

INFORMATION PAPER

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

*(Note: This material is taken from a brochure titled, **Ideas for building inclusive and resilient communities**, and compiled by the Australian Social Inclusion Board. A copy is included in your compendium.)*

Resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' after negative experiences and to cope in unknown situations. It refers to an individuals' capacity to withstand stress and adapt positively to change. Community resilience means the capacity of communities to respond positively to crises. It is the ability of a community to adapt to pressures and transform itself in a way which makes it more sustainable in the future. Rather than simply 'surviving' the stressor or change, a resilient community might respond in creative ways that fundamentally transform the basis of the community. Possible stressors include the broader political, economic, and physical environment, as well as communities' internal vulnerabilities.

Individuals and groups within communities will respond to challenges in different ways. For this reason, 'resilience' cannot be conceptualised as a discrete capability. Moreover, differences may mean that various groups are more or less resilient in particular situations. Vulnerable social groups, such as the elderly or unemployed, may have fewer resources to cope with a crisis. Poor communities are not only at greater risk in crises, due to lack of resources, but can be less successful at mobilising resources due to a lack of community capabilities.

Resilient communities are able to **integrate** their **resources** and **capability** to respond positively to crises and adapt to pressures. Resources that support resilience include: economic resources and development; social capital; infrastructure; information; and communication systems. Capabilities include: leadership; learning; innovation; and competence.

The integration of different resources and capabilities allows a community to respond to a changing environment, deal with crises and recover, innovate, and capitalise on economic and social opportunities. Resources and capacity can be integrated through reciprocal links, cooperative decision making and supportive relationships between individuals, families and organisations, including: government and non-government agencies; community organisations; and the business sector.

Resilient communities are equipped to help themselves and are also able to reach out and support one another in times of crisis - this has been seen in the recent Victorian bushfires.

The resources, capability and integration of a community are best strengthened continuously, not just in times of crisis or stress. Existing community and government activities, services and governance arrangements provide opportunities to work in ways that strengthen and support communities to be more resilient. Development – whether it is new development, redevelopment in established communities or rebuilding after natural disaster such as bushfire or flood – offers a unique opportunity to plan social and physical infrastructure to better support communities.

