Inviting the hearing sector into the emergency preparedness space

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Strengthening the experiences of deaf or hard of hearing (DHH+) people during extreme weather events and other emergencies

In this project we seek to (1) understand the current experiences of DHH+ people during emergencies; and (2) co-design an emergency preparedness tool for people who use hearing devices.

Phase 1: Understanding current experiences

Scoping review

Our scoping review identified three factors that influence DHH+ people's access to and participation in communication: (1) emergency warnings, alerts and announcements, (2) the emergency sector response, and (3) emergency preparedness.

There are opportunities to leverage capabilities and facilitators to address common barriers and support increased accessibility and inclusion for DHH+ people before, during and after emergencies (see figure).

There are roles for DHH+ community organisations and the hearing care sector to link DHH+ individuals with information, education and training provided by the emergency sector. For many DHH+ people who do not have connections with support organisations or other DHH+ people, the hearing care sector may be the only linkage point between their deafness or hearing difficulties, their hearing devices, and their personal emergency awareness and preparedness.

Cross-sectional survey

Our survey of 124 DHH+ Australians found a high level of reliance on hearing devices among many DHH+ people who use them. Without their hearing devices, many DHH+ people may be limited in the information they can access; who they can communicate with; and in making verbal emergency phone calls, leading to barriers in communicating with emergency response personnel or other unfamiliar people.

When a DHH+ hearing device user only has access to rechargeable batteries, they are likely to experience greater impacts from power outages and consequent impacts on communication and access to information.

When smartphones are lost, damaged or cannot be charged during an emergency, individuals may not be able to optimise the settings of their hearing device, including for connectivity (e.g. to access public announcements or to connect to other devices through Bluetooth).

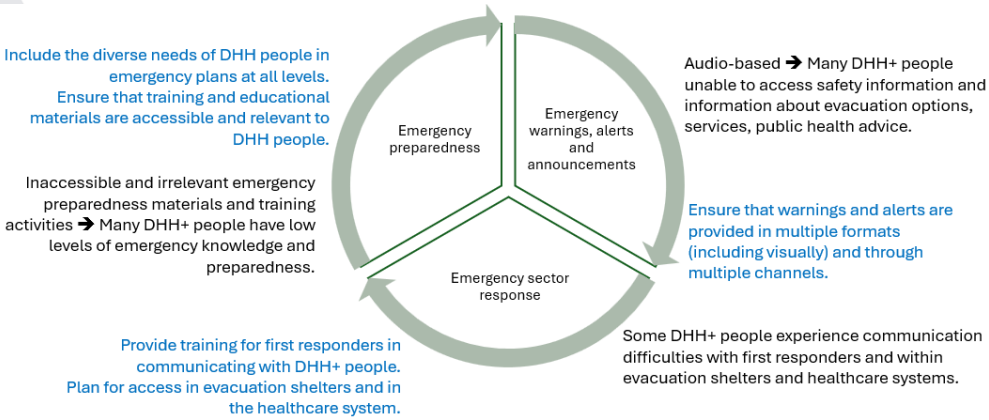

Figure 1: Scoping study results: Barriers experienced & recommendations to facilitate access to communication and information

Phase 2 (2025)

This phase will concentrate on critically evaluating current preparedness tools (including those for other conditions). It will also involve qualitative research and collaborative design efforts with DHH+ individuals, hearing care professionals, and manufacturers to create a new preparedness tool tailored for hearing device users.

Further information

For additional information scan the QR code or contact:

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