

# Older Australians feel vulnerable to emergency events

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A University of Adelaide researcher has for the first time revealed how prepared older South Australians feel when it comes to emergency events.

Dr Victoria Cornell says older people are often categorised as a 'vulnerable' group in emergency management; however, her research found the elderly actually have a wealth of knowledge and experience when it comes to emergency events, and they can be highly resilient.

The research findings were published in the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*.

Dr Cornell, a research associate in the University's Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning, says older people should not be labelled as vulnerable but instead as a group with specific needs.

"Disaster researchers classify older people as a vulnerable group; however, it's not advancing age alone that makes people vulnerable," Dr Cornell says.

"Vulnerabilities in disaster management are often associated with reduced physical mobility, poor eyesight or hearing, pre-existing health conditions, social isolation and low income. And while these are issues that may occur in older people, you don't necessarily have to be elderly to experience these vulnerabilities," she says.

Dr Cornell says that for the older people in the study, being prepared for an emergency isn't about a one-off checklist. It's a process of living and learning to create a feeling of mental preparedness and the ability to cope.

"Older people feel the events they have lived through make them mentally strong and resilient, and able to withstand and recover from an event. They don't label themselves as being prepared for an emergency in a practical sense; however, they also don't feel vulnerable," Dr Cornell says.

"Because emergency preparedness is a process, [elderly people](#) can have an advantage in some cases as they may have experienced a range of emergency events throughout their lives. They also have a wealth of knowledge and experiences, and a strong sense of community," she says.

According to Dr Cornell these findings will aid [emergency management](#) initiatives for older people.

"Elderly people are more concerned about health-related emergencies than they are about natural disasters such as bush fires. Therefore, emergency messaging for older people should be broad because being too specific about a particular hazard may result in a wasted opportunity to share important [emergency](#) preparedness information. Ensuring older people are secure, safe, and feel mentally strong, is more important." Dr Cornell says.

"By understanding what influences older people living in the community to prepare for emergencies, we can move away from making assumptions, and instead develop appropriate policies and processes based on research findings," she says.

**More information:** "What do older people's life experiences tell us

about emergency preparedness?"

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