomes who then may not be covered by insurance or unable to pay the insurance premiums or excess to rebuild or repair damages.

The belief that children are a homogenous group that extreme events impact on equally is a myth. This myth also ignores the variability among children, race, gender and class inequalities as well as age and developmental processes and differing levels of cognitive and physical ability. Every child is unique, with personal, family and structural factors that shape and influence their resources and resilience, as well as their families ability to respond and adapt to emergencies and crisis.

Conclusion

Based on the information shared by key informants during the Needs Assessment, children have been affected by the flooding in many ways, including the loss of lives, their homes and belongings, family businesses, the death of pets and animals, severe disruption to schooling, and residing in temporary accommodation which is often crowded. Children will continue to feel the impact over the coming months and years. Children, caregivers, and community members have displayed a range of responses because of their experiences of the flooding, and require support to build their resilience and recover from the effects of the floods.

The negative financial impact of the flooding on families and communities was highlighted by key informants in both SE QLD and Nth NSW and will affect children in 2022 and beyond, and this may have consequences for the health and wellbeing of children and their caregivers. A lack of appropriate long-term housing and accommodation was stressed by key informants and housing insecurity is greatly affecting the physical and mental health of children and families.

Each community and individual experienced the floods differently and any intervention should take care to work with each community to understand what services they require and the best way for these services to be delivered. Several key informants requested a community-based approach that seeks to involve the community and support children, especially those under 12 years who are currently underserved by access to mental health support outside of school.

All communities in flood impacted locations have been affected in some way, whether through the destruction of homes, schools, and community buildings, damage to infrastructure, or disruption to the provision of goods and services. The locations identified through the Needs Assessment should be given priority based on the scale of the flooding in those locations and the underlying vulnerabilities of the communities.

Some key insights about children’s needs

- Children need routine, safety and continuity of learning during and after disasters, ensuring that schools are given adequate resources to help their students is essential.
- More long-term mental health and psycho-social support that is specific to the potential trauma and anxiety experienced during disasters is required. Ensuring this is accessible to children, educators, parents and caregivers is critical to support their recovery and build resilience following a disaster, especially those in remote areas. Delivery of these support services through schools is an effective and feasible option.
- Many children have lost the places in which they play, which is common after disasters. Consideration should be given to establishing child-friendly spaces in places across all stages of recovery to support children to discharge stress following these events.
- The flood impacts have exacerbated and compounded the COVID-19 pandemic impacts such as education disruptions, mental health and physical health issues, job losses and financial stress.
- Five months after the floods and many families do not have certainty about their future. They are at risk and fear the heavy rainfall and flooding for the same areas this year. As a result, community preparedness, response and recovery are happening simultaneously – the traditional model of a single disaster response and timeline is no longer relevant with multiple cascading disasters.
- The floods, like other disasters and crises, have impacted those children and families with pre-existing systemic and structural disadvantages the hardest, including CALD and ATSI families and those with a lower socio-economic status.
- A key strength has been the enormous grass roots community action in the early stages of the response to this disaster that has continued. Communities have played a critical role in responding and assisting in the physical recovering from the floods across many locations. Communities have come together to support each other to provide basic needs such as health care, meals and temporary accommodation.



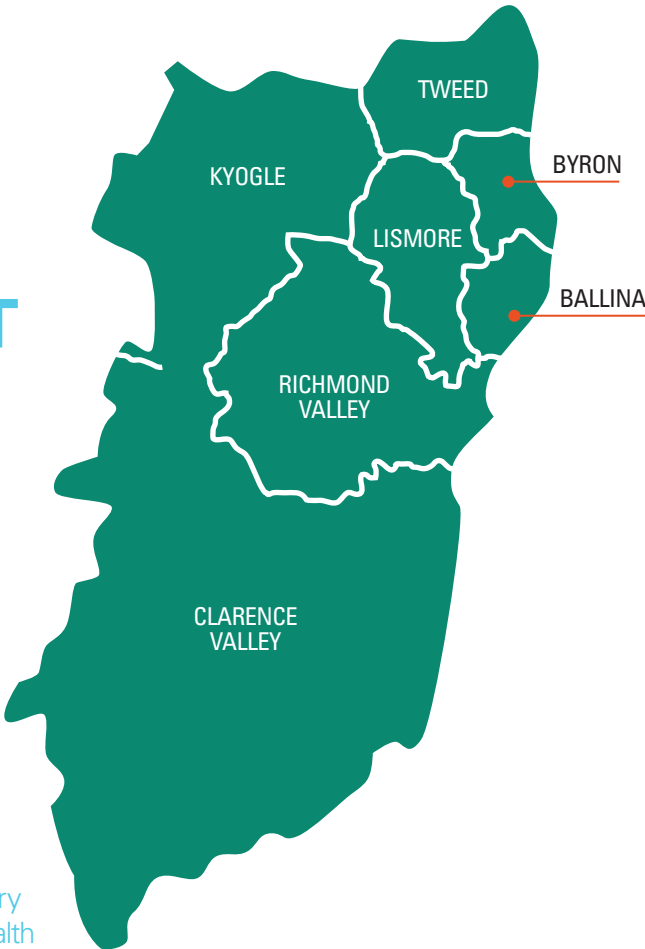
“Major flooding in NSW in February-March 2022 was a catastrophic disaster, causing widespread devastation and damage – particularly in the Northern Rivers and Hawkesbury regions.

Tragically lives were lost, thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed, and significant local infrastructure was damaged.”

NORTHERN NSW NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Flood Scale and Impact Summary

At the peak of the flood events in February/March, the NSW Government declared that 61 LGAs in NSW were deemed disaster areas, and 331 schools had temporarily ceased operations. Many schools in the region have damage to either the entire site or some buildings and facilities. The NSW DOE has classified several schools in the area as displaced. These include Broadwater Public, Cabbage Tree Island Public, Condong Public, Empire Vale Public and The Rivers Secondary College - Richmond Rover High Campus. Tragically nine lives were lost. The NSW Flood Inquiry Commission found that nearly \$4 billion NSW and Commonwealth government support has been provided to NSW (NSW Independent Flood Inquiry Commission, 2022)



Resilience NSW confirmed that in NSW:

- \$1.74 billion of impact has been validated through the Impacted Asset Register, with total estimated damage at \$2.7 billion.
- 2,905 kms of state road was impacted.
- Almost 7,000 personnel (Australian Defence Force (ADF), State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS), Fire and Rescue NSW) were involved in relief and immediate recovery/clean-up phases.
- Over 261,000 tonnes of waste was cleared, over 13 times more than the overall waste from the March 2021 floods.
- More than 10,000 cubic metres in shoreline clean-up.
- More than 8,188 registrations across 80 Evacuation Centres.
- More than 50,000 visits to recovery centres and assistance points, 20,000 more than the 2019/20 bushfires.
- 7,731 people supported with emergency accommodation, almost 5 times more than the 2021 flood.
- Over 157,000 calls to Service NSW, more than three times the calls for the 2019/20 bushfires.

North Coast Stats from PHN – Healthy North Coast 2018

- 17.1% of people in the North Coast are aged 0 – 14 years.
- 9.1% of young people in the North Coast identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. In NSW, 4.4% and in Australia, 4.1%.
- The North Coast region has the lowest rates of immunisation for one, two and five year-olds in Australia.
- Children living in disadvantaged families are three times more likely than those in more advantaged families to suffer from mental health disorders.
- In NSW, 1 in 10 preschool children (aged three to five) show mental health problems
- 10% of children under five have emotional or behavioural problems.
- Children and adolescents with no parents or carers in employment had higher rates of mental disorders. Kyogle 22.4%, Richmond Valley 20.5%, Lismore 15.9%, Tweed 12.4%, Byron 9.6%, and Ballina 9.8%. The average rate in NSW 11.5%.
- Mental health services such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselling were reported by Youth in 2018 Local Health Needs Community Survey as hard to access with a lack of specialists, long wait, and cost being significant barriers to access.

Key Informant Responses for Nth NSW

Theme	Responses
Family separation	<p>Have families been separated because of the floods? What were the main causes of separation and is the separation ongoing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Some families separated in the initial stages of the flooding so that members could get to safer areas while others stayed behind to look after the property or assist in rescues and evacuations.Many families have been living together either for a short time or for months in one home/ property in a multi-family/generational living situation. Often family members are living in caravans and tents on the property of extended family members.Some families have temporarily or permanently moved away from where they were living in order to access services or start again in a new place.
Behavioural changes and psycho-Social impacts	<p>Have you noticed any changes in children’s behaviour since the floods? What kind of behaviour changes have you noticed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased anxietyUnwillingness to be separated from parents – and for parents to leave their children at school when it is raining. They will often collect children when it starts to rain.Children with no previous behavioural issues have developed issues such as difficulties with concentration, learning and are more withdrawn.Children now dislike the sound of rain where previously they loved it.Educators have observed an increase in disruptive behaviour when it is raining.Increased frustration and interpersonal issues with other students.Express feelings of loss and grief in relation to their homes, pets, and life before the floods.Disclosure of “traumatic” stories related to the times when flooding was occurring, rescues, and evacuations.Crying and volatility in emotions.An increase in hopelessness and ideas of self-harm in teenage girls, and an increase in reported peer to peer sexual and violent behaviour.Personality changes.Children are sleepy, tired, and irritable.PTSD type symptoms.
Health and safety	<p>Are there any new risks for children’s health and safety related to the floods and the impact of the floods on the community? Has any action been taken to reduce these risks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Mould in housing .Increase in reports of domestic violence and cases of alcohol and drug abuse.Families living inside the shell of their flood affected homes, sometimes in tents to try and keep warm. Houses have no walls, insulation, or reliable hot water.Families living in tents and caravans on property in overcrowded situations. Multiple families living in the same household.Parents and community members are physically exhausted.Lack of access to paediatricians due to long wait list of up to 12 months.Lack of places to play outside at home, sporting activities have been stopped for months, the pool in Lismore is closed, and sporting fields have not been fixed. No safe play spaces in the established ‘pod communities’ at present. Physical exercise is important for children to discharge stress post-disaster.Children moving frequently between temporary housing. Many children are coming to school hungry .Headspace reports an increase in teenagers engaging in risky behaviours.
Access to support services	<p>Do children and caregivers have access to psycho-social and mental health services in this location? Are there any groups of children or caregivers who do not have access to these services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Many health services based in Lismore either relocated to Southern Cross University or have been closed since the floods.Occupational therapy and speech pathology services available in all locations visited, although shortage in some places.Family support services in Lismore, Ballina, and available to smaller communities in Nth NSW.

Theme	Responses
Main issues facing children and caregivers	<p>What do you see as the main issues facing children and caregivers because of the floods?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Housing insecurity -With over 4,000 homes destroyed, many families are living in temporary accommodation and required to continually change accommodation because they may only be able to stay in a place for 28 days and then must move. Cost of living was mentioned by all key informants as impacting negatively on families and children. Loss of jobs and income.Uncertainty and change - Everyone is trying to get back to ‘normal’, but many children’s lives are not normal. Sense of impermanency, stress in the household, schools relocated and other changes that will not be resolved for months, if not years. There has also been reported to be an increase in family violence.Community trauma -The whole community across Nth NSW has been affected, in places like Lismore, Coraki, Woodburn, Wardell, and Broadwater we’ve seen almost complete destruction almost complete destruction. This has resulted in lack of social connection due to all community services ceasing. Children and youth do not have access to places to connect, play and develop their social skills.
Educators providing opportunities to normalize feelings	<p>Have educators and educational facilities already been providing opportunities for children to normalize their feelings and the impact of the floods?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Most schools and preschools reported they tried to get things “back to normal” and routine as quickly as possible.Most educators described the importance of children coming back to school to see a familiar face even when the environment was different.Focus on wellbeing and student welfare for Terms 1 and 2 rather than educational outcomes, slowly getting back to learning focus.Some schools have counselling available for students.Educators have started additional training in trauma informed care and psycho-social groups, such as Stormbirds and Seasons for Growth, to run with students in the school. Most preschools spoke about using Birdies Tree books and resources with children.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">School Displacement and Co-Locating Impacts - Schools are being relocated to other schools that were less or not impacted that could accommodate them. This included two preschools and seven primary schools that were contacted for the Needs Assessment. Other primary schools, not included in the Assessment were also displaced.Educator exhaustion -The role of schools and educators in disaster response and recovery is stretching. Some schools were used as evacuation centres, and educators are providing additional wellbeing support to students beyond education. For example, many educators reported children arriving to school with no food, so educators have been providing breakfast and lunch clubs to ensure children are fed. Many educators described the fatigue of listening to children talk about their story especially when they too have experienced similar. Educators reported experiencing brain fog, care fatigue and difficulty making decisions. This will have a flow on effect to children’s education and emotional wellbeing.Grass Roots Community Action- Most communities talked about the grassroots community organising activations to support families and schools to clean up and access practical and physical support like vouchers, supplies and housing. For example, Wardell community have responded to the disaster by establishing their own recovery centre and hub as a place for community members to access. Wardell CORE hub is seeking to establish children and youth programs to give voice to the children, help them express their emotions and stories, and bring the community children together while services are recommencing. A strength and protective factor for children is the strong community spirit.The most vulnerable and disadvantaged impacted the worst -The floods, like many natural disasters and crises, have impacted those with lower socio-economic status, low literacy levels, CALD and ATSI populations the hardest for many reasons. The increase in rental pricing in areas such as Ballina and Lismore have resulted in increased competition for affordable housing. Many people have moved in with family members resulting in crowded housing.



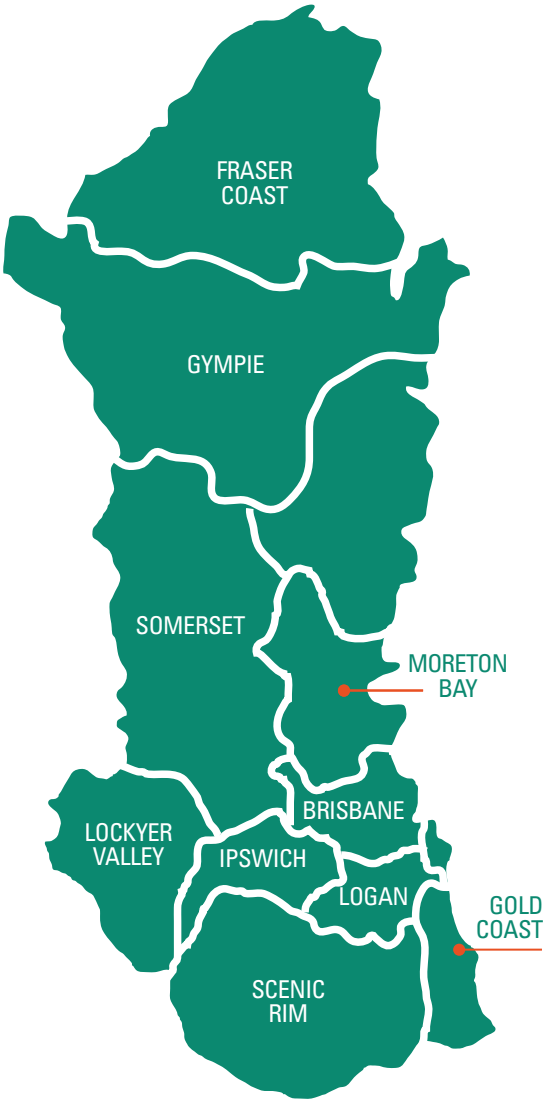
“The recent flooding seen in Southeast Queensland has been a catastrophic event on a scale we haven’t seen since 2011”

Premier of Queensland,
Annastacia Palaszczuk

SOUTHEAST QUEENSLAND NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Flood Scale and Impact Summary

At the peak of the floods, the Government declared that 23 LGAs in SE QLD were deemed disaster areas from the floods in February/March 2022, 13 lives were lost and 200 people injured, and 151 schools were closed as of March 1 (144 state schools and 68 independent and Catholic schools) and 85 State Schools were damaged, with six unable to fully reopen (Milton State School; Rocklea State School; Milperra State High School; Aviation High; One Mile State School; and St Helens State School) until Term 2, 2022. Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk stated that “the recent flooding seen in Southeast Queensland has been a catastrophic event on a scale we haven’t seen since 2011.”



Deloitte Access Economics report for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority titled “The social, financial and economic costs of the 2022 South East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding Event” in June 2022:

- 500,000 plus people estimated to have been affected by the floods.
- 29,000 calls made to the Community Recovery hotline for support.
- Over 17,000 contacts made at Community Recovery Hubs.
- 22,000 psychological first aid visits made across the QLD LGAs.
- \$7.7 billion in costs from social, financial and economic impacts.
- \$4.4 billion estimated costs in mental health, disease and social issues that are estimated to be long-lasting.
- \$2 billion in residential and commercial damage was the largest tangible financial costs from damage to property, contents and motor vehicles.
- \$492 million in public infrastructure damage including roads is another significant cost to SE QLD.
- \$324 million in costs for small businesses from lost economic activity caused by physical damage to businesses, as well as disrupted business operations due to road and public transport closures.
- \$254 million in agricultural production lost.
- \$65 million in emergency response and clean-up costs for a range of activities by the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA), other government agencies and not-for profit organisations including clean-up costs, temporary housing costs and emergency grants for affected households.
- \$1.4 billion in property related insurance claims to cover over 78,000 damaged properties reported by The Insurance Council of Australia.

Key Informant Responses for SE QLD

Theme	Responses
Family Separation	Have families been separated because of the floods? What were the main causes of separation and is the separation ongoing? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Minimal family separation from the floods.Where family separation has occurred, it was due to the shortage of temporary housing and families unable to stay together. In some situations, the accommodation offered was unsafe, with an increased risk of violence or abuse in the street or park. For example, some younger children were given to a relative while the parent and older children slept in a park or tent.
Behavioural Changes and Psycho-Social Impacts	Have you noticed any changes in children’s behaviour since the floods? What kind of behaviour changes have you noticed? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Most educators referred to their children as being resilient.A few educators shared that some children have shown behavioural changes after the floods including behavioural escalation and regression into bed wetting, sleeping, nightmares and “traumatic” pictures being drawn, mostly reported by early learning centres.Some parents/caregivers and teachers have been “re-traumatised” or experienced re-surfacing of trauma from earlier severe floods in 2011/2013.Educators observed that the level of stress and trigger threshold for children is lower, particularly for school-aged children who are stressed and having tantrums earlier in the school term than usual.More children are not ready to transition into primary school, both emotionally and socially.For children who lost animals they have experienced deep loss and grief. One young child watched her horse float away.Children have lost their favourite places to play and socialise like skate parks, sporting fields and after-school or holiday programs, which has caused boredom and disengagement and potentially greater violence and vandalism.The potential trauma from the floods is intermeshed with trauma and stressors of the past two/three years of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing threats of natural disasters.Most prominent is the recognised increase in children’s and caregivers’ anxiety about the rainy/wet weather. When it rains, some children can’t sleep and start crying, and some children have asked to sleep in the car to get out of the house. When it rains, children ask, “is that going to come in,” “will it flood again,” and “is Nanna’s house going to be ok,” they are scared and worried. Children also “know the water heights now.”One children’s support service has seen an increase in presentations of anxiety from the flooding and re-referrals of kids that we haven’t visited for three to four years. For adults, there is continuing uncertainty about the weather and ongoing flood risks, and a general weariness/fear of another flood this year.Multiple adults shared the sentiment “I would be concerned if another flood event happened in the next 12 months”.
Health and Safety	Are there any new risks for children’s health and safety related to the floods and the impact of the floods on the community? Has any action been taken to reduce these risks? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Some emergency and evacuation centres were overcrowded and could not adhere to COVID-19 protocols, and were unsafe for some children who were exposed to drug-taking, aggression, violence, and people being taken away by the police.There has been reported increased safety, child protection and domestic violence risks.Some property owners asked renters to leave soon after the floods to raise the rent. A single mother with two pre-school aged children with care responsibility was forced to sleep in her car or be homeless, which could result in child protection taking her children away.
Access to Support Services	Do children and caregivers have access to psychosocial and mental health services in this location? Are there any groups of children or caregivers who do not have access to these services? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall, the communities and schools observed that they received less recovery support than in response to previous floods in 2011/2013Gympie, Logan and Ipswich have more mental health and psychosocial support services than all the other areas visited. However, there are limited to no existing disaster specific programs in all areas.Regional city support services are responsible for huge geographical areas (e.g., Ipswich LGA).In smaller rural communities, children can struggle to get specialist services they need like speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, and social work, even under normal circumstances, let alone when their families have been affected by floods e.g., west of Ipswich.There is low interest/capacity for telehealth, online support services and travelling to another community for support services in rural/regional communities.All communities were aware of and accessing practical recovery support, including financial assistance.Practical recovery seems to be the immediate focus for recovery in most communities.Some of those that are the most vulnerable in a disaster are those new to the community because they don’t have the support systems in place to get help.Housing displacement has meant that it is more difficult for people to access support services and medication if they don’t have an address or relocate to another town or area.

Theme	Responses
Main Issues facing Children and Caregivers	What do you see as the main issues facing children and caregivers because of the floods? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Parents/caregiver exhaustion and stress – Families are stressed about uncertainty of where they will live, work and about the cost of living, and lots have moved back home with their relatives. The unstable housing situation is ongoing. Some families can’t provide shoes and lunch for their children which is a culmination of not having a house and bills to pay.Learning disruption and absenteeism – due to COVID-19 impacts exacerbated by the floods.Housing Displacement –The pre-existing housing crisis and shortage in both states are exacerbating the impacts of the floods on families and children. There has been extremely limited temporary housing that is safe, affordable or available for flood-affected families in both states. This situation is ongoing. Some people were put up in a motel for the week but then couldn’t afford the costs on the weekend and were forced to leave. Families are sleeping in cold sheds, in tents, in caravans, in cars, on the floor with relatives/friends, and some have been forced into homelessness. Some families are moving around continuously, six to eight times to have a roof over their heads. Some families have moved to a different town and travel/commute long durations to work and school. Many houses were not covered by insurance, or the insurance premiums were too high for people to pay. They also can’t afford to cover the cost of rebuilding or repairing damages from the floods, so they are left in temporary housing or exposed to mould.
Educators Providing Opportunities to Normalize Feelings	Have educators and educational facilities already been providing opportunities for children to normalize their feelings and the impact of the floods? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Educators have limited access to resources to support their wellbeing/self-care. They also have limited training and resources to support both studnets/children and parents/carers in disaster recovery.Schools received much less recovery support than in response to the 2011/2013 floods (particularly psycho-social), which was noticed and felt disheartening by educators.Schools relied more on the grassroots community to organise activations to support the clean-up, and to help provide practical support and vouchers.Educators have access ongoingly to counselling through an Employee Assistance ProgramChildren have access to varying degrees to school counsellors, guidance officers or a chaplain at their school. Birdie’s Tree books were identified as a known and accessed resource by some early educators in SE QLD. Schools in more rural and regional areas have minimal to no access to school counsellors etc, such as communities west of Ipswich and no access to a psychologist within this area. There are limited disaster-specific psychosocial support programs in schools.Some early childhood education and care Directors have great psychosocial awareness and are self-motivated to find and employ strategies to support teachers, parents/caregivers, and children. Children in these services have experienced more consistent learning, routine, and stability.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">School Displacement and Co-Locating Impacts - Schools are being relocated to other schools that were less or not impacted that could accommodate them. This included two preschools and seven primary schools that were contacted for the Needs Assessment. Other primary schools, not included in the Assessment were also displaced.Educator exhaustion - The role of schools and educators in disaster response and recovery is stretching. Some schools were used as evacuation centres and educators are providing additional wellbeing support to students beyond education. For example, many educators reported children arriving to school with no food, educators have been providing breakfast and lunch clubs to ensure children are fed. Many educators described the fatigue of listening to children talk about their story especially when they too have experienced similar. Educators reported experiencing brain fog, care fatigue and difficulty making decisions. This will have a flow on effect to children’s education and emotional wellbeing.Grass Roots Community Action- Most communities talked about the grassroots community organising and activations to support families and schools to clean up and access practical and physical support like vouchers, supplies and housing. For example, Wardell community have responded to the disaster by establishing their own recovery centre and hub as a place for community members to access. Wardell CORE hub is seeking to establish children and youth programs to give voice to the children, help them express their emotions and stories and bring the community children together while services are recommencing. A strength and protective factor for children is the strong community spirit.The most vulnerable and disadvantaged impacted the worst - The floods, like many natural disasters and crises, have impacted those with lower SES, low literacy levels, CALD and ATSI populations the hardest for many reasons. The increase in rental pricing in areas such as Ballina and Lismore have resulted in increased competition for affordable housing. Many people have moved in with family members resulting in crowded housing.

COMMUNITY EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY

In order to assist UNICEF Australia and RFW to determine which areas and schools to select to receive the response, the following information has been compiled. The data is not exhaustive and has been selected as proxy measures to try and provide an overview of the scale of the floods alongside existing information about the Local Government Areas community statistics in relation to children and mental health.

Annexe 1 and the summary tables on pages 24-25 show:

- The **size of the flood impacts** in the LGA overall, and on residential and agriculture land. This data was taken from the National Recovery and Resilience Agency.¹ *Estimates of flooded areas are based on a preliminary flood extent developed by NRRRA and has not been validated. Note this gives an indication of potentially impacted areas and there are possible errors of inclusion and omission.
- The **multiple disaster index for Australia in 2020** which covers drought, fires, floods, storms, cyclones, COVID-19 cases and job losses related to the COVID-19 pandemic².
- The **LGA Socio-Economic Disadvantage Score**. This data was taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the NSW Government Health Statistics. The lower the score, the worse the Socio-Economic Disadvantage³.
- The **% Vulnerable 0 – 5 and % under 15 affected by mental illness** was taken from NSW Government Communities and Justice, District and LGA Insights on Their Futures Matter Investment Approach⁴. Comparable data was not available for QLD LGAs.
- The **% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people** in the LGA population was taken from the 2021 Quick Census data.⁵

Using this methodology, LGAs were prioritised for the community needs assessment based on the scale and severity of the flood impacts, having multiple disaster impacts, lower SES, and Department of Education and Health recommendations. Further, for the field visit communities that were in closer proximity to each other were visited during the 3 days of travel to communities in SE QLD and then Nth NSW in July and August.

On the following pages Table 1 and Table 2 show the flood impacted LGAs that were prioritised for the needs assessment with information about the scale of the flood impacts, the disaster index score, % of job losses from COVID-19, as well as the associated Socio-Economic-Status ranking, SEIFA score and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander percentage of the population.

“Children and young people are particularly susceptible to mental health issues following disasters or emergencies, resulting in poorer educational outcomes and a loss of a sense of stability and safety.”

Professor Lisa Gibbs, University of Melbourne, Transcript 90 - Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020)

1 Source: <https://nema.gov.au/data#/map>
2 Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2020/dec/22/interactive-map-which-areas-of-australia-were-hit-by-multiple-disasters-in-2020>.
3 Source: http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/Indicator/soc_seifa_lgamap/soc_seifa_lgamap.
4 Source: <https://www.theirfuturesmatter.nsw.gov.au/investment-approach/district-and-lga-insights>.
5 Source: <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

Table 1: Northern NSW Flood Impacted LGAs Data

LGA	Flood Impacts	Disaster Index 2020 ¹	% COVID job losses	SES Rank in State ²	ATSI 2021 census
Ballina	<ul style="list-style-type: none">66 sq km flooded (14 per cent of Ballina)51 sq km of agricultural land flooded (16 per cent of agricultural land)4 sq km of residential land flooded (8 per cent of residential land)648 homes	1.087	6.5	98	3.9
	Fires and floods				
Byron	<ul style="list-style-type: none">12 sq km flooded (2 per cent of Byron)1 sq km of agricultural land flooded (0.4 per cent of agricultural land)3 sq km of residential land flooded (4 per cent of residential land)1,099 homes	1.117	6.5	99	1.9
	Fires and floods				
Clarence Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none">402 sq km flooded (4 per cent of Clarence Valley)284 sq km of agricultural land flooded (9 per cent of agricultural land)9 sq km of residential land flooded (7 per cent of residential land)	2.649	5.9	23	8.1
	Drought, fires and floods				
Kyogle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">2 sq km flooded (0.1 per cent of Kyogle)1 sq km of agricultural land flooded (0.1 per cent of agricultural land)0.24 sq km of residential land flooded (0.9 per cent of residential land)39 homes	2.113	4.3	12	5.6
	Drought, fires and floods				
Lismore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">203 sq km flooded (16 per cent of Lismore)170 sq km of agricultural land flooded (18 per cent of agricultural land)5 sq km of residential land flooded (7 per cent of residential land)1,803 homes	2.07	4.3	46	5.9
	Drought, fires and floods				
Richmond Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none">219 sq km flooded (7 per cent of Richmond Valley)146 sq km of agricultural land flooded (13 per cent of agricultural land)8 sq km of residential land flooded (14 per cent of residential land)833 homes	2.582	4.8	8	7.9
	Drought, fires and floods				
Tweed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">85 sq km flooded (6 per cent of Tweed)66 sq km of agricultural land flooded (11 per cent of agricultural land)6 sq km of residential land flooded (4 per cent of residential land)1,668 homes	1.058	4.4	67	4.4
	Fires and floods				

1 Scores from 0 – 2.67
2 Lower rank is lower SES

Table 2: Southeast Queensland Flood Impacted LGAs Data

LGA	Flood Impacts	Disaster Index 2020 ¹	% COVID job losses	SES Rank in State ²	ATSI 2021 census
Fraser Coast (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">309 sq km flooded (4 per cent of Fraser Coast)150 sq km of agricultural land flooded (5 per cent of agricultural land)9 sq km of residential land flooded (4 per cent of residential land)174 homes	1.081	4.1	23	5.1
	Fires, Cyclone and Flood				
Gympie (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">277 sq km flooded (4 per cent of Gympie)168 sq km of agricultural land flooded (4 per cent of agricultural land)26 sq km of residential land flooded (8 per cent of residential land)179 homes	1.118	4.9	26	4.4
	Fires, Cyclone and Flood				
Ipswich (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">111 sq km flooded (10 per cent of Ipswich)77 sq km of agricultural land flooded (12 per cent of agricultural land)11 sq km of residential land flooded (7 per cent of residential land)351 homes	1.05	3.4	45	5.5
	Floods				
Lockyer Valley (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">84 sq km flooded (4 per cent of Lockyer Valley)66 sq km of agricultural land flooded (4 per cent of agricultural land)6 sq km of residential land flooded (4 per cent of residential land)102 homes	2.146	2.9	36	5.1
	Drought, fires and floods				
Logan (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">133 sq km flooded (14 per cent of Logan)59 sq km of agricultural land flooded (18 per cent of agricultural land)41 sq km of residential land flooded (10 per cent of residential land)194 homes.	1.051	3.9	43	4.2
	Floods				
Scenic Rim (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">199 sq km flooded (5 per cent of Scenic Rim)183 sq km of agricultural land flooded (6 per cent of agricultural land)5 sq km of residential land flooded (5 per cent of residential land)	2.141	4.4	57	3.7
	Drought, fires and floods				
Somerset (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">161 sq km flooded (3 per cent of Somerset)131 sq km of agricultural land flooded (4 per cent of agricultural land)8 sq km of residential land flooded (6 per cent of residential land)32 homes	2.154	6.3	30	4.7
	Drought, fires and floods				

1 Scores from 0 – 2.67
2 Lower rank is lower SES

NEXT STEPS

Children are particularly vulnerable to the trauma of natural disasters and their long-term consequences. For children in rural and remote regions - where most of the impacts of natural disasters are felt - the trauma is compounded by existing disadvantage because of where they live. Royal Far West is funded by the Australian Government, through the Department of Health & Aged Care, to deliver an evidence-based psycho-social and mental health disaster recovery program to 30 flood affected communities through pre-schools and primary schools in Northern NSW and Southeast QLD.

The intended outcomes of the program are to:

- Support and improve the mental health and wellbeing of children affected by floods, during the post-disaster recovery phase.
- Develop the knowledge and capacity of parents and carers enabling them to support their children's mental health and wellbeing, and to know when and where to seek help; and
- Develop the knowledge and skills of educators to confidently support the mental health and wellbeing of children in their care.

RFW drew on UNICEF Australia's global expertise and knowledge of children's rights, disasters, and emergencies, to support the Needs Assessment phase of the program. We thank UNICEF Australia for their assistance, and gratefully acknowledge the government for their support -- without such funding our work for children following this crisis would not be possible. The program being delivered through this partnership is one of the primary interventions in a broader set of initiatives to ensure that the needs of children are prioritised in the nation's recovery.

Following the completion of this Needs Assessment, RFW will continue to liaise with local areas to hear their perspectives and experiences and to identify the 30 schools and preschools across 10 communities in the impacted regions most in need of recovery support for children and families, and agree tailored programs and supports based on their individual specific needs and time frames.

All communities in over 84 flood impacted locations including over 400 schools have been affected in some way, whether through the destruction of homes, community buildings, damage to infrastructure, or disruption to the provision of goods and services. Given the severity and breadth of the impacts on children

across multiple domains, RFW and UNICEF Australia together will continue to advocate for more services that are tailored to children impacted by disasters.

Children's voices are important and should play an essential role in helping shape policies and programs which affect them. To make disaster planning and recovery more effective it must include the perspective, experiences and needs of children. A key component of RFW and UNICEF Australia's work together is listening to the experiences of children and young people as highlighted in our report 'Bushfire Recovery: The Children's Voices'. Research has shown us that adults consistently underreport children's levels of distress and recovery needs in disasters. Therefore, RFW and UNICEF Australia's, will continue to consult with children and young people and elevate their voices with key decision makers.

“ We know from the success of our Bushfire Recovery Program that skills learnt by children, their families and teachers help build resilience and wellbeing and foster stronger rural communities – we must and can do better in preparing these communities for an uncertain and challenging future, whilst never forgetting the needs of the children. This program will provide a lifeline to children in rural areas struggling from the aftermath of the floods.”



PHOTO: © Royal Far West

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We would like to acknowledge and thank all the government officials, principals, educators, civil society organisation and support services for their generous contribution into this report. As well as all the grassroots community groups and other service providers that we heard about and continue to support community recovery but were unable to speak with on this initial visit.

- Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network (ACATLGN), Australian National University
- Australian Red Cross
- Be You
- Headspace
- Good Grief / MacKillop Institute
- Kummara / Family and Child Connect
- Refocus
- Rural Aid
- SSI / Access Gateway
- Stride Kids and Adults
- The Family Centre
- Wardell Core

The following government agencies that have a role in disaster response at the time of the 2022 floods provided information or data into this needs assessment:

Federal Government Agencies:	NSW Government Agencies:	QLD Government Agencies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Recovery and Resilience Agency• Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resilience NSW• NSW Department of Education• NSW Department of Health• North Coast Primary Health Network (NCPHN)• Regional, Rural & Remote Education Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Queensland Reconstruction Authority• QLD Department of Education• QLD Department of Health• Children’s Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service• ED-LinQ Coordinators, Department of Health• Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

This report was prepared by Adrienne O’Dell (Manager of Impact, Australian Programs) and Victoria Clancy (Contractor) from UNICEF Australia and Sarah Eagland (Head of Community Services), Tayla Iellamo (Senior Occupational Therapist) and Felicity Anicich (Clinical Psychologist) from Royal Far West and designed by Lorinda Taylor.

Disclaimer: This report is published by Royal Far West and UNICEF Australia for information purposes and to help advocate for improvements in outcomes for children in Australia. Sufficient care has been taken to provide an accurate representation of information shared and key findings from key informant interviews. The contributors and funder do not necessarily endorse the content and findings of this report.

ABOUT

Royal Far West and UNICEF Australia share a common goal to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people wherever they live.

We work to ensure that all children have the opportunity to survive and thrive, developing to achieve their full potential. Our work is built from a foundational commitment to children's rights, and we work to secure these fundamental rights for every child regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location or other status.

We seek to understand and address the root causes of inequity so that all children, particularly those who experience disadvantage or deprivation in society, have access to education, health care, sanitation, clean water, protection and other services necessary for their survival, growth and development.

Royal Far West works to support children who live in rural and remote communities, because where you live should not be a barrier to services or a cause for disadvantage. Getting the right support can make the difference between children thriving or falling behind, not just in childhood, but over their lifetime.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and communities in which we and our partners work throughout Australia, and their connection to their lands, waters, and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders both past, present and emerging.



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