



**MEDIA RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New report: this El Niño season, we need to treat disasters with *CARE***

As damage to our climate causes more frequent and severe natural disasters, we need a new approach to disaster that prioritises care for everyone, according to new research by community organisation Australia reMADE and rural women's health advocates Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE).

This comes as the Bureau of Meteorology has declared the first El Niño event since the Black Summer bushfires, which will see warmer temperatures and less rainfall, increasing the likelihood of bushfires within an already-warming climate.

"While we have weathered many a storm in our long and ancient history, in the coming decades we're expecting conditions that will challenge even the heartiest and most resilient communities to survive and thrive," says lead researcher, Australia reMADE Co-Director, Dr Millie Rooney.

"The good news is, we have the know-how to build communities that are set up to survive and thrive before, during and after disaster, through approaching disasters with care."

Dr Rooney led a team of researchers in community conversations with people in the Goulburn Valley region and north-eastern Victoria – where people have endured the Black Summer bushfires, the 2022 floods and the global pandemic in recent years.

**Findings reveal that people have three core needs to be cared for well through disaster.**

- To be **seen**: known in their communities and by government authorities, so their needs can be anticipated and their agency and expertise respected;
- To be **safe**: through disaster prevention and mitigation, access to safe places and accurate, timely, accessible information; and
- To be **supported**: better equipped at the community level to support each other before, during and after disaster.

“Communities do a tremendous job of caring for each other when the worst happens,” Dr Rooney says. “What we’re hearing is they need more support – from basic safety equipment and places to shelter, to access to affordable temporary accommodation and long-term mental health support.”

Prevention is also key. “People want government to be doing everything it can to decarbonise, manage the risks of fires and floods, and keep people safe from disaster in the first place,” Dr Rooney says.

**The report finds it’s time to change how we look at disaster prevention and preparation, prioritising care and strong, connected communities.**

“Care through disaster speaks to our basic needs as humans to care and be cared for, needs that are only amplified in times of crisis,” says Amanda Kelly, CEO of WHGNE. “Yet, as with the way care is largely invisible and undervalued more broadly, care in times of disaster often gets dismissed as something ‘soft’ and somehow less essential; something to turn our attention to once all the ‘important things’ have been addressed.”

**A care-centred approach urges government and others to invest early, long before disaster strikes – and that’s a huge opportunity.**

“Turns out, the things that make for strong communities where people can be seen, safe and supported through disaster are also the things that make our communities great places to live 365 days a year,” Dr Rooney says.

Enabling infrastructure for strong communities can be as simple as public parks, playgrounds, libraries and senior centres – places where people build connection and access information. But they also include those ever-precious resources of time and money, which government can help free up through forward-thinking policies like four-day standard working weeks, basic income support and paid community care and disaster leave, advocates argue.

“No one wants to live in a more disaster-prone world, and it’s still essential to do everything possible to prevent more damage to our climate especially. Fortunately, we do want to live in the kinds of communities that can thrive before, during and after disaster. We can build those now to see us into the future, come what may,” Dr Rooney says.

**More information, report and summary available at:** <https://www.australiaremade.org/care-disaster>.

**For further comment, please contact:**

**Dr Millie Rooney**  
Australia reMADE Co-Director  
[millie@australiaremade.org](mailto:millie@australiaremade.org), 0412 084 863

**Amanda Kelly**  
WHGNE CEO  
[a.kelly@whealth.com.au](mailto:a.kelly@whealth.com.au), 0418 856 345

