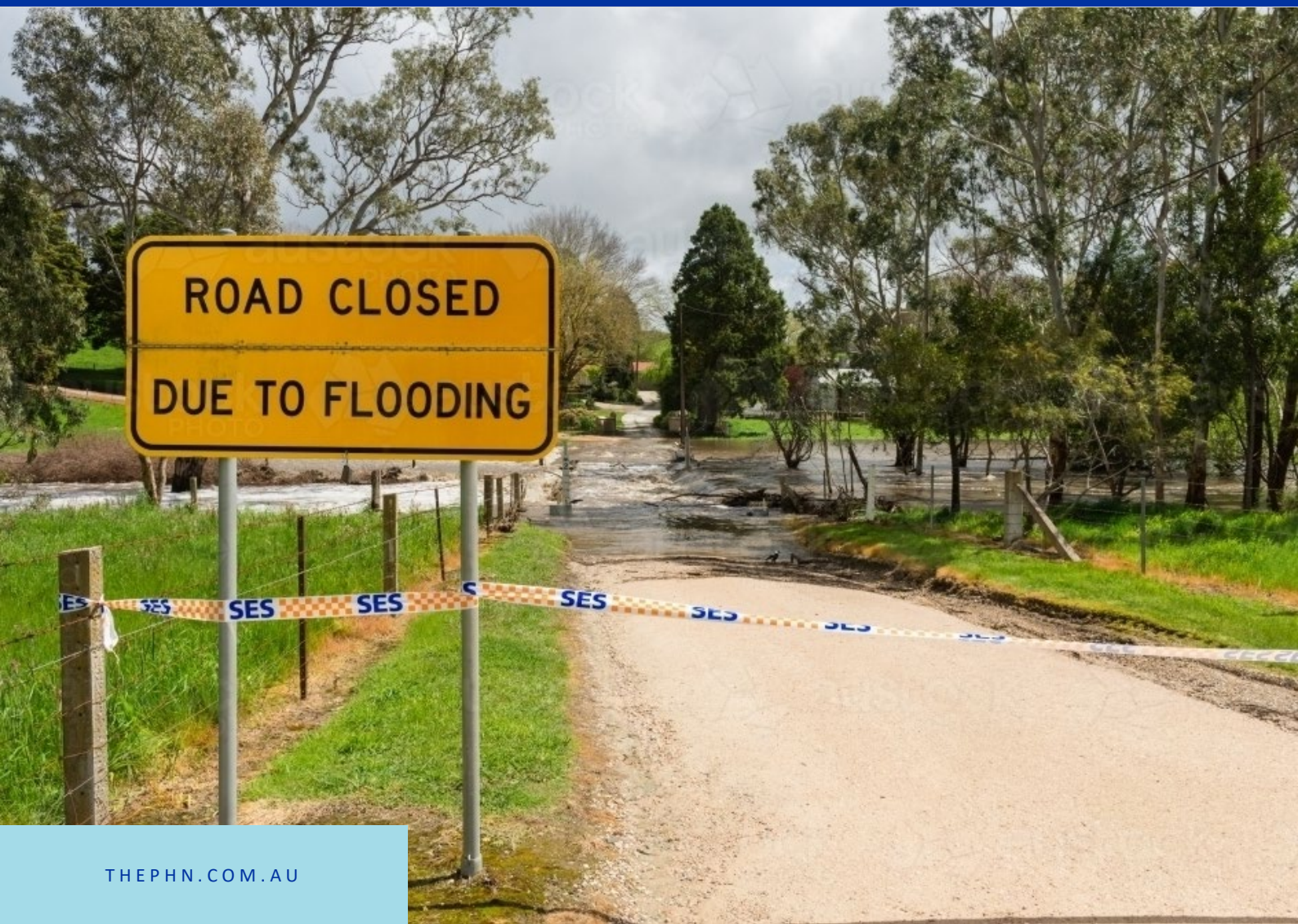


Disaster & Emergency Management

ACHIEVEMENTS & SUCSESSES

January 2024



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BACKGROUND

In recent years the Hunter New England and Central Coast (HNECC) regions have been affected by multiple disaster and emergency events, including recurrent floods, severe weather, bushfire, heatwaves, and drought, a rodent plague, the pandemic, and a mass casualty traffic accident.

The PHN recognises the pivotal role of primary care providers, as they are the backbone of Australia's healthcare infrastructure and are inherently involved in their community's disaster response and recovery processes. During emergencies, the demand for healthcare services typically surges. Care providers and their teams have consistently risen to the occasion, ensuring individuals in need receive prompt and compassionate care.

To warrant continuity of care, but also to safeguard their staff and business continuity during emergencies and disasters, it is vital that primary care providers are equipped to navigate the different stages of the disaster management cycle, including preparedness development, response, recovery, and planning and prevention efforts.

In 2022 the PHN introduced the role of Manager Disaster and Emergency Coordination. This ensures that primary care providers within the HNECC footprint have access to modern evidence-based disaster management support, that aligns with national and state policy and practice, and our unique local context.

The following article highlights some of the recent achievements and successes in this fast-changing environment where no day is the same.

A WELL-CONNECTED PHN

Being well connected is crucially important. The PHN has extended its reach to sustain relationships with all major stakeholders involved in the disaster management process – ranging from first responding agencies, to local councils, to small local grass-roots organisations. This enables us to support you with the most relevant local information, to escalate any issues affected providers may face, and to act as a voice for the primary care sector across the region.

The PHN has consolidated the working relationship with the disaster management teams of the Central Coast and Hunter New England Local Health Districts and has a seat at local welfare committee meetings, and local council disaster recovery resilience working group meetings.

We all know that disasters don't respect borders. We want to acknowledge the fruitful collaboration with our neighbouring PHNs Nepean Blue Mountains, Healthy North Coast and North Sydney PHN – who informed our activities with their experience and enabled us to close gaps.

The PHN disaster management team is supported by GP advisor Dr John Goswell (Hunter), (and until recently by Dr Catherine Palmqvist (Central Coast)), the Clinical Councils and Community Advisory Committees, who provide relevant feedback to tailor PHN policy and practice to HNECC health provider needs.

In August 2023, the PHN attended the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference to learn the latest developments in resilience and risk reduction to inform future projects and provider support.



Photo: Ellen Senft, HNECC PHN Manager Disaster and Emergency Coordination (left) visiting North Sydney PHN Executive Manager for Health Workforce and Systems Improvement Donna Pettigrew's (right) poster presentation at the 2023 AIDR conference in Brisbane.

PROVIDER PREPAREDNESS

Well prepared providers can respond and recover more efficiently from disasters. This is why preparedness development has been one of our major goals in the last year.

Emergency Response and Preparedness Toolkit (ERPT)

The PHN is proud to announce it is supporting Hunter New England and Central Coast General Practices by making available 100 funded 12-month licences for the RACGP accredited ERPT tool.

ERPT supports general practices to develop their own tailored practice emergency response and business continuity plan.

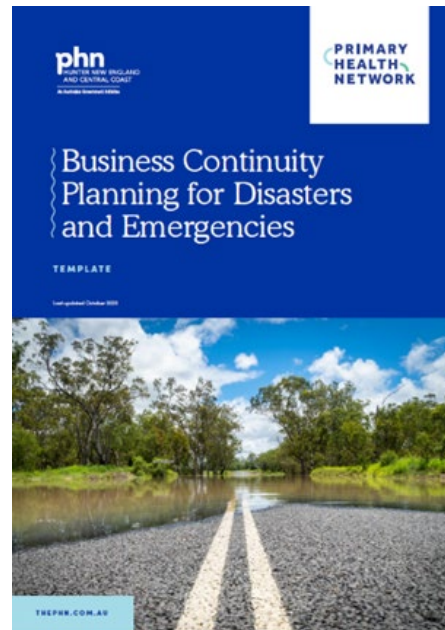
For more information: Emergency Response Planning Tool (ERPT) Licence - Primary Health Network (thephn.com.au)



The graphic features a red background with a white diagonal line. On the left, there are logos for PHN, Primary Health Network, and First Nations Health. The main text reads: "Hunter New England and Central Coast GPs: Prepare your business for the harsh Australian summer with ERPT". Below this, it explains that ERPT is an online tool for developing an emergency response plan. It also mentions that PHN is sponsoring 100 free 12-month licences for the ERPT for General Practices. Logos for ERPT, RACGP, and health point are at the bottom.

Business Continuity Planning Support for primary care providers

While not considered a replacement for GP preparedness development with the ERPT, the PHN has developed a business continuity planning template for other primary care providers including Allied Health as a starting point for their emergency planning. The template was developed with input from GP advisors, the PHN First Nations Health Access team, and local first responding agencies. It is available under "preparing a general practice for disaster" on HealthPathways.



PHN Education events: Winter Trilogy for disaster preparedness

This series of three online education events was held between July and September 2023, and all three recordings are available in the PHN education library. When a Disaster Affects Your Practice: Part 1 – Cybersecurity & Earthquakes - Primary Health Network (thephn.com.au)

First responding agencies and subject matter experts presented desktop hazard scenarios and discussed the optimal business continuity measures for providers to be well prepared.

Topics: Cybersecurity, thunderstorm asthma, fire, bushfire and smoke, flood and tsunami, infectious diseases, and earthquake.



The flyer is blue with a white diagonal line. It features the PHN logo and the Primary Health Network logo. The title is "When a Disaster Affects Your Practice: Part 1 – Cybersecurity & Earthquakes". Below the title, it says "WINTER TRILOGY EVENT ON HOW TO PREPARE YOUR PRACTICE FOR A DISASTER". The text describes the event's purpose and learning outcomes. It also lists the speakers: Peter Mullen, PHN Digital Health Officer, and Dr John Goswell, a General Practitioner. The event is scheduled for Tuesday 22nd July 2023, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm. The flyer also includes information about the other two events in the trilogy.

Primary Care providers in Disaster Recovery

The PHN has also partnered with Reconstruction Authority NSW and delivered a webinar about the disaster recovery process and the important role community practices have during this stage. Subject matter experts from NSWRA, the NSW SES, the local Regional Emergency Management Officer, and Prof Graham Brewer from the University of Newcastle provided insightful details about the New England Northwest flood recovery in 2022/23.

View the video here [Community Practices in Disaster Recovery - Primary Health Network \(thephn.com.au\)](https://thephn.com.au)

Health Pathways – Review of disaster management content

The Disaster Management and Health Pathways teams have reviewed the existing pathways resources, with input from GP advisor Dr Goswell. HNE and CC content has been aligned as far as practicable and a new structure has been added, including updated resources to help providers navigate their business, staff, and patients through the disaster management cycle. Modules include preparing the practice and patients for disaster, practice management during a disaster with desktop scenarios, and post disaster health.

Health Pathways are accessible to all HNECC primary care providers including Allied Health.

[Home - Community HealthPathways Hunter New England](#)

[HealthPathways Central Coast \(communityhealthpathways.org\)](https://communityhealthpathways.org)

COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS - SUMMER HAZARDS CAMPAIGN 2023/24

With an El Niño and Indian Ocean Dipole declared, the summer season 2023/24 is forecasted to bring heatwaves, drought, and increased bushfire risk. All these hazards may affect human health, with certain population groups such as elderly people, people with certain health conditions, First Nations people and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations at higher risk. The PHN has proactively developed a summer hazards campaign to increase the awareness of these hazards and to offer strategies on how to prepare. The campaign utilises traditional media avenues (print media such as newspapers, flyers and posters), social media with video, radio, a podcast, and the PHN website to specifically target vulnerable groups.

Be prepared, stay informed and know your options! For more information: [Summer Hazards - Primary Health Network \(thephn.com.au\)](https://thephn.com.au)



Let's all look out for each other this summer.

We're expecting a very hot and dry summer, and because of this we need to be prepared for a range of hazards including heat, bush fire and smoke. Each of these hazards can cause health problems including dehydration, heat exhaustion, coughing or breathing difficulties from smoke.

BE PREPARED

- Have enough food and medication at home
- Turn on your fan or air conditioning
- Stay hydrated
- Talk to your doctor if you have health concerns

STAY INFORMED

- Listen to the news and talk with your friends and family
- Download the 'Hazards Near Me' app

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

- If your home is not cool, head to the shops or library
- Follow advice from the emergency services, and
- Don't be afraid to ask for help

THEPHN.COM.AU/SUMMERHAZARDS

PRIMARY HEALTH NETWORK

SUMMER HAZARDS

patient info

healthdirect

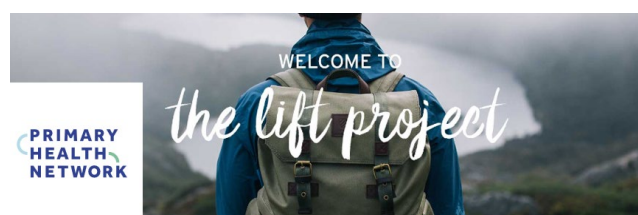
for more information

POST COVID AND DISASTER MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The COVID pandemic and recent disasters have taken a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of primary care providers and their staff.

To help health care professionals rebuild resilience, feel good and function effectively, the HNECC PHN invited primary care professionals and their families to participate in a unique wellbeing initiative called *The Lift Project*, a premier, evidence-based wellbeing solution for individuals, groups, and organisations which was developed locally by the University of Avondale's Prof Darren Morton.

A total of 497 participants from across the HNECC primary care sector joined the 10-week online wellbeing program which launched in October 2023.



THE NEW PHN DISASTER MANAGEMENT LANDING PAGE – YOUR ONE-STOP SHOP

In November 2023 the PHN launched the new disaster management pages targeting primary care providers and communities.

The landing page walks you through all relevant resources for disaster planning and preparedness, response, and recovery. It was developed with input from local first responding agencies and will also host a link to all latest news and developments in the sector. You can also access contact information to receive support from the PHN if you are affected by an event, and for all questions related to disasters. Check it out here:

[Disaster Management - Primary Health Network \(thephn.com.au\)](https://thephn.com.au).

OUTLOOK - WHAT'S NEXT?

The PHN will continue to develop tailored resources for provider preparedness and play an active role in the local disaster management community.

Besides promoting disaster preparedness, we are engaged in delivering provider support in the response phase during active events. For example, we liaise with providers and Local Health Districts to help safeguard the continuity of primary care in affected communities, including supporting evacuation centres.

In addition, we support disaster affected providers and communities to recover from events through stakeholder liaison, grants, and community initiatives.

If you have any questions, would like to provide us with feedback, or need assistance, please reach out to disastermanagement@thephn.com.au

**PRIMARY
HEALTH
NETWORK**

phn
HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
AND CENTRAL COAST

An Australian Government Initiative