LONG TERM PLANNING FOR RECOVERY AFTER DISASTERS: ENSURING HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES (HiAP)

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INFORMATION SHEET 9
Economic recovery issues

What is the aim of this series of documents?

This document aims to show what can be learnt from previous disasters about the impact of decisions and actions taken that have affected people's wellbeing during the recovery period.

The document is written from a public health perspective but draws from the **literature of many disciplines.**

The key challenge and aim is to gain a place in the recovery planning effort and ensure that health and wellbeing is recognised as a key factor to be considered in all decisions and actions, rather taking a narrow view of "health" as being limited to health protection and disease control functions, vital though they are.

It aims to show that recovery takes place in several phases, from immediate response to long term rebuilding, with transitional phases in between. These phases overlap and the stages of recovery may be of longer or shorter duration for particular groups of people within the affected area.

It highlights that there is always tension between acting speedily and taking time to plan well. Pre-disaster planning is the best means of avoiding short term decisions that create or exacerbate long term problems.

Why is the HIAP approach so relevant?

Health in All Policies (HiAP) is an approach which emphasises the fact that health and wellbeing are largely influenced by measures that are managed by government sectors other than health. HiAP seeks to highlight the connections and interactions between health and other sectors. The health sector's role is to support other sectors to achieve their goals in a way which also improves health and wellbeing.

Economic recovery

The American Planning Association puts economic recovery right at the top of the agenda for long-term recovery and reconstruction (American Planning Association 2005, p.53-57).

Based on events after other disasters, they estimate that around 30% of small businesses do not survive, mainly because of the length of time they are disrupted after the disaster. The key points of their discussion are summarised:

- **Economic recovery and community wellbeing are linked**. Businesses need an available workforce as well as an economic base for local retailers and other enterprises, and the restoration of employment, local infrastructure and support services are needed by everyone in the community, whether businesses or residents (p.54).

- Economic recovery is likely **to take longer in poorer sections** of the community because of the relative lack of resources to restart and limited capacity to undertake or even influence (in the case of rented premises) the speed and focus of the recovery process.

- **Phases** - Economic activity usually undergoes a "roller coaster" trajectory after a disaster with a downward plunge in the short term, followed by an intense phase of reconstruction usually supported by outside aid from government and other external sources, but this then flattens out and the economy returns to a more normal balance.

- **Rebuilding period** - The intense rebuilding period needs to be used to build an economy that is economically stronger and less vulnerable to future disasters. This may involve relocating a business district away from disaster prone areas (for example flood plains) or diversifying the type of business undertaken. The loss of tourism, even for a short period, is a major economic threat for those communities that depend on it for a significant portion of their income.

- Using the experience of disaster to incorporate mitigation efforts for the future also protects the local and regional tax base, which in turn is good for local government.

Even though supporting businesses is vital for the overall recovery of communities in the long term, assisting businesses in the short term may sometimes divert from immediate human service needs. Quarantelli (1999) cites an example from Mexico following a hurricane in Cancun where restoring the tourist hotel resort area was given the highest priority to ensure the flow of foreign currency into the country and protect the jobs of the many local people employed in the tourist industry.

While this may have been the right decision from a broad economic perspective, it resulted in a reduction in humanitarian assistance to some of the worst hit neighbourhoods, where homeless people were neglected for many months.[3] The same report then goes on to note that although there has been minimal research on the influence of political factors in disaster response and recovery, political power is a crucial factor and "…it would be naïve to think that even in [democratic] societies, no political factors enter into the relevant decision making and the providing of recovery aid" (p.9).

Access to services

Restoration of routine public services and commercial businesses is an integral part of rebuilding communities after disasters, including access to utilities, health care, transport, food supplies, education, and sources of employment.

Ensuring the continuation and resilience of these services is just as important a part of forward planning for future disaster mitigation as considering the impact on individuals and families – neither can be considered in isolation (Keim 2008).

The psychosocial impact of relocating whole communities to areas without services after Hurricane Katrina, for example, has already been discussed (Levine et al 2007) as has the necessity of strengthening the resilience of the economic base of a community to ensure its continuation (American Planning Association 2005).

The same type of interventions that support social capital and sustainability also tend to also decrease vulnerability of services in times of disaster (Cork 2009; Maguire and Cartwright 2008).

HIAP messages:

- "Health begins where we live, learn, work, and play"

- Health starts – "long before illness – in our homes, schools and jobs"

- Health in All Policies (HiAP) is an approach that acknowledges the causes of health and wellbeing lie outside the health sector and are socially and economically formed.

- HiAP highlights the connections and interactions between health and other sectors and how they contribute to better health outcomes.

- Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a tool to meet HiAP goals.

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[3] The suggestion of accommodating Rugby World Cup tourists in luxury liners in Lyttelton harbour because Christchurch had lost so many hotels come to mind here, as well as the subsequent negative comments that the suggestion provoked.

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Authorship and acknowledgements

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