

KEY THEMES IEPCP Forum

Bounce Forward: Urban Resilience in the context of COVID-19



The Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) hosted an online forum, **Bounce Forward: Urban Resilience in the context of COVID-19**, for local government in September 2020. The aim was to:

Provide an opportunity for EMR councils to share insights about the impacts of COVID-19 on their communities and use an urban resilience lens to support planning for a stronger and more resilient future

Urban resilience expert and current Manager City Resilience and Sustainable Futures at the City of Melbourne, Maree Grenfell, presented at and facilitated the forum. Lee Robson, Manager Community Resilience at Manningham Council, shared local insights about applying resilience thinking. Participants learned about the theory and background of urban resilience and were introduced to urban resilience frameworks; worked in small groups to capture current strengths and challenges for urban resilience; and discussed their vision for a more resilient future.

This document captures and shares the key themes from the forum.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE WHAT RESILIENCE MEANS TO YOU AT THIS TIME



NEW INSIGHTS REGARDING RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY PLANNING

Community involvement/led:

Community led and driven is important, elevating the community voice. We can learn from what has worked with communities that have experienced shocks. Engage, co-design and share decision making to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate activities. Ensuring we reach more individuals. Supporting community to lead resilience building initiatives, place-based and neighbourhood focused.

Opportunity to do differently:

There are multiple benefits of change and opportunity to try new things. Challenge to sustain this thinking and not fall back to old thinking. Systems that support this such as data could be useful.

“We need to think about how we can sustain this ‘rethinking’ so that we don’t fall back into old habits when the threat of COVID is over”

Inclusion, access & equity:

Important to have an equity lens and being inclusive of all members of the community, not leaving people behind.

Unique role of local government:

Local government is well placed to engage with supporting our communities to develop resilience from grass roots upwards and elections are an opportunity to drive this.

Integrated planning:

Councils must plan in integrated ways and move out of silos.

Potential for cross council collaboration:

Cross municipal collaborations should continue and increase and would be beneficial.

Learning about the resilience framework:

The framework can be built into other council planning processes.

RESILIENCE DIAGNOSTIC

Participants broke into small groups of up to 6 people to think about and discuss what is working well and not working well at this time in their own local government area, as well as the inequities and vulnerabilities they are noticing.

What’s working well?

Reaching out to community and collecting information about needs

Reaching out to community and making contact to check in and respond. Understanding needs and impact through surveys and contact with organisations, groups. Insight from the surveys has supported response and recovery work. Typical community development approaches.

“The ability to source, collect and aggregate data to give good insight into the community is challenging but with some of the work that parts of council are doing, we have more of a picture than we would have had (if we) relied on traditional engagement. “

Adapted quickly/crisis response

We know we can adapt very quickly, supporting our community and ensuring services are not disrupted in a crisis.

Staff support

Staff have been supported, provided with opportunities, re-deployed, their wellbeing considered.

Communication

Good information sharing happened with multiple communication methods. Specific campaigns (Be Kind) were good.

Changed the way services are delivered

Re-imagined the way services are delivered, such as libraries/aged care and did this quickly.

Collaboration – council/community

Interdepartmental collaboration is working well, supporting responding to community.

Online engagement increased

Lots of activities have moved online - events, forums, meetings, and have been well-received.

Leadership

Senior capability and focused leadership for recovery works well.

Existing infrastructure/assets

Infrastructure assets have served the community well eg access to parks and outdoor spaces.

Networks and partnerships

Leveraged from existing relationships with partners, such as neighbourhood houses, and put some in place to respond, such as food network. These networks need to be fostered and built on.

“Existing networks are a real strength of councils. And lots of networks that aren't necessarily driven by councils but they are part of. Those networks are what need to be fostered and built on”

What's not working well?

Information and Communication

How information flows within Council as well as externally and how best to use that information. For CALD communities need good relationships and policies around translation. Getting local news seen as more of an issue. Changes in communication occurred. Printed communication ceased at the same time which created a gap.

“Consideration of how to communicate with CALD communities has revealed that relationships were not of sufficient depth to meet the needs. Currently approaches have been direct translation which could be strengthened and will serve well going forward if addressed now.”

Community Engagement

Engagement with community will assist with recovery but there are challenges. Impact of changes in the Local Government Act provides opportunity for more proactive work but need to change way we engage and who we engage with, particularly those not already connected. COVID has highlighted the gaps.

“Need to get community more engaged in decision making. With changes in the local government act, that is a real opportunity for all LG's to be more proactive in decision making. Challenge will be how as it's not possible to engage people in the same old way like speaking to people out on the street etc. We haven't really realised all the opportunities for engagement so we don't hear from just the same people.”

Limited Resources

Resources need to be locally tailored as each LGA is different. Initiatives need to be strategic. Community focused response is resource intensive.

Clients and services

Services were cancelled and clients were distressed. Social isolation was increased and impacts on mental health, some turning to increased alcohol consumption.

Uncertainty

Not knowing the end point and responding to a once in 100 years event is challenging as we've never encountered a pandemic. Need to tailor recovery and programs.

“Dealing with a 1 in 100 year event so Emergency Management planning, as rigorous as it is, we are responding to something we have never encountered so there will be some lessons there but the more you can engage in the community, the more you can tailor recovery packages and programs”

Digital access

Lack of information of client's access to technology. Need to acknowledge a number of people don't have access and can't make assumptions about this.

Specific groups

People with a disability and people living by themselves.

Ability to respond quickly

Local Government environment is challenging for making decisions and responding quickly.

State government role

Greater collaboration with and clarity from state government would work better.

What inequities/vulnerabilities in your community are you noticing at this time?

Specific cohorts have been affected more:

People in high density living – apartments, rooming houses. English as a second language. Those with chronic health issues, particularly mental health. Socially isolated. Under financial stress. Frail older. Younger, especially with mental health issues. International students.

Specific issues:

- Demand for services or gaps highlighted – housing, emergency and food relief, hoarding, family violence, elder abuse, need to meet basic needs first, mental health, economic/financial issues
- Who is accessing services – broader range of people who haven't accessed supports before
- Lack of social cohesion – more racism, increase in social isolation, neglect of older people
- Systemic issues eg in access to PPE
- Mental Health – concerns starting to show, confidence in returning to normal, worries about safety, isolation

Digital access, communication and information

- People without digital access are missing out on important information and services. Harder to reach without possibility of face to face communication. Issues could be skills and/or financial limitations.
- Getting information out in a timely manner and using methods that people can access. Eg older people tend to use printed, tv and radio for information. Language barriers are an issue. Need the right information in language.

“People with limited digital access are harder to reach given we can't go door to door. Some people don't have the competence or skills and others do but don't have the financial means to purchase goods. “

Opportunity

Local Government has identified gaps and could explore relationships with wide and varied groups. Need to translate opportunity into action and fast track these.

OPPORTUNITIES & ACTIONS

Participants broke into small groups of up to 6 people for a second time to discuss their vision for a more resilient future, the gaps between the current state and their vision, and how they might move towards their vision, using the common resilience framework as a guide.

Vision for a more resilient future

“The work that you put into building resilient communities has other benefits and not just when disaster or emergency happens. If we're building strong communities, they are well resourced to look out for each other and to help each other have opportunities”

Community Engagement/community driven

Importance of community engagement, building social capital, and using community development. It needs to be ramped up and increased with deliberate engagement of 20,000 people. Community should drive the conversation. Community driven initiatives.

Resilient communities work should build strong communities, that are well resourced to help each other have.

“Ramp up community engagement to have an ongoing engagement with the community, not hear from 400 or 1000 people when we do surveys, we should be hearing from 20000 people. Run deliberate engagement pieces throughout the year.”

Staff

Build staff capability and resilience.

Collaboration and partnering

Bringing local community stakeholders together, engaging with each other and community.

More agility

Council policy and strategy needs to be reviewed and more agile.

Social connectedness



Inner East Primary Care Partnership acknowledges
the support of the Victorian Government
www.iepcp.org.au



Social connectedness across all domains is a priority. Need to re-engage people.

“social connectedness is a priority. Across different domains: arts, culture, connectivity, social groups, community orgs. A lot of connection has been lost. Reengage people back. May lose children from sport and other social activities and adults too.”

Investment/resources

More funding to community to drive evidence-based initiatives. Especially for social connection, mental health, family violence. Sustain and build on grants.

Environment/Climate change

Addressing climate change, building on changes seen due to COVID, to improve productivity, work-life balance, more use of nature and parks, increased community interaction and involvement. Increase valuing of green spaces as refuges from heat.

Planning/Integrated approaches

Looking at how resilience fits with other plans and integrate. How to operationalise the existing council's vision. The 4 dimensions of the CRF are already embedded in council plans. Shifting to a more simplified framework that is easier to implement.

“Councils already have visions that are theoretically ideal, lots of ideas already there but its difficult to work out how to achieve them. For example, we want to achieve liveability definition but after a while it becomes theory and we need to unravel the theory to see how we can operationalise it”

Preparedness vs response

Can apply preparedness thinking across Council, shifting away from resource intensive response and recovery.

“Most emergency management people would say that we should shift our thinking to preparedness of spectrum rather than recovery. The amount of time and money we spend on response and recovery. Can apply that thinking across so many areas of councils such as Aged care. We respond when people's health is compromised rather than investing up front. When you talk about a vision, the pieces are almost there but we need to actually shift our thinking and investment in preparedness. Ask the question, are we actually willing to invest the dollars if we're not going to see the immediate return on investment. Not going to see the outcomes until its needed but are we prepared to invest that money at the other end to be more able to react quickly.”

Thinking about what's working well/not well and the vulnerabilities identified, what are the gaps between the vision and current state?

- Information provision
- Staff wellbeing
- Connecting with groups/organisations
- Connecting with and consulting with community
- Reducing silos (internal and external)
- Digital access
- Access to resources.

- Access to services
- Council capacity eg emergency response resources, less financial resources, staff under pressure
- Living with chronic illness
- Climate change responses
- Local jobs
- Family violence

“Covid-19, in some ways is a blessing. Its illustrating where the gaps are. We knew where they were and were doing the same-old-same-old dealing with them but now that this has happened, its really showing them in an exaggerated way. It's making us think differently. A positive that has jolted us to change our thinking to make us more innovative in addressing social inequalities that have always been there.”

How do we move from the current state towards the vision?

Engagement

Engage community leaders, hand over control to community. Work with community organisations and neighbourhood houses. Know the community strengths and support to find their own solutions. Not top down approaches. Co-design with council.

Planning

Build into current planning and recovery processes. Rethink success and how it is measured.

Local government capability

Ensure that local government have the right capabilities and possibly different capabilities to achieve the vision. Speak to and inform new Councillors/leaders. Build on strengths.

“Learning from areas that have experienced shocks about what works best: bushfire communities in East Gippsland demonstrating resilience, importance of grassroots responses.”

Collaboration/Partnership

Collaborate and partner with stakeholders, other councils, State Government. Coordination role to bring together. Collaboration enables quicker response.

Resources

Flexibility with funding, repurposing existing grants, small grants.

Referring to the City Resilience Framework - how might you improve resilience across multiple drivers? Is there something you (or your organisation) could start working on now towards the vision?

Engagement

Breadth of engagement. Communicate and engage. Get community buy-in. Build shared understanding of resilience.

“Empowering a broad range of stakeholders in the leadership space, both community and employees. eg plans don't have to be perfect but can enable quick action.”



Inner East Primary Care Partnership acknowledges
the support of the Victorian Government
www.iepcp.org.au



Local government context

Encourage staff to think outside their own role, provide opportunities to learn. Reflect on internal processes and make changes. Look at the current and emerging capabilities needed and embed in planning. Review what we have and what we do to make them more accessible (eg parks, public spaces, infrastructure). Unique role of local government at this time.

Next steps – comments from feedback survey post forum

- I am seeking further training in this area.
- Follow-up session where small to large examples of resilience activities could be shared. Also a network to meet regularly to share information.
- Opportunity to workshop more practical ways to apply the resilience framework to our work
- Guidance on evaluation and monitoring resilience in LG
- Advice for embedding resilience within local government planning, including how to include it as a framework in strategic business planning and community planning
- More case studies and links to what councils are doing to bounce forward
- workshop the framework and make it relevant to my area of work
- a follow up workshop to look at the application of the framework in more detail

“Thank you for a great event. We've already integrated our learnings into our recovery planning and were really appreciative of the combination of theory and applicability. It was really well-timed too, as we are pausing to reflect on the last 5-6mths, as well as readying ourselves for the upcoming planning cycle”
(Forum participant)

Further information:

Sharon Porteous, Inner East PCP

Sharon.porteous@iepcp.org.au

PH: (03) 8843 225



Inner East Primary Care Partnership acknowledges
the support of the Victorian Government
www.iepcp.org.au

