

25 March 2025

GETTING THROUGH TOGETHER

Recommended framework for agencies for community wellbeing and disaster recovery

He waka eke noa

A waka we are all in together - we are all in this together - we rise together, fall together, work together, keep going together

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Introduction

Psychosocial support is a vital part of disaster response and recovery, particularly after large-scale events that impact entire communities. It provides emotional, practical and social support to help individuals cope with and adjust to life after a disaster. While [around three-quarters of New Zealand's population](#) is generally considered 'mentally well,' wellbeing can be affected by life events, meaning extra support may be needed to regain balance during difficult times.

In the aftermath of a large disaster, our health system and healthcare workers will be under significant strain, with communities facing heightened mental and physical distress, isolation and overwhelm. Rural communities will face additional challenges due to fewer local services and limited access to support. Initially, a shared experience can create strong bonds among affected communities, but as time passes and people's circumstances change, community needs will evolve. This requires a more flexible, phased approach to ensure no one is left behind.

In 2020, the [Te Hau Toka Southern Lakes Wellbeing Group](#) was formed as a partnership between key health, social, and local government agencies to support regional mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This collaboration provided the group with an opportunity to co-design a plan with its communities, local respected welfare and social support agencies, and national experts to help address the pandemic's mental health impacts.

With the group concluding its work in March 2025, it is keen to share its insights, successes and lessons learned with agencies and communities to help shape future emergency preparedness and responses. Drawing on research, collective expertise, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles - partnership, active protection, mutual benefit, and equity - the group proposes the 'Getting Through Together' framework. This community-led, evidence-based, phased approach to wellbeing prioritises promotion, prevention and early intervention, ensuring all communities are included, valued and receive equitable support. The framework complements existing government structures and aligns with the following contexts:

- **The Co-ordinated Incident Management System (CIMS):** New Zealand's official framework for coordinated incident management across responding agencies. Psychosocial support falls under the Welfare function and involves representatives from councils and local welfare/social support agencies.
- **Ministry of Health:** Responsible for national planning and coordination of psychosocial support services under the direction of the National Controller (or National Recovery Manager during recovery).
- **Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora Southern:** This agency is responsible for providing regional psychosocial services to individuals, families/whānau, and communities in nationally declared emergencies. These services are delivered through a co-ordinated response by government and non-government agencies.
- **Evidence-based approaches:** The proposed framework draws on proven proactive wellbeing models like [The Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) and [Te Whare Tapa Whā](#), as well as post-disaster wellbeing programmes that have supported community recovery. Key examples include:
 - The [independent evaluation](#) of Te Hau Toka's programme and its [community mental wellbeing plan](#), co-designed with community, welfare and social support agencies, and New Zealand experts.
 - The Ministry of Health [Framework for Psychosocial Support in Emergencies](#).
 - The success of the [All Right?](#) programme after the Canterbury earthquake sequence, the [Mental Health Foundation's post-cyclone Gabrielle wellbeing research](#), the [multi-agency Farmstrong programme](#) helping farmers recover from extreme weather events, and [He Waka Ora](#), a resource designed to equip communities with the tools to plan and implement effective wellbeing initiatives that support both recovery and resilience.

Summary - key benefits of the 'Getting Through Together' framework

Te Hau Toka's proposed framework offers a community-centred approach to resilience, aligned with government frameworks and Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles. It is structured around the four Rs of emergency management and is designed to meet the needs of all communities in a culturally safe and inclusive manner. The framework empowers communities to take ownership of their recovery efforts, focusing on shared responsibility, mutual benefit, and equity.

- **Risk reduction:** Evidence shows that strong social capital - community connections and support networks - is a significant protective factor for disaster resilience. This framework encourages a proactive, locally-driven approach to community development, capacity and support, which strengthens these networks and, in turn, improves disaster outcomes.
- **Readiness:** By adopting the Te Hau Toka framework, emergency management agencies can build local capacity to respond to crises. This includes identifying gaps in support, strengthening relationships, and co-designing preparedness plans with key stakeholders. Its central principle is partnership to ensure the community is involved in decision-making at every level. While no funding is currently available, the framework sets the groundwork for future readiness.
- **Response:** The framework provides a structured, evidence-based approach to delivering effective, local psychosocial support. It complements clinical services by emphasising prevention, early intervention, and promoting community wellbeing. This reduces the demand for intensive clinical care and helps to stabilise communities during the response phase. The framework also supports identifying local leaders who can drive recovery efforts and ensure cultural values are respected throughout the process.
- **Recovery:** The framework promotes unity and collective action, empowering communities to take ownership of their recovery. Strengthening social capital and leveraging shared resources and community networks helps foster long-term resilience. It ensures flexibility in adapting to each community's unique pace and needs, and equity through fair distribution of resources, particularly to vulnerable groups. This facilitates a more inclusive and sustainable recovery

The community's voice must be heard throughout the phases of this framework to ensure local needs and priorities are reflected. Creating channels and regular opportunities for community input will shape the development, planning, and delivery of initiatives as well as the overall direction of travel. Therefore, Te Hau Toka also recommends four corresponding mental health and wellbeing objectives:

- **Engage / Tūhono:** Engage with communities to support their wellbeing and resilience, ensuring their voices are heard and respected throughout the process.
- **Equip / Whakariterite:** Equip individuals and communities with the tools to manage their mental wellbeing, building resilience and strengthening natural support systems using culturally appropriate methods.
- **Empower / Mana Motuhake:** Empower communities to lead their own recovery efforts, emphasising shared decision-making and local ownership.
- **Ensure / Pae tawhiti:** Ensure communities are aware of the available pathways to care in community, primary and secondary health settings, with a focus on ensuring equal access to culturally appropriate services for diverse populations.

Context - applying an AF8 earthquake scenario

In the event of a major disaster like an [Alpine Fault Magnitude 8 \(AF8\) earthquake](#), communities may need to rely on their own resources for up to a week or more before external aid can arrive, as outlined in the [AF8 Safer Framework](#). Drawing from the Canterbury earthquake sequence, the structural rebuild could take months or even years, while emotional recovery may take five to 10 years, with mental health challenges likely to increase over time.

From a psychosocial support perspective, the following principles are critical:

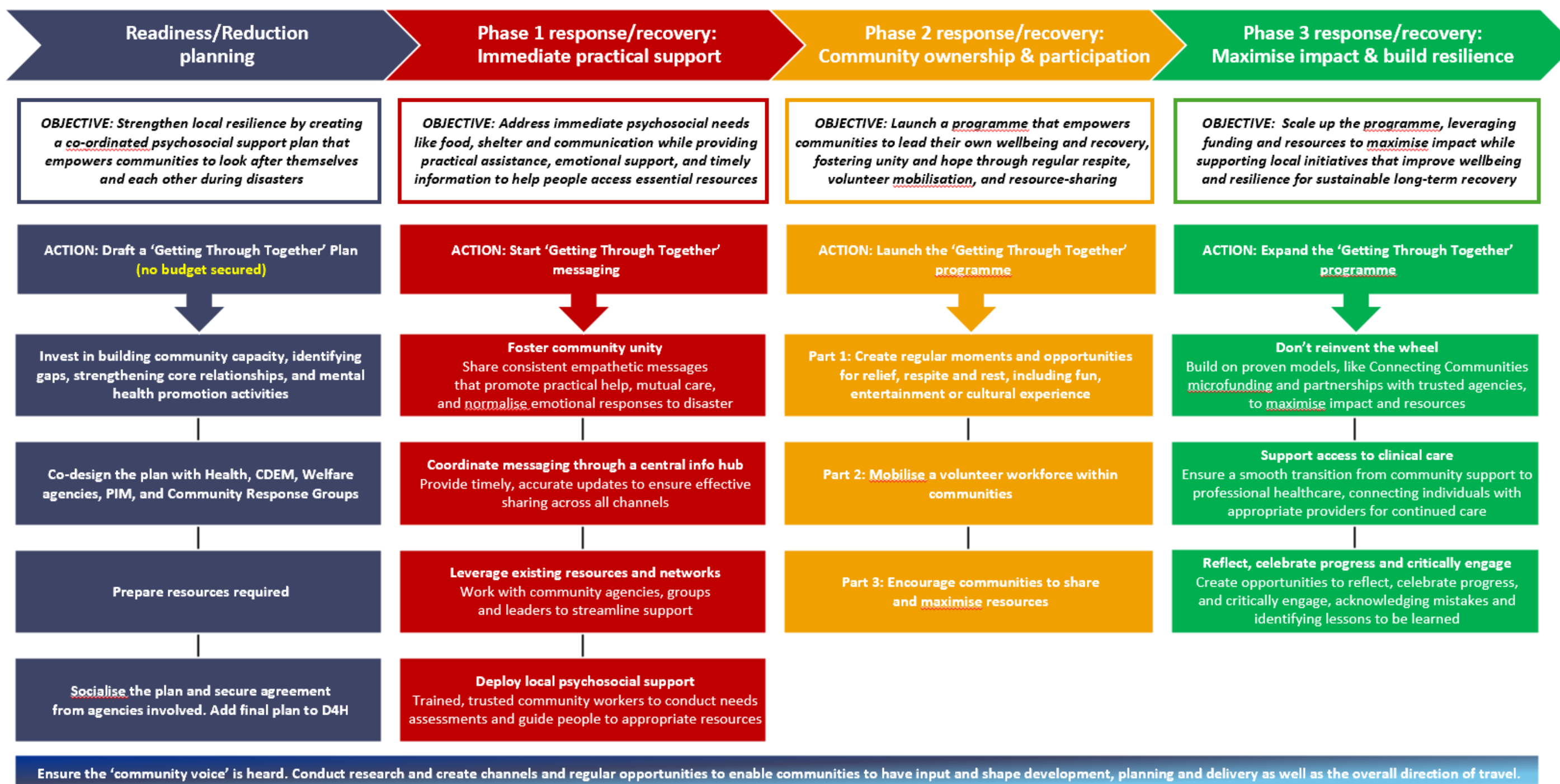
- **Communities are stronger when they work together:** Resilience is rooted in the collective strength of communities. When individuals come together, share resources and support one another, the overall ability to recover is significantly enhanced.
- **Equipping individuals with tools, education and support is essential:** Providing people with the resources and skills to look after their own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of others, plays a pivotal role in recovery. This empowers communities to take a proactive approach to resilience.
- **Hope and optimism are vital:** In the aftermath of a disaster, the challenge of understanding why traumatic events occur can be overwhelming. Maintaining hope and optimism can help mitigate the psychological impact, offering communities a pathway to healing and renewal.
- **Prior mental health challenges need attention:** Since 2010, South Island communities - particularly in Canterbury and Kaikoura - have endured repeated earthquakes and aftershocks. Other regions, such as the West Coast, Marlborough and Dunedin, have also faced extreme events like flooding. These events have had a lasting impact on residents' mental wellbeing, potentially making both the public and emergency responders more vulnerable to the psychosocial effects of future earthquakes or other disasters.
- **Fatigue and mental health must be carefully managed:** In a post-earthquake environment, fatigue is a real concern, compounded by the ongoing risk of aftershocks. It is essential to manage mental health impacts with care, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the entire population. This includes particular attention to those who may be physically, socially or mentally vulnerable. These groups must be central in psychosocial support and evacuation planning. It is also crucial to recognise that wellbeing needs can be unpredictable, with some individuals emerging as the 'new vulnerable' in such high-stress situations.
- **Community and social connection are key to recovery:** [Research commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation](#) after Cyclone Gabrielle showed that communities valued social events and activities that nurtured community spirit and boosted their wellbeing and they wanted more of them. Community cohesion and connection are vital factors in helping people navigate the emotional and practical challenges of recovery.
- **Swift mobilisation of resources is critical:** Feedback from previous disasters indicates that once government/external investors/donor aid is deployed, it must be delivered swiftly to avoid delays in reaching those in need. Prompt mobilisation of investment and support programmes ensures that affected communities receive timely assistance and helps mitigate concerns about funding delays or reputational damage.
- **Domestic and international visitors are also vulnerable:** In the event of a major disaster like the AF8 earthquake, domestic and international visitors may be affected by the same risks as local communities. It's essential to have a clear plan for their quick, safe evacuation, communication, and support. This ensures that visitors are not a strain on local resources, allowing local communities to focus on their recovery while ensuring that visitors receive the necessary assistance without diminishing resources for residents. The focus must remain on supporting local communities, but having a plan for visitors helps manage the broader impact on the region's resilience.

Te Hau Toka's proposed 'Getting Through Together' framework (A3 format)

Recommended mental health and wellbeing objectives

Engage / <u>Tūhono</u>	Equip / <u>Whakariterite</u>	Empower / <u>Mana Motuhake</u>	Ensure / <u>Pae tawhiti</u>
Engage with communities to support their wellbeing and resilience, ensuring their voices are heard and respected throughout the process	Equip individuals and communities with the tools to manage their mental wellbeing, building resilience and strengthening natural support systems using culturally appropriate methods	Empower communities to lead their own recovery efforts, <u>emphasising</u> shared decision-making and local ownership	Ensure communities are aware of the available pathways to care in community, primary and secondary health settings, with a focus on ensuring equal access to culturally appropriate services for diverse populations

Overview of the proposed 'Getting Through Together' framework



Note: Mental health promotion activities are particularly important in the Readiness/Reduction phase. They don't always need to focus on disaster preparedness and can help with community engagement during peacetime. This is a key time to work with communities on their self-identified aspirations and challenges. It also builds the social capital, capacity and networks needed to activate during a disaster.

Framework breakdown – more detail and examples

Phase 1 response/recovery: Immediate practical support - start 'Getting Through Together' messaging

Objective: Address immediate psychosocial needs while providing practical assistance, emotional support and timely information to help people access essential resources

In the early stages of a disaster, people's responses can include a wide range of psychological, behavioural, physical and emotional reactions and difficulty processing complex information.

Recovery starts on Day 1 of the response. Evidence shows that people are often in 'survival mode' and are focused on immediate needs. Prioritising practical support and connection – like help with daily tasks, access to essentials, and emotional reassurance – can restore safety and comfort without clinical intervention. This approach helps provide immediate relief, build community resilience, and ensure that people can begin recovery with a sense of safety and reassurance.

Key suggested actions

Foster community unity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Communicate with empathetic messaging ('Getting Through Together'). This messaging should not only focus on the support available and encouraging people to look after each other, but also help normalise common emotional reactions to disasters. It's important that early messages avoid making normal reactions seem like problems, as this can lead to a focus on clinical services instead of empowering communities to use their own coping skills.
Co-ordinate messaging and create a one-stop information hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Response agencies work together to provide consistent, clear, and easy-to-access information in a central hub, such as updates on response efforts, hyper-local information (e.g. road closures), and practical support available to the community.
Leverage existing resources and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Work with respected and trusted local agencies, community groups and leaders to help share messages through their channels e.g. Welcoming Communities and migrant groups, churches and community agencies like the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Happiness House, Central Lakes Family Services, Community Link Upper Clutha, Community Houses, Community Boards, and the Rural Support Trust. Te Hau Toka also has pre-established messaging, resources and a strong communication network that can be rapidly deployed to help people care for themselves, support each other, and navigate additional mental health and wellbeing resources.
Deploy local psychosocial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When possible, send trained and trusted community support workers or navigators to key locations (e.g. evacuation centres, welfare hubs, and accompany building inspectors or other responders) to conduct needs assessments and connect people with appropriate support. I.e. meet people where they are.

Phase 2: Community ownership and participation – start ‘Getting Through Together’ programme

Objective: Launch a programme that empowers communities to lead their own wellbeing and recovery, fostering unity and hope through regular respite, volunteer mobilisation, and resource-sharing

After a disaster, most people will experience distress, anxiety, sadness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and physical aches and pains. These reactions are normal and typically improve over time. However, common mental health conditions like depression and anxiety are likely to significantly increase in a crisis.

This phase, which has three parts, focuses on strengthening community bonds by bringing people together for emotional relief and providing practical ways for them to look after themselves and each other.

Key suggested actions

Launch the ‘Getting Through Together’ programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create opportunities for the community to unite, support each other and foster a sense of hope, optimism and empowerment.
Amplify empathic messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage participation in the programme and share positive stories of community resilience, highlighting how people are coming together. Building the narrative of a caring, united community is key. Start by embracing the value of manaakitanga and reminding communities how they traditionally show respect, care and support for each other. Continue to acknowledge all feelings, including negative ones, to ensure no one feels left behind if they’re not feeling positive. Engaging trusted community leaders to amplify the programme and messaging within their networks brings authentic voices and culturally appropriate approaches.• Research should be a priority to guide strategic direction, inform decisions, and shape the language used in messaging. Conducting research, particularly with mixed methods like focus groups, community meetings, and input from key informants, strongly supports this approach.
Create a gratitude and sharing forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster connection and positivity by providing a physical or digital message board where people can post messages of aroha, gratitude and kindness and share personal stories. Find ways to share this more widely e.g. media, posters, signs, events etc.
Offer practical wellbeing tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share advice on staying well, such as limiting screen time to avoid doomscrolling, using helplines, and promoting self-care with proven models like the Five Ways to Wellbeing and Te Whare Tapa Whā. Beyond public communications, seek feedback and get creative in reaching different audiences. For example, engage Te Hau Toka’s regional network of wellbeing champions, create videos with trusted community leaders (from migrant groups, schools, etc.), work with the Rural Support Trust, ask church ministers to speak to their congregations, encourage industry associations to share resources with their members, and involve workplace wellbeing and H&S representatives.
Prepare for clinical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure customer-centric resources and support systems are in place to help people understand what clinical services are available and how to easily access them when needed. For example, promote the service ahead of the organisation (e.g. Access and Choice service rather than WellSouth) and ensure GPs have information about all of the options as they’re often the first port of call.

Part 1: Create regular moments and opportunities for relief, respite and rest, including fun, entertainment or cultural experience

- **Provide moments of respite:** Offer regular breaks for people, especially children and the most vulnerable, to experience periods of normality and structure. Encourage them to take time out and connect socially within their neighbourhoods (with appropriate safety precautions).
- **Create opportunities:** Understand how arts, culture, creativity, and heritage can help with healing and support during recovery. After the Canterbury earthquakes, there were many examples of this, which provided relief and hope and helped inspire and guide planning and development, such as infrastructure and buildings.
- **Leverage existing community hubs:** This could be driven by well-respected not-for-profit groups, local organisations, and community centres with strong connections and resources like game trailers and equipment.

Key groups include councils (particularly Community Development / Creativity, Culture and Heritage; Sport and Recreation; Libraries; and Welcoming Communities), community hubs (like Happiness House, Community Link Upper Clutha, Lake Hāwea Community Centre, The Headwaters Glenorchy, and Fiordland/Cromwell/Alexandra Community Houses), the Salvation Army, churches, arts facilities (like Te Atamira and QPACT), Māori and Pasifika-focused organisations, and youth trusts.

Ideas for activities:

- **Partner with key organisations:** Engage Hapū, schools, migrant groups, community associations, churches, senior networks, and the Rural Support Trust to organise activities for their members.
- **Involve exercise and wellbeing professionals:** Call for exercise instructors, sports coaches, event centres, gyms, and sports teams to organise community games and classes, helping people to stay active and entertained.
- **Encourage community-driven activities:** Provide ideas for people to organise their own neighbourhood events such as sports games, sing-alongs, dancing, jingo, silent discos, or themed costume gatherings, to bring some light relief.
- **Library programmes:** Organise activities like reading groups or initiatives such as seniors reading to children.
- **Pet therapy:** Offer pet therapy programmes (such as QT Community Cats Whiskers and Wisdom with seniors and kids reading to companion animals), petting zoos, or volunteering for MPI animal welfare initiatives.
- **Creativity, culture and heritage:** Provide opportunities for creativity, culture and heritage as part of trauma therapy - this can be a highly effective way to help people process emotions, tell their stories, and reconnect. There are always tremendous untapped resources (like artists and musicians) in communities who are used to working with nothing to create gold. They are also experts in activating imagination, social commentary and providing alternative visions, hope, joy, fun etc. For example, culture therapy as per community demographics like Mirimiri and Rongoā clinics and other cultural practices; arts and craft workshops (through clubs and organisations like Te Atamira, QPACT, Community Houses); community choirs (already many formed since COVID); live music and concerts (including backyard and street corners); family fun days; poetry events etc.
- **Create visual message boards:** Set up physical or digital community message boards where people can share gratitude, kindness, and messages of support, reinforcing connection and positivity, and find ways to share this more widely.

Part 2: Mobilise a volunteer workforce

Volunteering brings a wide range of benefits, helping people to connect with others, feel useful, share skills, stay active, and give back to their communities.

In the aftermath of a disaster, many people will naturally feel compelled to help. To ensure these efforts are impactful and co-ordinated, it's essential to have a pre-established plan that mobilises volunteers, organises their skills, and directs their contributions effectively. Without such a plan, well-meaning volunteers may inadvertently waste valuable time or resources, reducing overall effectiveness.

Locals (hau kāinga / home people - anyone living locally)

Mobilising local volunteers is essential to addressing immediate needs while building a sense of shared purpose and solidarity. This strengthens the community's resilience and connection during recovery. Volunteer efforts can be organised through Community Response Groups (CRGs), Volunteer South, the Red Cross, Community Boards or other local agencies. Ideas for mobilising volunteers include:

- **Engage local and organised groups:** Local groups such as transport operators, Lions and Rotary clubs, 4WD clubs, sports clubs, and Deerstalkers Associations could play an important role in moving people, resources, and supplies around the community efficiently.
- **Create a volunteer workforce for essential tasks:** Form a dedicated volunteer team to clear debris and offer specialised skills such as electricians, builders, glaziers, and general handymen. Involve organisations like the Men's and Women's Sheds.
- **Encourage existing volunteers to help:** Ask people to connect with the organisations and community groups they already volunteer for to see how they can assist during the recovery efforts. These groups can also provide valuable practical and emotional support and a sense of normality.
- **Support vulnerable community members:** Recruit volunteers to check on the most vulnerable individuals in their neighbourhoods or provide extra support at aged care facilities, ideally with some first aid training. This helps ensure that the needs of those who are physically, socially, or mentally vulnerable are met.
- **Phone trees/'pop-ins':** Establish phone trees to gather vital information, check on people and provide updates, especially if telecommunications are disrupted. Additionally, create 'pop-in' teams to visit homes in person to maintain contact and offer support where needed. The 'Gets Ready' system could also be used.

Visitors (manuhiri - visitors from outside the district)

In an emergency, visitors can be particularly vulnerable, unfamiliar with local protocols and resources, which can place additional strain on already limited local capacity. Ensuring their safe evacuation is a priority, but this process may be complex and time-consuming.

When planning for large-scale emergencies, local authorities could consider proactively engaging stranded visitors in recovery efforts - without disrupting critical operations - while they await evacuation. By assigning safe, low-risk roles in controlled environments like welfare centres, visitor manpower can maximise labour, speed up local response and recovery, foster unity during a crisis, and give visitors a sense of purpose, boosting their mental wellbeing in a challenging time.

Identifying visitors' skills and willingness to help during registration allows them to contribute to tasks such as packing/serving food, cooking BBQs, clearing debris, or helping families to entertain children. Involving visitors benefits local communities by providing much-needed support while fostering manaakitanga, strengthening the bond between visitors and locals. This strategy also supports regional regenerative tourism goals, promoting long-term sustainability and wellbeing for both visitors and residents.

Part 3: Encourage people to share and maximise resources

Sharing resources is key to fostering community support. It ensures that everyone has access to essential supplies like food, water, energy, and tools while also building unity, shared responsibility and resilience. By fostering a culture of sharing, the community can maximise available resources, reduce waste, and ensure that no one is left behind. This approach encourages partnership and equity, ensuring everyone is supported and included in collective efforts. It addresses immediate needs and contributes to long-term resilience and community solidarity.

- **Promote resource sharing:** Encourage the community to come together by sharing resources and supporting each other. This can be achieved through activities like street BBQs, food socials, 5 o'clock drinks, lending tools and equipment, and providing access to resources like power generators, Starlink, and water tankers. In the Reduction/Readiness phase, promoting community events like Neighbours Day, Welcoming Week and the National ShakeOut earthquake exercise are excellent ways to help neighbours connect and build relationships, creating a foundation for resource sharing in times of need.
- **Support the community-wide food resilience plan:** Assess available food resources like Kiwi Harvest, unused commercial food, community gardens and local supermarkets to ensure that food is maximised and distributed effectively. This should align with and support regional food resilience plans (e.g. the QLDC Food Resilience Plan/Southern Lakes Kai Collective), to ensure equitable access to food during a crisis, especially for those most vulnerable.
- **Support large-scale food and social events:** Encourage and support community agencies, churches and local organisations in coordinating large-scale community food and social events. These events can strengthen social bonds and meet immediate needs. Marae are central to emergency response across Aotearoa, but some communities (like Queenstown, Wānaka and Fiordland) do not have a papatipu Rūnanga. Community halls, churches and schools can provide a physical space for multiple agencies and Iwi to deliver side by side.
 - Mobilise food trucks and local volunteers to assist organisations like the Salvation Army, Baskets of Blessing, Good Bitches Baking, and Community Response Groups in helping to prepare, pack and distribute meals. Chefs and hospitality workers, for example, can offer valuable assistance with meal preparation and serving.

Phase 3: Maximise impact and build resilience - expand the 'Getting Through Together' programme

Objective: Scale up the programme, leveraging funding and resources to maximise impact while supporting local initiatives that improve wellbeing and resilience for sustainable long-term recovery

When aid (e.g. government funding and external investors/donors) arrives, we must be prepared to mobilise and expand our response and recovery efforts to support the community effectively. By building on existing structures and funding models, we can quickly expand our efforts and maximise resources to support long-term recovery.

Key suggested actions

Don't reinvent the wheel - use proven models	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The following Te Hau Toka models already have a proven track record of success and could be leveraged to scale up a funding programme:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Connecting Communities micro-funding – regular small amounts of funding distributed across the community to support connection and wellbeing initiatives.– Larger-scale partnership funding - supporting existing, respected local organisations to amplify key community programmes they're delivering
Support access to clinical care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure a smooth transition from community support to professional healthcare, helping individuals to connect with appropriate providers for continued care.• Maintain community networks and engagement.
Reflect, celebrate progress and critically engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create opportunities to reflect, celebrate progress, and critically engage, acknowledging mistakes and identifying lessons to be learned.

About Te Hau Toka

Te Hau Toka Southern Lakes Wellbeing Group is an inter-agency collaboration dedicated to promoting health and wellbeing in the Southern Lakes region, with a focus on promotion, prevention, early intervention, and equity.

It was formed in 2020 by key health, social sector and local government agencies to help address the negative mental health impacts of COVID-19 in the rural tourism-dependent communities of Queenstown, Wānaka, Fiordland and Cromwell.

In 2021, Te Hau Toka received \$3 million funding through the Government's Tourism Communities: Support, Recovery, and Re-Set Plan to support community wellbeing initiatives. While the funding was targeted at the Queenstown Lakes and Fiordland areas, Te Hau Toka also included Cromwell, recognising that many of its residents working in the Queenstown Lakes region faced similar challenges.

Te Hau Toka group members include Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora Southern, WellSouth Primary Health Network, the Southern Mental Health and Addiction Network Leadership Group, Queenstown Lakes District Council, Central Lakes Family Services, the Fiordland Wellbeing Collective, and three contractors (three community wellbeing navigators/coordinators, and a communications and community engagement specialist). The governance group, made up of the three regional mayors (QLDC, SDC and CODC), the iwi representative for the seven runaka, and the director of Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora Southern, has also provided strong support and advocacy.

Community ownership and participation have been key to Te Hau Toka's strategy and success. During the COVID response and recovery phases, the group has delivered evidence-based mental health and wellbeing initiatives **by the community, with the community** through:

- Genuine co-design
- Collaboration - not reinventing the wheel
- Ongoing evaluation – fast learning and adaptation as needed.

An [independent evaluation](#) found the Te Hau Toka Southern Lakes Wellbeing Group to be highly effective in promoting mental wellbeing during the COVID pandemic response and recovery. Its work demonstrated how investment in community-led initiatives and targeted education programmes, as well as strong collaboration and advocacy can improve community connection, resilience, and overall wellbeing.

Te Hau Toka initiatives included funding the adaption of the internationally renowned evidence-based Youth Mental Health First Aid training for New Zealand and piloting it in the Southern Lakes region, providing free access to education programmes like Mental Health 101 and GoodYarn, establishing the Connecting Communities microfunding programme, partnering with existing community organisations to amplify their efforts, and developing resources like the Traffic Light Guide and Seniors Gig Guide, to make mental wellbeing activities and information more accessible.

As part of its legacy, Te Hau Toka is keen to share its insights, successes learnings with agencies and communities across Aotearoa to help shape future emergency responses. The ability to tap into existing networks, expertise, knowledge, and skills will help speed up the response, avoid duplication, and achieve better results.

For more information about Te Hau Toka and its initiatives, visit www.southernhealth.nz/tehautoka or contact:

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