

Entry type: Concept
Entry ID: AWE0719

Disaster and Emergency Services, Australian Red Cross

Summary

The Australian Red Cross has given special emphasis to Disaster and Emergency Services as part of the larger role of the Red Cross in caring for victims of natural disasters, conflict and human tragedies. The Australian Red Cross took up this role as a philanthropic organisation already able to operate within the armed forces and within State disaster plans. In the main, disaster and emergency services have largely been a State-based function of the Australian Red Cross, with national coordination developing over time. Their disaster preparation and response strongly involves local branches and communities, with women providing much of the ground support and assistance, such as catering and registration, and increasingly management for the Australian Red Cross.

Details

The first Constitution of the Australian branch of the British Red Cross Society made assistance in great public disaster, calamity or need one of its key objects, subject to the approval of its national Council. In an emergency, the President could authorise rendering of assistance, as Lady Helen Munro Ferguson did in World War I. The Australian Red Cross assisted in civil disasters within Australia after World War I, in terms of the influenza epidemic, but more so after World War II. According to Noreen Minogue, the Western Australian Division of the Australian Red Cross Society was the first State to move strongly into Civil Preparedness for Disaster. By the mid-1960s, however, each State Division of the Australian Red Cross had some affiliation with the statutory authorities in emergency and disaster services. Although State Divisions initially handled disasters on their own, large-scale events, like the Tasmanian bushfires of 1967 required the assistance of other Divisions. As a result, the Australian Red Cross Society formed a National Disaster Relief Committee, and the Disaster Services Department was formed in 1975. Its national officers focused on registration and care of victims, the provision of trained personnel, and a uniform pattern of disaster organisation and training throughout Australia. In the 1980s, an expert national and divisional committee was formed in Disaster Preparedness to advise, coordinate and support the development of services, known as the Disaster Services Advisory Committee in 2004. The area was often referred to as emergency services, and sometimes came under different Departments, such as the national Department of Services and Membership in 1999-2000. The Australian Red Cross's Strategy 2005 again targeted disaster and emergency services as a core activity, with plans to improve the focus and coordination of the service, provide a national registration system and deliver effective disaster services which meet communities' needs.

Published resources

Book

50 years service to humanity, Australian Red Cross Society, [1964]

The More things change...The Australian Red Cross 1914-1989, Minogue, Noreen, 1989

Look what you started Henry! A history of the Australian Red Cross 1914-1991., Stubbings, Leon, 1992

Report

Strategy 2005, Australian Red Cross, c2002

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Australian Red Cross Research and Information Service

Records relating to community services, social work and welfare, and disaster relief provided by the Australian Red Cross

The University of Melbourne Archives

Annual Reports of the Australian Red Cross

Minutes and Meeting Papers, National Council

Annual Reports of Red Cross Divisions and Blood Service

Author Details

Penny Robinson

Created 10 February 2004

Last modified 29 October 2018