

# Ready for anything

Putting people  
at the heart  
of emergency  
response



The power  
of kindness



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# Executive summary

**No one knows when an emergency will strike. The effects can be devastating, far reaching and life changing. While we can never fully mitigate all the negative impacts of a major incident, we can work together to ensure our communities, families and friends are more resilient to withstand an emergency, then have the support they need during an emergency, and finally are enabled to recover well.**

Understanding the needs of people and communities is critical to creating a more effective, human-centred approach to emergency response. Our report explores what people need and want before, during and after an emergency.

While we found that needs can be highly individualised and influenced by a number of factors, our wide-ranging consultation identified four themes of need that are important:

## **Immediate practical needs**

Immediate needs when crisis hits include: food, shelter and medication, plus the need for privacy and to feel safe.

## **Mental health and psychosocial support**

Practical and emotional support is a hugely significant factor in the early stages of recovery. These psychological needs should be treated as equal to a person's physical health. This includes an empathetic need to be given time to reflect and to tell their story, to make sense of what happened and to feel in control of what happens next.

## **Information and communication**

This includes the need for leadership and organisation; for accurate, accessible and timely information; and the ability to contact and communicate with family and friends.

## **Advice, support and advocacy**

Most people affected by an emergency will need some help with navigating systems, such as accessing legal aid or dealing with insurance claims – it is important that this help is both co-ordinated and consistent. Critically, support must empower those affected to take control of their own recovery. It must also provide a platform or voice for victims' and affected communities' needs.

We hope these findings deliver a better understanding of how to empower and equip people before, during and after a crisis – ensuring that the road to recovery is clearer and their resilience for the future more secure – and that people feel at the heart of any coordinated approach to a major incident response.

Supporting communities affected by an emergency is at the heart of our work as the British Red Cross, and what unites us all across the international Red Cross Red Crescent Movement around the globe. Yet we are unable to achieve this alone. We are committed to convening and collaborating with all partners from across sectors involved in responding to emergencies, as well as supporting community engagement, to share insights and develop policy and practice recommendations based on the findings set out in this report. And to drive the agenda forwards with those who have the power to make a difference.

# Introduction

**After a house fire, the fire service puts out the flames. The paramedics treat any casualties. The police cordon off the building. But what happens to the family left on their front lawn? The British Red Cross responds to an emergency in the UK every four hours, from domestic fires and power outages to major incidents like terror attacks and floods.**

People generally only begin to consider what they would need in an emergency when it lands on their doorstep.<sup>1</sup> The summer of 2017 saw the nation respond to a series of consecutive national emergencies of a type unparalleled in peacetime. The UK continues to face multiple risks – the impact of climate change and flooding, terror attacks in urban areas, health pandemics, civil unrest – and we must be prepared.

We have embarked on a year of listening, learning and engaging, to understand better what people need and want following an emergency event. We surveyed 5000 people about the support they would expect to receive in an emergency. We gathered perspectives from people with lived experience of emergencies, as well as those with direct experience of a major incident – the frontline of emergency response – including our own staff and volunteers, alongside the charity sector and national government. We were informed by a number of reviews, including the Kerslake Arena Attack Review, and the reports of Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce.

This report expands on our initial learnings, outlined in *Harnessing the Power of Kindness: Towards a more effective response to emergencies*, to inform and develop a new way of operating. We want to enable individuals and communities to be better prepared to deal with the chaos that erupts in an emergency.

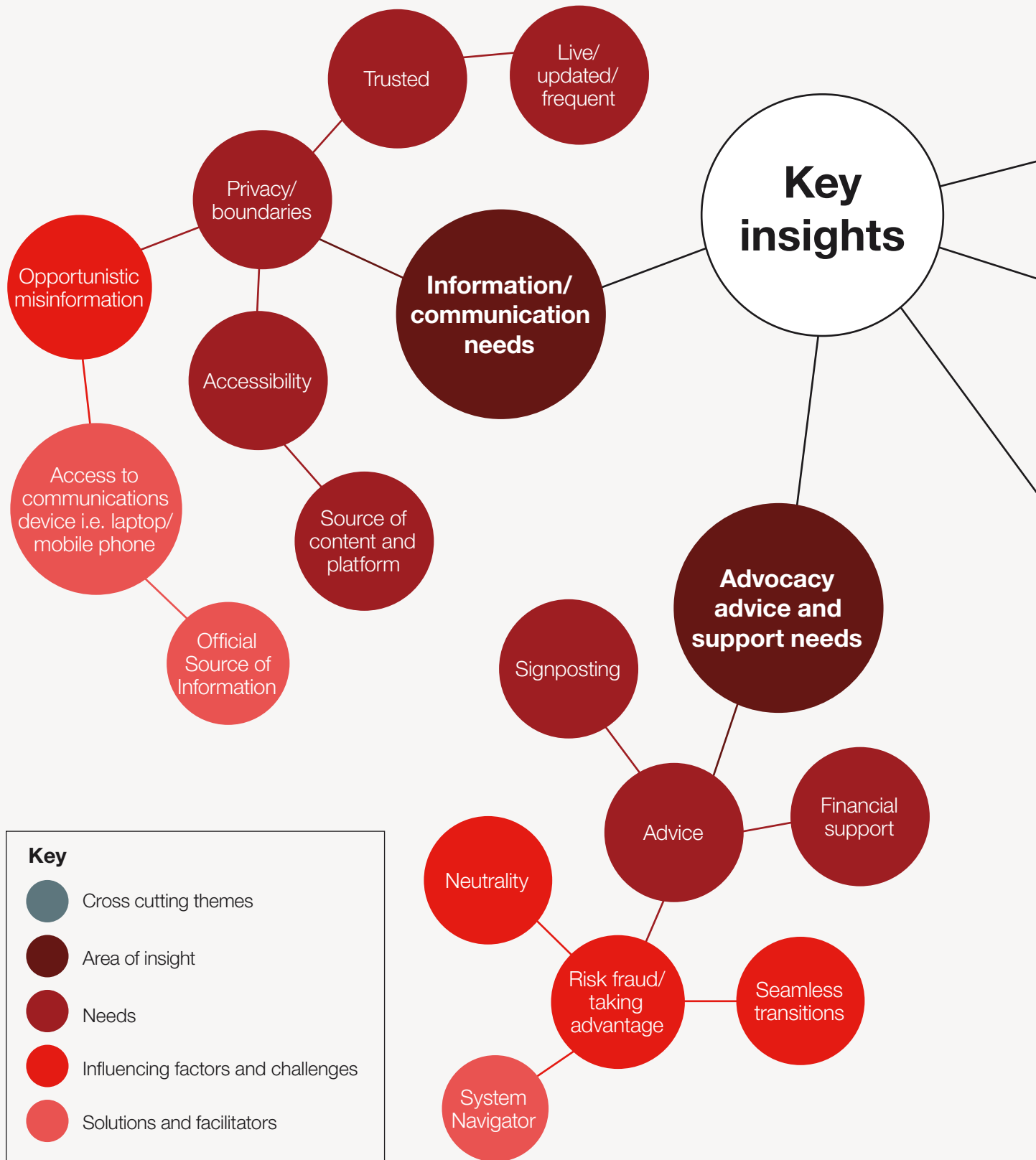
No emergency is the same and no person is the same. To meet the needs of a diverse population, all affected people must be at the heart of any emergency response, so they feel empowered and ultimately experience a more effective recovery. This agency, in turn, will lead to more resilience in communities to withstand future incidents.

No one knows when an emergency will strike. The effects can be devastating, far reaching and life changing. While we can never fully mitigate all the negative impacts of a major incident, we can ensure our communities, families and friends are more resilient, better prepared and support each other when it happens. This will ultimately lead to a quicker and more sustainable recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> We found that 70 per cent of people said their household have never taken steps to prepare for an emergency.

# Key insights from our year of consultation



**Key**

- Cross cutting themes
- Area of insight
- Needs
- Influencing factors and challenges
- Solutions and facilitators



# What we did

## Engaging with people directly affected by emergencies

**We wanted to understand better what people need and want before, during and after an emergency. We aimed to explore what works well and where people's needs aren't being met now.**

- We surveyed the views of over 5,000 people across the UK.<sup>2</sup>
  - We worked with consultation specialists Community Research to engage people directly affected by emergencies, British Red Cross frontline emergency response teams<sup>3</sup>, and a broad range of voluntary and community sector organisations, consulting with over 75 individuals as part of the process.
  - We continue to work with many charities through an initiative convened by the Charity Commission of England and Wales, and are involved in similar initiatives in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
  - We met with elected representatives and civil servants, local government leaders and statutory responders.
  - We spoke to local people through our new community engagement and resilience projects. We engaged with mental health specialists and representatives and our psychosocial support team launched a new project to support emergency responders.
- We hosted a number of events, bringing together a diverse range of views and experiences.
  - We commissioned a review of literature on emergency response, to understand the broader context of person-centred needs.

The views of people we spoke with are feeding directly in to our ongoing work in crisis response. They are helping us to review and develop our resilience, response and recovery activities, as well as shaping our new cash assistance offer.

True to the British Red Cross's fundamental principles, our primary concern is to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, and we always act in a completely neutral and impartial way, without discrimination.

This report summarises what people told us.

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<sup>2</sup> A nationally representative online survey of 5,008 adults (18+) carried out by Opinium between November 2<sup>nd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Community Research *Learning from people impacted by emergencies: consultation report, Internal British Red Cross report, October 2018.*



# What we will do next

## **We are committed to:**

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**Taking forward the recommendations we set out in our report *Harnessing the Power of Kindness* and developing further policy and practice recommendations based on the findings set out in this report.**

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**Working in close collaboration with all others involved in UK emergency response, through formal national and local structures.**

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**Sharing insights from our work to understand people's emergency needs, externally and within and across the international Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.**

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**Continuing our programme of reform, moving towards operational excellence in all aspects of humanitarian crisis response.**

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**Supporting community engagement and resilience programmes and sharing learning from those.**

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# Identifying crisis needs

## Individual and community needs

It is striking is how individual people can have such different needs in an emergency. Understanding this fact can help us meet or prioritise these needs. An individual's needs can be influenced by their culture, religion or belief, gender and socioeconomic background. Needs might also be affected by a person's vulnerability, like pre-existing health conditions, disability or age, and their level of resilience, which can depend on their economic status, support network and prior experience of trauma.

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**“There was one man who’s terminally ill, and it was very hard to get him out of the house and get him somewhere where he could be comfortable. He’s dying so he needed somewhere safe and comfortable, and I think at that time there should have been doctors, somebody there to help with that, but at the same time nobody could get in or out, so it was very difficult.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Scotland*

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Individual needs can be unpredictable, and we shouldn't generalise based on a person's most obvious characteristics. It's important that our response is as individual as the people we're trying to help, and that it's delivered with kindness, empathy and emotional intelligence.

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**I think we need to be careful of defining vulnerabilities and I think it's about listening – the people will tell you. If you can listen and be empathetic, people will tell you what they need.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Northern Ireland*

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In an emergency, many people need secure, appropriate and private shelter, along with help navigating the system to receive financial assistance and housing. But people can also have a huge range of much more specific needs, whether that is food that meets their dietary requirements or batteries for their hearing aids.

Underpinning all of this is a need for timely mental health and psychosocial support, and we also found that it was important to champion the voices of affected individuals and communities.

We know that many people aren't prepared for a major incident, so it's more important than ever to understand what the immediate needs are so that responders can be more effective and people and communities are more able to support themselves.

Our consultation identified four kinds of support needs:

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- 1 Immediate practical needs.

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  - 2 Mental health and psychosocial support.

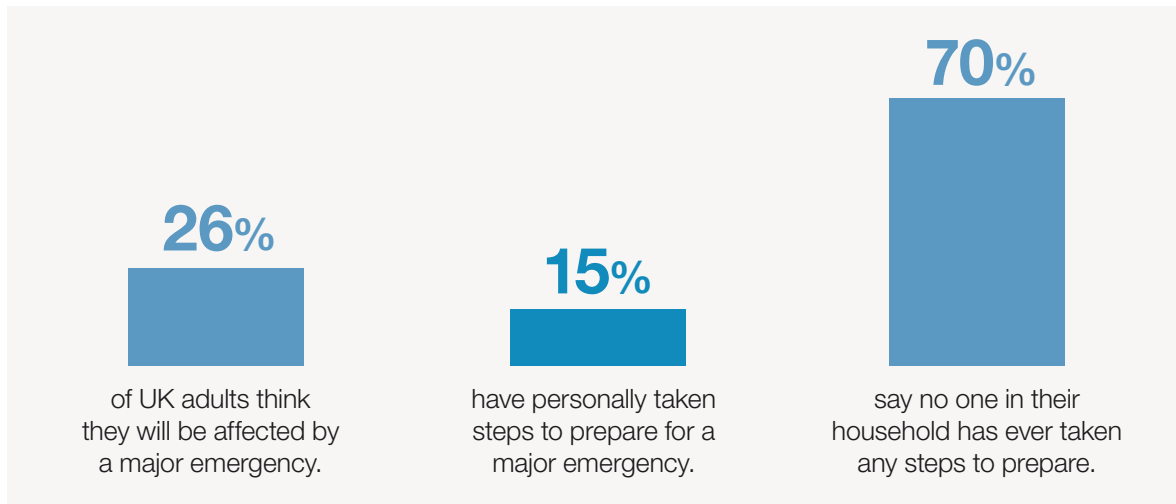
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  - 3 Information and communication.

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  - 4 Advocacy, advice and support.<sup>4</sup>
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<sup>4</sup> Our learning is categorised into four areas of need, based on a typology identified by Community Research during the consultation. It is important to point out that there is no hierarchy or recommendations for sequencing – people's needs are individual and will usually be a combination of emotional, practical and support needs etc. However, we separate them in this report for ease of analysis and to allow us to explore each in detail.



Supporting people and communities to be resilient is critical and something the British Red Cross and many others are working hard to do. Emergency responders need to know what people’s immediate needs are, to support them better, but equally we want to see people and communities to be able to prepare and support themselves better.

Communities play a critical role in emergency response planning. They represent the particular needs of individuals and groups in that local area, can share knowledge and expertise as well as providing valuable access to local networks.

This is particularly true of people and communities who have experienced the impact of an emergency before.

**British Red Cross has launched a new project funded by the Connected Communities Innovation Fund with the aim of preparing local communities in Barking and Dagenham, Waltham Forest and Redbridge to help each other and support responders during emergencies.<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup> The Connected Communities Innovation Fund, a partnership between innovation foundation Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The fund supports the best innovations that mobilise people’s time and talents to encourage more people to volunteer alongside public services.

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**“I’m vice chairman of the local flood group, which I started ... if you haven’t been flooded it isn’t something that comes up on your radar. So I started [it] and since then we’ve done an enormous amount.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Lancashire*

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Ensuring that those responsible for emergency planning are engaged with local voluntary and community sector organisations is critical in areas where there are recurrent issues such as flooding. Local groups are likely to anticipate emergencies and have preparation tactics in ways others cannot and can be part of a wider coordinated response.

However, we know that more needs to be done to ensure that all local emergency response structures – the “local resilience forums” in England and Wales and their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland – more consistently involve the voluntary and community sector and put people’s needs at the heart of their plans.<sup>6</sup>

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**“We decanted upstairs, we emptied the fridge, took the kettle, we filled the bath with water for drinking. Having been through it previously, we were more or less well prepared just from a historical point of view. Well, self-preservation, just the basics. Food and drink, some form of communications and, in the event of a power cut, which happened, we lost all power, so we had some form of radio so that we could listen in to the local radio station.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria*

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**In 2018 we actively engaged a diverse range of local and community organisations within London and targeted areas across the UK, to explore how we can combine our strengths to benefit the communities we support when preparing for, responding to, and recovering from an emergency. Based on learnings from 2017’s emergency events, there is a recognition that a more joined up approach is critical, yet there is great variability in the connectedness of communities, and an understanding of the assets and capabilities of local communities to respond in. In 2019 we will continue to work with partners nationally to evolve a sustainable way of closing the gap.**

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<sup>6</sup> See our analysis and recommendation in *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*.

The type of incident and its location will also affect the kinds of needs people have.

49%

of people in urban areas said they would like emergency items, compared to

51%

in rural areas.

Whilst our polling found little variation between rural and urban areas in terms of the help people want in an emergency, there are some obvious practical differences. Compared with a very rural area, an urban area is likely to have more resources available, along with good access for the emergency services, shops for provisions and a less dispersed community. On the other hand, some rural communities can be more resilient because they are more used to being self-sufficient and self-reliant.

**Our report *Living in fear of the rain: The impact of recent flooding in Greater Belfast* explored the impact of flooding on people living in identified flooded communities across Greater Belfast. The report highlighted the social, physical, psychological and financial impact of flooding, vulnerability and resilience, specifically highlighting the need to look at community profiles and the impact of flooding on the most vulnerable.<sup>7</sup>**



<sup>7</sup> British Red Cross (2010) Living in Fear of the Rain, [www.climatenorthernireland.org.uk/cmsfiles/resources/files/Living-in-Fear-of-Rain.pdf](http://www.climatenorthernireland.org.uk/cmsfiles/resources/files/Living-in-Fear-of-Rain.pdf)

# Immediate practical needs

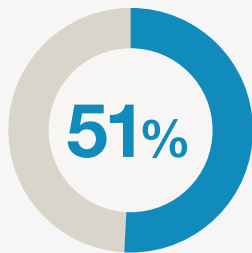
## Types of immediate practical support

Once the emergency services have removed people from danger and dealt with their primary physical and medical issues, the core work of many emergency responders will be to help with immediate practical needs.

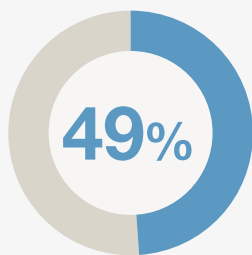
Unsurprisingly, our polling found that this kind of support was among the things people wanted most in the aftermath of an emergency.

People need food, shelter and medication, but it emerged from our consultation that even basic and immediate practical needs like these can be highly individualised – and can vary according to the circumstances of an event, personal levels of resilience and access to social support or networks. This reinforces the need for a tailored approach to emergency response that takes into account the needs of the whole person.

### The types of support people would want to receive after an emergency<sup>8</sup>:



of people said they would want emergency items, such as food, water, clothes and toiletries



of people said they would want emergency accommodation

**“I realised the extent of what was happening, that my daughter was going to be wearing not her own clothes, clothes that didn’t fit her, nappies that didn’t fit her, and that’s when I think it hit home with me that our lives had been turned upside down. It was silly things, I remember the first day I got a pink blanket to give her ... that was a big thing for me.”**

– person with lived experience of a flood, Scotland

People with lived experience of emergencies stressed the need for physical and practical help, from the onset of an emergency warning, through the event itself and into the aftermath.

**“You need bodies on the ground to lug stuff and clean stuff and try and salvage what we could and say this is salvageable but that isn’t.”**

– person with lived experience of a flood, Kent

<sup>8</sup> A similar proportion of people with lived experience of an emergency said they would like to receive these types of immediate practical support as people who had not experienced an emergency.

## Shelter

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**“The most pressing and urgent thing was having a place to sleep and a place to stay... some of my friends who I considered quite close didn’t really offer, or they said it but in a way that they didn’t really mean it.”**

*– person with experience of a building collapse, London*

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**“Where am I going to stop tonight? I would like a cup of tea but there’s no facilities. You get right down to the real basics.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria*

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Shelter was an important concept in terms of both physical and emotional security. People who had lived through emergencies often referred to the notion of a need to have “place of safety” or “safe place”, as did Red Cross staff and volunteers.

Our polling found that about half of UK adults (49 per cent) would want to receive emergency accommodation, and of those, 56 per cent would want the government or local authority to provide it.

However, our frontline teams have told us that there can be challenges in finding suitable accommodation when people cannot return to their homes.

**“My colleague was not finding the housing very helpful and was getting passed around and no solution reached. Eventually, after three hours, we decided to drive the lady to the housing office so they would deal with her directly. They agreed to send a surveyor to inspect the property but would not provide emergency accommodation, despite our involvement. Eventually the grandson’s friend agreed to put them up.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Manchester, relating to a house fire*

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It’s also important that the accommodation is secure, and allows for comfort and privacy. Inevitably, this can be challenging as emergency accommodation, such as a rest centre, can often be in a public space. A failure to meet this need can even lead some people to put themselves in danger by not leaving their homes.

**“It’s not very private, is it, sleeping in a gym? And they’re old people. They needed privacy, and also they knew that they wouldn’t be very comfortable, and they’d have to share toilets, so that’s why they didn’t go. They just stayed in their home until the water receded, but in the morning it was still knee deep.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria*

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**“We slept at the barracks. I wanted somewhere safe for my daughter, somewhere that was clean and safe, that had a door that locked.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Scotland*

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## Medical

Medical needs are a high priority, especially when people have to leave their homes quickly. For some, that might mean leaving behind important medical supplies or equipment such as wheelchairs, while others may have medications that need to be kept in controlled conditions.

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**“You are going to have people that need three months of medication, they need it again because they’ve lost it. It’s being aware of that, and it’s working alongside that I think.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, West Yorkshire*

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**“Certain drugs have to be put in a fridge, and with no power their drugs were brought to them every day by people that were local that had got power.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Kent*

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## Food

Our staff and volunteers mentioned how important it was that food provided for people in emergency situations still met medical and religious dietary requirements. They also suggested ensuring food was accessible and welcoming made a huge difference, such as organising provisions.

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**“If I take Grenfell as an example, there was a pile of food on the table and I noticed that no-one touched it. And we said, “why don’t we quickly arrange the food?” And that took 10-15 minutes, and as soon as we did that, people started eating.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, London*

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## Employment

Returning to employment was identified as a key need, both as a way to return to normality and to obtain money. For some, getting back to work as soon as possible can be essential to keeping their job.

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**“(the) accommodation, it was slum accommodation, totally unsafe, filled with over 100 workers, Bulgarians, Romanians ... The Fire Service shut the location down so they couldn’t stay in there overnight but the importance for them was to get to work the next day – not food, not shelter but work. So that meant that I had to get up at five o’clock in the morning to drive a minibus to take them down the field to get some leeks, but again you wouldn’t have thought that.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, North Wales*

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Transport needs are another consideration, since in flooded areas there may be periods where people are cut off.

## Meeting immediate practical needs

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Meeting people's immediate practical needs is a key part of a human-centred approach to emergency response and again, this is where local communities as well as formal responders will play a critical role.

### Cash assistance

Cash assistance should be part of the response to major crises in the UK, just as it is in international humanitarian work. Staff, volunteers and people with lived experience of emergencies felt that financial assistance and advice was key to helping them buy essentials. Transferring money rather than goods can be more efficient, and can also make support more personalised and culturally specific by giving people choice. This sense of choice also helps empower individuals and communities to make decisions about their own recovery, while preserving their dignity.

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**“Two weeks when you have nothing is a long time to wait, so I think perhaps if they had some interim measure of emergency response kind of cash flow to deal with these things then that could be an initial support.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Scotland*

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**“They were struggling to just buy anything because everything was in the house and they've got so little in their bank accounts, or don't have a bank account, that actually they can't even afford basic stuff. So we call that short-term provision, but then there's a gap afterwards because you're trying to access support financially. If they can't get benefits or it's going to take weeks to get benefits then what happens until then?”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Manchester*

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Our polling strongly supports the idea of immediate cash assistance as part of a package of support in the aftermath of an emergency. Nearly half of the people we polled said that if they had to evacuate their home due to a flood they would prefer cash to in-kind support, to spend on emergency items or accommodation of their choosing.

### Given a choice between cash or emergency items\*



**52%** of people would prefer to receive items such as clothes and bedding and



**48%** would prefer cash to purchase these things themselves

### Given a choice between cash or emergency accommodation\*



**55%** would prefer emergency accommodation to be provided for them, while



**45%** would prefer cash to spend on accommodation of their choosing

\*after evacuating their home due to flood

The British Red Cross is developing its capability to deliver scalable and timely cash assistance within hours of an emergency. However, in practice there are some challenges around this, such as identifying the individuals affected by the emergency. It's critical that crisis needs are assessed in real time and that there are good information flows to funders in the early stages of response.

While people affected by emergencies do need and want items such as toiletries and clothes, not all goods donated by the public are suitable. We've recommended<sup>9</sup> that there should be better guidance to support people to share their deep desire to give at times of crisis in the most effective ways.

<sup>9</sup> *Harnessing the Power of Kindness for Communities in Crisis (2018)*.

# Psychosocial and mental health

**Social and psychological support is a hugely significant factor in the early stages of recovery. People's emotional and psychological needs should be treated as equal to a person's physical health.**

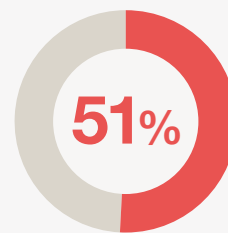
There is still a tendency to focus on physical support, and sometimes people's psychological and emotional needs are overlooked or not prioritised. Yet the psychological impact of a major incident is likely to affect not just those who have been physically injured but a much larger number of people too. This can include witnesses, local businesses and those who were not there, but have a link to the event such as friends or family members.

Timely emotional and mental health support is a key part of a truly human-centred response, and there is still much to do in ensuring that mental and physical health needs are addressed in tandem.

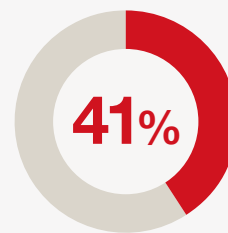
## **Support from those closest to you, as well as professionals**

Our polling demonstrates that the public recognises there's a need for emotional support after an emergency, such as talking to someone about their needs, feelings, priorities and concerns. A personal or local connection is important to people when considering who they would want to comfort them.

**When asked who they would like to comfort them after an emergency<sup>10</sup>:**



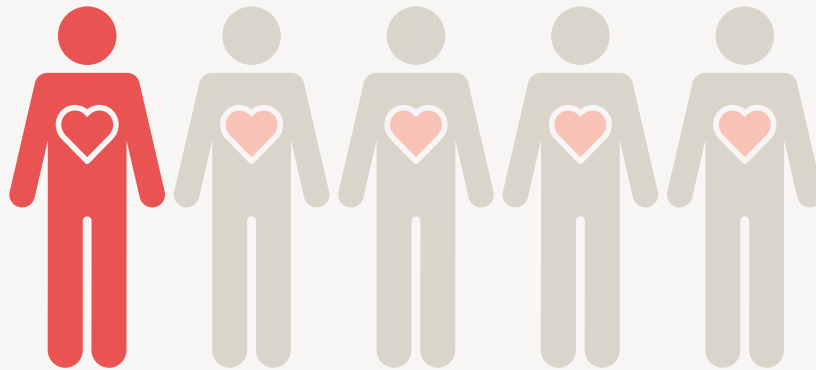
said family



said friends and/or neighbours

<sup>10</sup> Among people who said they would like to receive emotional support following an emergency.

**About a fifth of respondents (19 per cent) said they would want some emotional support after an emergency, and most of these would want this support within hours or days.**



People who had experienced an emergency were more likely to say they would like emotional support (23 per cent) than those who hadn't (17 per cent).

People were more likely to say they would want emotional support after a house fire or having to evacuate after a bomb threat or terror attack. They were least likely to want this support during or after a water outage lasting 48 or more hours.<sup>11</sup>

In our experience, friends and families are often the best people to provide comfort following an incident. We know how critical it is to unite people with their families and connect them into their communities, so they can receive support from the people who are going to be there in the days, weeks and months to come.

<sup>11</sup> Out of four scenarios people were asked to consider: a house fire, a flood that required evacuation, a bomb or terror threat attack that required evacuation or a water outage lasting 48+ hours.

## Opportunity to reflect

Many of those we spoke to who had experienced emergencies described feeling bewildered and shocked in the immediate aftermath of an incident, but not having much time to process what was happening to them.

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**“One of the firemen making a comment about how calm I was, I think that was partially shock ... The immediate was bewilderment ... very, very stressful. I lost a lot of weight. I don’t think you always realise you’re worried to that extent.”**

*– person with lived experience of a fire, Hertfordshire*

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The British Red Cross provides immediate practical and psychosocial support to people following an emergency, and we keep in mind that the first few weeks following an emergency are a critical period of “watchful waiting”. This is the time when people affected by an emergency begin to process what has happened, often with help from their personal networks. Comfort and support during this period can help to normalise the post-trauma feeling and reduce the stigma often associated with discussing feelings of upset.

People need human contact, empathy and understanding, both immediately and in the weeks following an incident. Some might also need trauma-informed clinical practice in the later recovery phases.

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**“Somebody to talk to about what has happened to you, I think it’s helpful ... And that was good, I sat there and cried. They have tea and biscuits and they listen to you and that was good.”**

*– person with experience of a fire, Lancashire*

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**“[What do people need?] I think just basics, another human being who genuinely cares in this time.**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Northern Ireland*

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Many need time to reflect, and after that they often need time to tell their story – as an emotional outlet and to try to make sense of what happened. Some people we spoke to found witnessing the incident through to the end helped them process and come to terms with their experience, while others wanted to speak to someone who had been in a similar situation and could give them hope that things would improve over time. Crucially, different people affected by emergencies needed to process events in very different ways

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**“Maybe to let them be angry. Yes, to allow people to vent or react however they may react, it’s allowing them to do that.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, London*

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**“I was trying to process it myself ... some peace, some quiet. I think that’s why I just went off walking quite a bit because I just needed some space, it was all very intensive. There were people, it was all very intense, a lot of noise.”**

*– person with lived experience of a fire, Leicestershire*

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Our research found that the local community is often important in comforting people.

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**“Talking with people who have been through the same thing, or working through the same thing, is beneficial. What has been good that has come out of that is Healthy Minds – a local Halifax charity – are actually doing a lot of workshops and programmes.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, West Yorkshire*

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However, we know from our own UK-based and international work that there is a large unmet need, both for psychosocial support in the early stages of recovery and for clinical mental health support in the medium to long-term.

## Meeting different needs

Our work throughout 2018 showed that providing a human-centred response to emergencies means we need to understand the needs of different groups of people – including young people, families and those with specific cultural requirements.

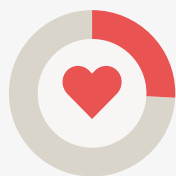
It might be that these findings only highlight who is willing to admit they would want emotional support, not who would necessarily need it. The figures suggest that there is perhaps a stigma among men and older people about admitting they need to be comforted after an emergency incident.

Our research repeatedly showed that we have to consider the needs of different groups and individuals if we are going to meet these needs successfully. We might be dealing with children whose classmates have been victims in an incident, people seeking asylum who are mistrustful of statutory authorities, or people who have been geographically dispersed after a crisis, but would benefit from staying in touch with one another. In each case, the response will need to be tailored to the particular needs identified.

Many people suggested that the solution lay in specialist help from skilled workers trained in trauma work, who could respond to the needs of people from different cultures and communities.

People told us there should be holistic support from different services, and that there needs to be a coordinated response to those who need help. One participant talked about the concept of a mental health “commander” to coordinate this kind of support from the onset of an emergency event. A further example mentioned was the need for a “joined-up” relationship between hospital chaplains offering pastoral support in hospitals and the help that is subsequently offered outside the hospital by voluntary and community organisations. It was pointed out that currently there is no continuity of support in that context.

### We found that young people were more likely to say they wanted emotional support than older people

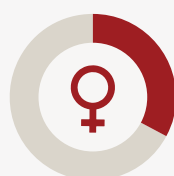


**26%**  
of those aged 18-24 wanted emotional support but only

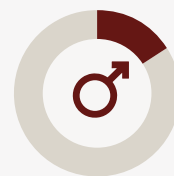


**14%**  
among of those aged 65 wanted emotional support.

### Women were more likely than men to say they wanted emotional support



**33%**  
of women would like support compared to only



**16%**  
of men, both following a house fire.



## Identifying mental and psychosocial needs

In order to provide appropriate, individualised support, early identification and triage of mental health problems needs to be an important part of a disaster response effort. This includes signposting to specialist mental health services or other forms of psychosocial support.

The emergency responders and charity sector workers we spoke to also thought early identification of mental health and psychosocial needs was important to prevent people from “falling through the net”. This can be critical not only to provide immediate support, but also to enable mental health services to contact people at a later date and offer support at the time they might need it, even if it’s long after the incident.

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**“One of the things was, ironically in terms of panic attacks, anxiety and psychological damage, my daughter who wasn’t there – it impacted her for much longer than actually being there.”**

*– person with lived experience of a fire, Hertfordshire*

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Having people with the right skills on the ground to triage, support and signpost is critical. A fundamental need for responders is to feel that they are equipped to deal with any situation that they may encounter, and this means receiving appropriate training. Response providers recounted the stress and guilt associated with not being able to support people effectively, if they were unsure what to do or say.

## Responders need support too

In our discussions with central and local government, voluntary and community sector representatives and health professionals, it is clear that a human-centred approach must take into account the mental and psychosocial needs of responders as well as those directly affected. This includes the blue light responders – police, fire, ambulance – people first on the scene and voluntary sector personnel.

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**“We as humans have a built-in need after a stressful situation to go and talk about it. It’s part of our survival mechanism.”**

*– Staff/volunteer, South Wales*

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## Support in the days, weeks and months after an emergency

After the major incidents of 2017 in London and Manchester, it was clear that many of those affected still needed practical and emotional support. For some, the recognition of the trauma they had experienced was only just becoming apparent and they were accessing mental health support for the first time. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, the Support for Grenfell Community Hub was created for various agencies and community groups to work together to offer a range of support, counselling and advice for the community affected.

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**“I think for me actually, it’s now it’s the continued stress. Because I think in the immediate aftermath you’ve got so much adrenaline running through you, and so much to sort out. It’s just the continuous everyday stress of like not having a place that’s your own.”**

*– person with lived experience of a fire, London*

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**In 2018, the British Red Cross was awarded funding from the Treasury to support the “Resilient Responders” programme, providing resilience and improved wellbeing for emergency services personnel. Peer advocacy is a key approach of the project to ensure sustainability and will identify peer advocates from within the services, providing them with skills and knowledge training to ensure sustainability beyond the end of the grant. The project will offer almost 7,000 sessions, with each recipient organisation provided with 10 support sessions weekly in a combination of groups and 1 to 1 sessions. This programme will be evaluated, and will inform future work.**

## **A human-centred response needs to follow the person**

Some people affected by a major incident might access support immediately, but may struggle afterwards to get ongoing access to the mental health services they need. Access to services is a complex issue, but these problems can be compounded for those who do not live in the area where the incident took place.

The issue of geographic dispersal of survivors following an emergency is one that characterised the terror attacks which took place in London and Manchester in 2017 – where many of the people affected came from somewhere other than the site of the emergency.

This issue is especially likely for incidents in urban areas or cities, or for areas with high numbers of tourists.

For the survivors of the Manchester Arena terror attack, ongoing support for those returning home has been offered via the Manchester Resilience Hub, which provides local outreach outside of Manchester. However, that has been possible largely because it is paid for in part by donations to the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund.

People from both voluntary and government organisations suggested to us formal and informal networks, facilitated by digital collaboration communication channels, can help survivors connect and engage with others with shared experiences, and possibly staff and volunteers too. This need can be dependent on the type of incident, such as a terrorist incident where a community of circumstance rather than geographical location is created. The demographic affected may also influence the form of which this network will take.



# Information and communication

Support people most effectively, information needs to be shared appropriately between statutory responders and the local community and voluntary sector. Sharing information can also help lessen the psychological impact of an emergency by providing reassurance, clarity and managing expectations<sup>12</sup>. This is about understanding what local and national organisations can offer in terms of support during and after an emergency, being able to contact them quickly and easily, and sharing information in real time as the incident is happening.

## Type of Information

53%

would want information on how the situation is progressing following an emergency.

**People also want advice on how to keep themselves safe:**

39%

in a flooding scenario.

41%

in a bomb/terror attack scenario.

42%

of UK adults would want support finding family members they had become separated from following a bomb threat or terror attack.

The need for information is important for those close to them. The wider literature on emergency response shows that relatives and friends of those involved in mass casualty incidents like terror attacks, the Grenfell Tower fire and the Croydon tram crash have, understandably, an overwhelming need for information about the whereabouts and safety of their loved ones.

The need for information during and after an emergency event was emphatically echoed by people we consulted with lived experience of emergencies, staff and volunteers.

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**“I felt, what do we do? How do we cope with it? What happens? What do we have to do? We needed guidance. Information about what to do, who to contact. The process. What you need to do in a situation like that? Who do you need to tell? Is it electricity people, the council? Because you don't have a clue at that point ... it's information and guidance.”**

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*– person with lived experience of a fire, Hertfordshire*

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<sup>12</sup> This is included in the pyramid of responses published by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007 [www.who.int/mental\\_health/emergencies/guidelines\\_iasc\\_mental\\_health\\_psychosocial\\_june\\_2007.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf)

## Trusted source of information and coordination

There is a clear need for information to come from a trusted authority – for example local government, other official channels or the British Red Cross. As an example, we heard that local authorities could do more to ensure their own websites and social media are more responsive and flexible in catering to information needs. There were also suggestions that digital information boards could be used to provide highly visible and up-to-date information to local people and communities.

Consistency of information is important too, and we can promote this by making sure that all responders from top to bottom are briefed with developments.

## Media engagement

People involved in emergency situations have had mixed experiences with the media. Our consultation highlighted that the media can play a prominent role in an emergency, as both a communicator and a key actor. It can be a way for individuals to receive information and to project their own voices and experience, but engagement with the media can also create additional needs. For example, it can be invasive in the case of terrorism where there may be heightened public and legal scrutiny.

## Social Media

People told us how helpful social media can be for information, to communicate with friends and family, and to receive offers of help and support in the aftermath of an emergency. This is an area where business can play a key role in connecting people.

However, social media carries a risk of inaccurate news and what has sometimes been described as “opportunistic misinformation” – the deliberate giving of false or misleading information. Despite this, people often still turn to social media because it’s a more immediate and responsive source of information than the more trustworthy official channels.

There is an assumption that technology and social media are well-integrated as a form of communication in emergency response. For example, our survey found a quarter of people believe that emergency responders such as firefighters and the police monitor social media websites for people needing help. About the same proportion believe that people can receive help from emergency responders by posting on social media. This highlights how better use of social media could potentially help get key information to people during and after an emergency.

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**“When supplies started coming in, that’s when people started contacting my partner through Facebook, people we didn’t know, offering clothes, milk, supplies for our daughter.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Scotland*

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**“Our daughter who was at uni ... so we didn’t tell her straight away ... She got told via Facebook that the dogs had been killed. Yes, awful, she was very, very worried, thinking there had been injuries when there hadn’t. There was another rumour going around that our son had been injured.”**

*– person with lived experience of a fire, Hertfordshire*

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## Privacy

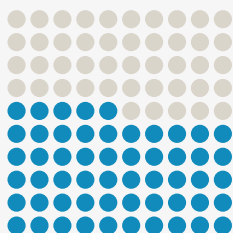
The handling of personal information is an additional concern, and people need to be reassured that their personal data will be used within the GDPR guidelines. Our frontline teams also told us that the handling of personal data is a concern for people without official status or immigration documents. However, it is also important for emergency responders to be able to share data in order to work effectively and meet people's needs, so there are a number of issues to take into account in this area.

## Accessibility

Our staff and volunteers were also concerned about accessibility of information, including issues around language and technological literacy and access. For example, they pointed out that using technology and social media to meet communication needs might not be appropriate for some older people, or individuals with particular support needs.

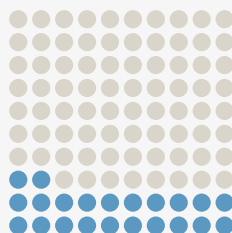
For many, it's simple things that can make all the difference. Something as basic as providing a mobile phone charger can give people the means to connect with others, reassure loved ones and seek support.

### Our polling found:



**55%**

the majority of younger people (aged 18-24) have an emergency alert app on their phone.



**22%**

the minority of those aged 65 and over have an emergency alert app on their phone.

Most UK adults don't have an emergency app.

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**“You need a phone ... you’d want to try and contact your own family.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria*

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**“The other thing, with a fire they’ve lost everything, they’ve lost their mobile phones, the lot, and they want to talk to their daughter or someone who’s missing. So what I’ve done is I’ve given them my phone to dial up whoever it is, to contact them.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, South Wales*

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# Advocacy, advice and support

**Meeting advocacy, advice and support needs is all about helping people rebuild their lives. This is important to set the foundation for recovery in the days, weeks and even years ahead.**

To be most effective, support needs to be neutral and non-judgemental, while still being person-centred and the amount of support that someone needs to work out their next steps is very individual. This might also include giving the person an opportunity to “tell their story”, helping them make sense of what has happened, letting them articulate their needs and concerns, and recognising those needs.

How people receive advocacy, advice and support is critical. People need and expect clear leadership, coordination and a sense of order. Fundamentally, staff, volunteers and those with lived experience of emergencies felt that people need to be able to trust the organisations, volunteers and professionals that they are speaking to.

## Signposting, advice and help

**29%** said they would want signposting to relevant advice, services and other support.

Most people who want this type of support want to receive it within minutes or hours

**64%** would prefer it to come from the government/local authority.

**39%** would prefer it to come from the emergency services.

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**“It’s somebody saying ‘okay, you need accommodation, there’s this available, it’s going to cost this, you can move into this so and so, do you need any help with transport?’ That kind of stuff.”**

– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria

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The support that people might need might be with the small steps, like generating a list of people to contact and helping to prioritise. People might also need help contacting employers, dealing with the council and filling in forms. Specifically, many of our interviewees mentioned needing advice on making insurance claims and how to access other financial support and legal advice.

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**“The most important one, to be brutally honest, is your insurance policy. Because without that, you’ve had it ... you need someone totally unbiased, unconnected with any insurance company but somebody who knows their way round the insurance company, to say ‘this is what’s going to happen to you, this is what will happen regarding the insurers, this will be their approach and these will be the options they will offer you’”**

– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria

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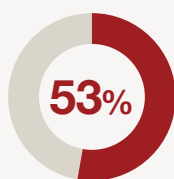
## Longer-term financial assistance

There is also a clear need for access to longer-term financial assistance – to support people in the weeks and months after an emergency. Our polling indicated the public expect long term financial support to be provided by a range of sources, with insurance companies and the Government and local authority ranked most highly. The expectation of long-term financial support varies by age, 34% of those aged 18-24 would want long term financial assistance following an emergency, compared to 29% of those 65+. The support provided after an emergency can range from reimbursement from insurance companies, to funds received from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Any form of long term financial support provided should be provided in a transparent, coordinated, and equitable manner, with personal circumstances, such as immigration or employment status not being a barrier to access.

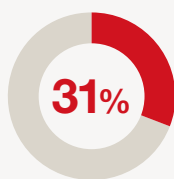
## Support for organisations involved in response

We saw how many local charities and businesses who were not usually involved in emergency response stepped in to support people throughout 2017.

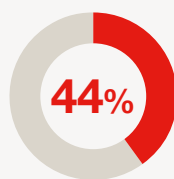
Unfortunately for some of them, it had the effect of putting them at risk of going under themselves, because the cost of response to them in terms of money and capacity was so great. Many across the voluntary and community sector have been working together to consider how organisations themselves – especially small, local ones – can be better supported to recover following an emergency too.



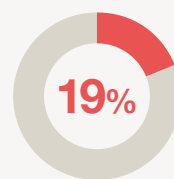
of people prefer longer-term financial assistance from an insurance company.



of people said they want financial support for their longer-term needs.



of people would want this support following a house fire within days.



of people would want this support following a house fire within hours.

**People who want longer-term financial support from each type of organisation:**

**31%**  
the Government/  
Local Authority.

**53%**  
their Insurance  
Company.

## Coordination and navigating the complicated system

When we spoke to those who had been involved in emergency situations about what advice people might need, one issue that came up was how complicated the system of support can be.

People need a coordinated and structured approach, where they can feel certain about the roles, responsibilities and capacity of different organisations. People with lived experience of emergencies suggested that a single point of contact or a clear navigator role could help meet this need.

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**“I think the people need a navigator, I’m really thinking that could be Red Cross or it could be anybody ... But you just go back to the person in crisis, their lives have been thrown upside down, they don’t know where to start. The journey is going to be long in most cases and they need a point of contact or someone who will say ‘I’ll maybe make that phone call for you, I’ll find out’.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Northern Ireland*

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A strong theme in our research was the need to get advocacy support and advice from a neutral, trustworthy and person-centred professional, volunteer or organisation.

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**“I think they do look to us to know how to manage the situation. We need to be seen to be giving that, we know what we’re doing and we’re giving that reassurance.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, Northern Ireland*

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**“It’s amazing how many cowboys just appear on the scene ... I think what they need is advice on how to tell if your electrician is certified. How to tell your plumber knows what they are doing.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, West Yorkshire*

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People need to know exactly who they are speaking to, and while some might look to the government for advice, others will actively avoid speaking to the statutory authorities.

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**“I think one of the reasons that people trust the Red Cross is we’re seen as people who are there purely to help with the situation as it is now. Like if you think about Grenfell, all of the problems that arose for the people who were living there when it came to registers and things like that. The initial response is they don’t want to be fearing that people might be taking information for other reasons, and that means identity is quite important.”**

*– British Red Cross staff/volunteer, London*

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## Leadership and partnership at local, regional and national levels

Clear leadership is essential for a coordinated, person-centred and trusted approach. Staff, volunteers and some of those with lived experience of emergencies stressed that people also need a sense that someone is in charge. They said that if this is not apparent, it can add to feelings of insecurity.

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**“Somebody needs to take the lead.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Cumbria*

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**“There was no action plan in place. We got to the hall, we didn’t know who we were speaking to, who we were dealing with was just the general public, there was nobody in place. There was nobody visible with a jacket on, you just didn’t know who you were going to speak to.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Scotland*

The need for order in the chaos was something that many people with lived experience of emergencies called for, as did staff and volunteers. People feel safer when they have a sense that steps are being taken to bring things under control – particularly when they are feeling the bewilderment, shock and disorientation that emergency situations can evoke.

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**“We were flooded, and we hadn’t got any structure and organisation.”**

*– person with lived experience of a flood, Lancashire*

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The organisational representatives we spoke to stressed the need for a coordinated and structured approach, with certainty over different organisations’ roles, responsibilities and capacity. The need for coordination is further emphasised by our polling, which demonstrated that the public expect a range of support to be provided by a range of agencies.



# Conclusions

**When an emergency hits a community, it can tear at its very fabric. However, if people are prepared, they can withstand the impact of shocks and recover in time. While the community may take time to heal, people should feel empowered, supported and confident in their own and their institutions ability to respond.**

While the majority of people in the UK may not currently feel prepared in an emergency, they were clear about what they wanted. It is now up to all those in crisis response to deliver on this and ensure that people do feel equipped to deal with emergencies and feel at the heart of any coordinated approach to a major incident response.

Nothing can ever replace the enduring sense of loss following an emergency – whether the impact is material, or the tragic death of a loved one. A better understanding of how to empower and equip people before, during and after a crisis, can however go a long way to ensuring that the road to recovery is clearer and their resilience for the future more secure.

# Appendix

**We polled over 5000 people across the UK<sup>12</sup>, to understand better how people prepare for an emergency and the support they would want following a major incident. We gathered people's overall views and set out specific scenarios where they might need to evacuate their accommodation: house fire, flood, water outage and bomb threat or terror attack.**

- A quarter of UK adults (26 per cent) think they will be affected by a major emergency, but only 15 per cent have personally taken steps to prepare for a major emergency – the vast majority (70 per cent) say no one in their household has ever taken any steps to prepare.
- Almost two thirds of adults (65 per cent) do not have an emergency or alert app, such as a weather or news app or the British Red Cross emergency app, although a majority of younger people aged 18-24 (55 per cent) do have at least one of these types of app.
- Given the choice between being given emergency items such as clothes and bedding and emergency accommodation or cash to purchase their own immediately after a flood, nearly half of UK adults would prefer to receive cash to buy their own items (48 per cent) or pay for accommodation of their choosing (45 per cent).
- Nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of people would prefer to receive emergency cash support by direct deposit into their bank account while nearly half (47 per cent) would prefer a physical cash handouts.
- Across all UK scenarios, when asked who they would want to provide the types of practical support they would most want – such as accommodation, emergency items and information – the government/ local authority was the most commonly cited answer.
- There are significant roles too for friends, family, local and national VCS, with people who would like emotional support following an emergency saying they would most like their family to provide it (51 per cent), followed by their friends and/ or neighbours (41 per cent) or local community groups (20 per cent).
- A fast response is critical. Our polling found that, generally, people want medical support within minutes, practical support within hours and emotional support and financial support for longer term needs within days or sooner.

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<sup>12</sup> A nationally representative online survey of 5,008 adults (18+) carried out by Opinium between November 2nd and 12th, 2018.



# Thank you.

[redcross.org.uk](https://www.redcross.org.uk)

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