



Disability Advocacy  
**PATHWAYS**

Reflections from Pathways'  
Response to Cyclone Alfred

**April 2025**

## About Pathways

Disability Advocacy Pathways (Pathways) is a service delivered by Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion (QAI) and funded by the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. Pathways provides information and referral support to people with disability, their families and supporters. Enquiries are received via phone, email and an online form. The service also maintains systems for reporting and minoring service capacity across Queensland Disability Advocacy Program (QDAP) funded organisations, helping to prevent people from being caught in a constant 'referral-round-about'.

In times of natural disaster, Pathways has the capacity to activate extended hours and expand its scope to meet increased demand and provide greater flexibility. With the anticipation of Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, the Department requested that Pathways increase operating hours from Wednesday 5th March to Friday 14th March, inclusive (report period). During this period, the service operated from 9:00am to 9:00pm, seven days a week. The Pathways phone line was staffed on a rotating roster across six team members.

To ensure coordinated service delivery and information flow, Pathways participated in daily briefings throughout the disaster period with representatives from the Queensland Government and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

## Key Trends

During the 10-day period, the Pathways team received 54 enquiries. Of these, 46% (23 enquiries) were directly related to disaster and emergency services with one in three people contacting during the extended service hours. Several key themes emerged from the experiences of people with disability who contacted Pathways:

- Continuity of care during power outages - people with physical disability who rely on electronic assistive technology and equipment expressed significant concerns about power outages. Many were unsure how to source a generator,

including whether this could be arranged through the NDIS or their service provider.

- In-home support disruptions – several people with disability reported presenting at hospital emergency departments due to lack of their usual in-home support workers, who were either unable to access their homes due to flooding or had been instructed not to attend due to safety risks.
- Complex support systems - many callers facing complex circumstances found it increasingly difficult to navigate support available.
- Domestic and family violence - people experiencing domestic and family violence encountered additional barriers in accessing appropriate disaster response options, included extended wait times (up to 45 minutes) to reach an operator, only to be informed that practical support was not available.
- Lack of disability-specific information - publicly available information about evacuation centres was limited and lacked disability-specific detail.
- NDIS barriers - NDIS participants experienced difficulties using their plans to respond to the crisis, including challenges in accessing increased support and confusion around changing rules—such as the removal of generator purchases from allowable items.
- Lack of coordinated practical support - callers were concerned about the absence of coordinated, easily accessible practical support such as sandbag and food delivery or proactive evacuation assistance.
- Increased stress and anxiety – many people expressed heightened stress and anxiety in the lead up to the cyclone, alongside a lack of awareness about available disaster specific support services.
- Insufficient emergency preparedness - there was a general lack of clear, proactive emergency planning information or guidance on how to implement existing emergency plans.

As of the end of April, Pathways continues to receive enquiries related to the weather event. These include issues such as denied insurance claims for homes with accessibility modifications, disruptions to regular NDIS-funded services, and the ongoing impacts of extended power outages.

## Service impact and feedback

During the weather event, the average enquiry duration rose to 1.2 hours, with the longest single enquiry lasting 7 hours. Pathways continues provide ongoing support to people who initially contacted the service during the crisis, helping them to connect with additional services and resources.

Feedback from people with disability, their families and supporters included:

- Difficulty locating necessary information before contacting Pathways.
- Appreciation for the clarity and availability of information provided by Pathways.
- Positive comments on the helpfulness and responsiveness of Pathways staff.
- Recognition that Pathways was the only service to escalate their concerns, although in some instances, the outcomes sought could not be achieved due to systemic or resourcing limitations.

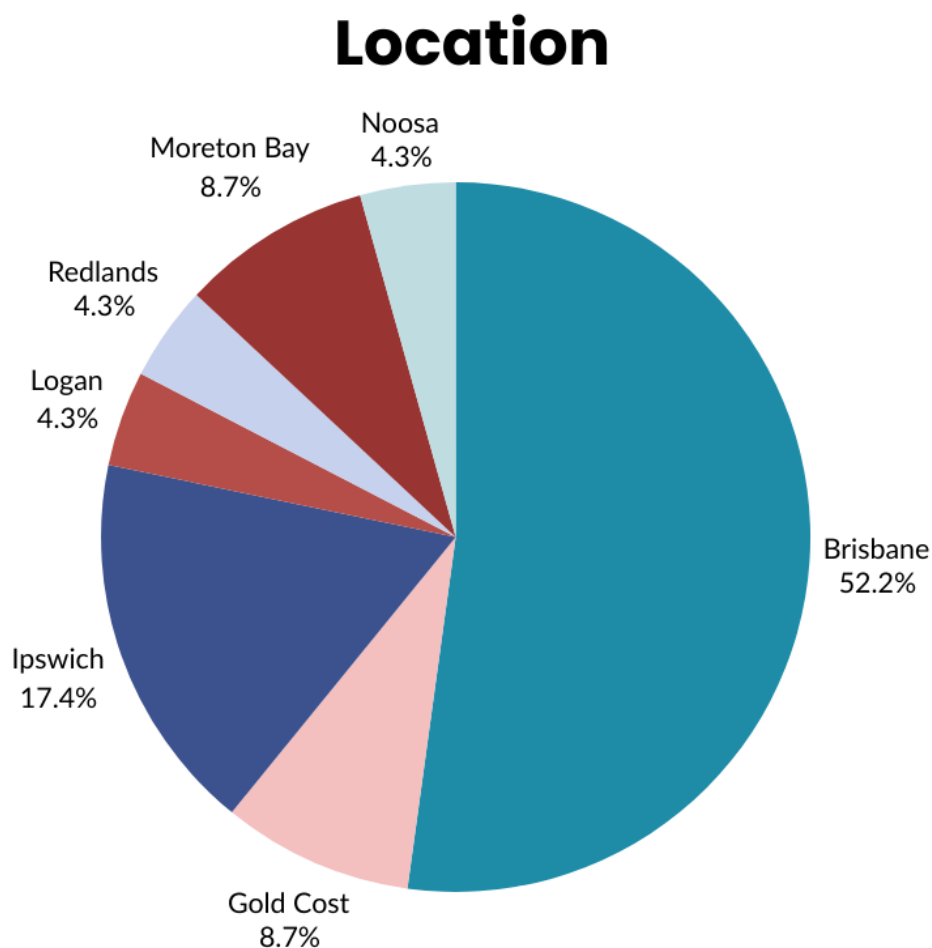
## Case Study: Emergency Support Access Barriers

During cyclone preparations, Pathways received a call from an individual in Brisbane who was unable to leave their home due to their disability. The caller was distressed, as they could not access essential items such as sandbags or food, and their regular support provider was unavailable due to the extreme weather. The situation was further complicated by the caller's experience of domestic violence. The perpetrator, who resided in the same area and knew the caller's address, was also expected to evacuate to the same local evacuation centre—posing a significant safety risk.

Due to safety concerns, evacuation was not an option, as the perpetrator—who knew the caller's location—was also likely to attend the same evacuation centre. In response, Pathways contacted the local Member of Parliament to advocate for urgent support. Staff from the MP's office were able to deliver sandbags, assist with setting up a flood barrier, and provide a small supply of food, allowing the caller to shelter in place more safely.

## Demographic Data

During the weather event, Pathways received one third of enquiries from individuals with disability and their families, and another third were received from people in community support roles. Callers were located across Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Redlands, Moreton Bay and Noosa. Over half of all disaster and emergency related enquiries came from the Greater Brisbane area. Many of the enquires received during the weather event were very complex with at least one in three people financial hardship and a risk of homelessness.





**30%**  
experiencing  
financial hardship



**69%**  
Referrals to  
Government agencies



**35%**  
experiencing or at  
risk of homelessness



**35%**  
Referrals from people  
with disability and families



**35%**  
People with  
physical disability

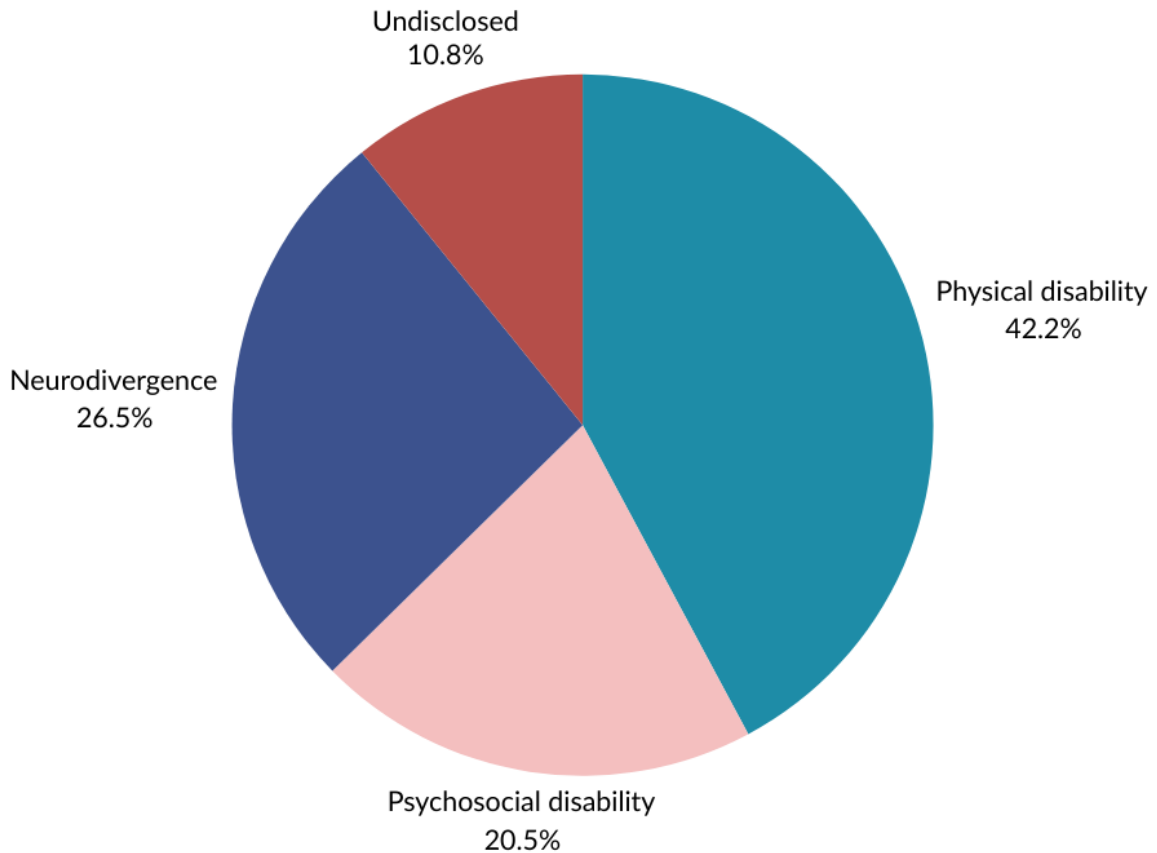


**35%**  
Referrals from  
community supports

Pathways referred the majority of enquiries to government agencies for further assistance. This is significantly higher than usual, and many of these referrals were made to government agencies for the purposes of escalation. This was done by Pathways as in many cases there were no known non-government services or supports that were appropriate and available.

During the weather event, one third (compared to 11% annually) of enquiries regarded people with physical disabilities. Many of these enquiries related to people with disability who use electronic aids and equipment, such as motorised wheelchairs and electric beds. Pathways also received several enquiries from people with psychosocial disability and autism spectrum disorder. Feedback received from many callers with psychosocial disability and autism spectrum disorder indicated that having someone to talk through about these concerns and gaining a better understanding available resources made a difference to their outlook and improved their emotional state during the cyclone.

# Disability



## Case Study: Disability-Related Emergency Preparedness

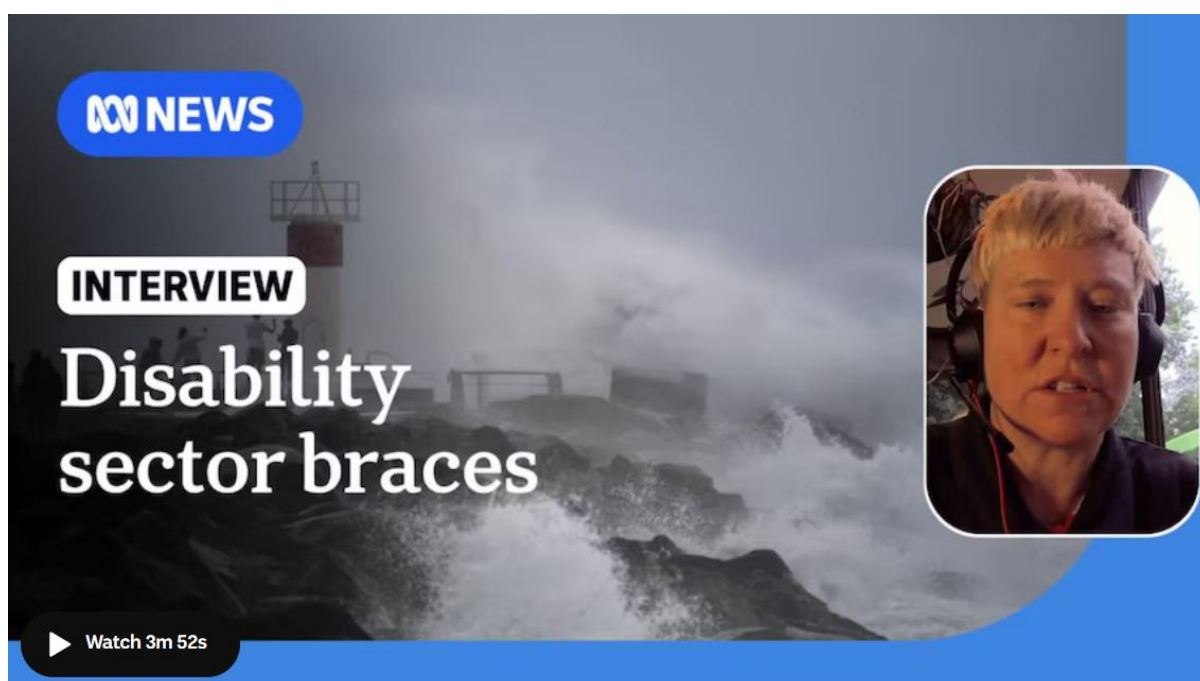
During a severe weather event on the Gold Coast, a woman contacted our service seeking urgent support. Her husband, who uses an electric mobility aid, had been advised by emergency services to prepare for possible evacuation. She was distressed after being told she may need to carry him to safety if their home flooded—something she was physically unable to do. Compounding her anxiety was the lack of access to alternative accommodation or backup power, and the stand-down of local emergency services during the cyclone’s peak. Public messaging at the time advised residents to prepare emergency kits and stated that help would be provided “when it is safe.” In response, Pathways escalated the matter, advocating for flexible use of their NDIS plan funds to support disability-specific emergency preparedness including additional support hours to prepare and respond to the event.

## Promotion and Engagement

In the lead up to the weather event, QAI's CEO, Matilda Alexander, appeared on [ABC's](#) morning news program and spoke about the Pathways and the extended service supporting people with disability impacted by Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. The segment was recorded and available through the ABC website. Several callers cited the ABC news story as the way they heard about Pathways.

Both QAI and Pathways host Instagram and Facebook profiles, and shared multiple posts relating to Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. During the period Mon 3 – Mon 10 March, QAI's average engagement on social media posts more than doubled compared to February. The Pathways channels also saw significantly increased engagement during this period compared to February 2025. Overall Cyclone Alfred-specific content had exponentially higher engagement than the usual Pathways content with **over 8,600 views on a single post** (example below).

QAI's website resource '[Disability and Natural Disasters](#)' also saw a spike of over **112 views on Thursday 6 March**.





## Example social media post



The graphic is a social media post with a background of a satellite image of a cyclone. A large, dark red, irregular shape is overlaid on the image. Inside this shape, the text is white. The main headline is 'Pathways operating extended hours for Cyclone Alfred weather event!'. Below it, the operating hours are listed as '9am - 9pm daily including the weekend as long as we have power.' At the bottom of the red shape, it says 'What we can help with...' with a white arrow pointing to the right. To the right of the red shape, on a light red background, is a section titled 'We can assist with' followed by a bulleted list of five items.

**Pathways operating extended hours for Cyclone Alfred weather event!**

9am - 9pm daily including the weekend as long as we have power.

What we can help with...

**We can assist with**

- Talking people with disability through Emergency Preparedness materials, including being aware of plans and getting them organised.
- Communicating the plan with people in their support network and with disability advocates throughout Queensland as available.
- Tell people where to find information, and help them understand the information.
- Encourage people to contact emergency services, we can also assist to raise concerns if these services are not accessible.
- Provide information on services and emergency preparedness, community recovery, grants and financial assistance, etc.



The graphic is a social media post with a dark red background. A light red, irregular shape is overlaid on the background. Inside this shape, the text is white. The main headline is 'We are here to help'. Below it, the contact information is listed: 'Phone: 1800 130 582' and 'Email: pathways@qai.org.au'.

**We are here to help**

Phone: 1800 130 582  
Email: pathways@qai.org.au

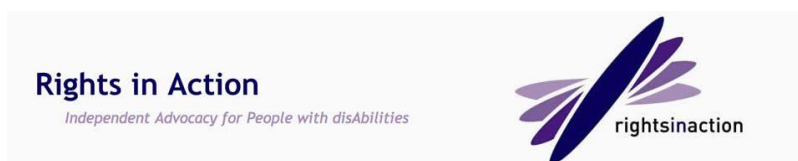
# Insights from Individual Advocacy Organisations

## Rights in Action

Rights in Action (RIA) is an individual disability advocacy organisation supporting people across North and Far North Queensland, with offices based in Townsville and Cairns. As these regions are regularly impacted by severe weather events, RIA provided some valuable information about the experiences of people with disability in these regions.

In addition to issues experienced by Pathways callers, RIA reported that over the course of recent severe weather events they observed a 'disappointing absence' of disaster planning from some local government. As a result of the lack of support by local government, the manager of the Townsville Community Information Centre took the initiative to perform an additional and unfunded information and referral role, providing valuable information and direction for Townsville residence with disability. RIA would like to see compulsory preparedness and recovery planning undertaken by all local councils including a 'one-stop-shop' for disaster prepare including housing representatives, disaster repair grants, ration boxes, insurance representatives, clothes, and clinics. This would ensure that high risk people with disability are not left to chase up an endless circle of numbers to find out simple queries.

This lack of initiative and planning has continued to impact disaster-affected people with disability, and Rights in Action have expressed that there are still people with disability who have not received any support post-disaster. RIA report a lack of communication and significant delays in restoring power to some areas for example Ingham where some people experienced power outages for up to two weeks. Additionally, RIA have observed delays in NDIS service providers returning to direct service delivery as the business recovers or upgrades their disaster preparedness.



## Speaking Up For You (SUFY)

Speaking Up For You (SUFY) are an individual advocacy organisation providing assistance across the Greater Brisbane and Moreton Bay regions.

SUFY have raised concerns with Pathways about the limitations of smaller service providers and independent support workers during natural disasters like Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. Some of the limitations and barriers experienced by smaller and independent teams and support workers in these circumstances include teams having less 'back-up' support and access to fill-in workers when disasters occur, particularly when support workers are unable to get to their client's home safely. SUFY's insights highlight the importance of disaster preparedness plans and the need to pro-bono support work and service provision during natural disasters.

SUFY shared that the SES disclosed they do not hold a record of people with disability in the Greater Brisbane region and suggested establishing a database of the details of people with disability who request to be prioritised by services like SES during natural disaster events. The collection of names and details of people with disability on this type of database should be voluntary, and people with disability should be able to choose whether they want to be involved.

Advocates at SUFY have observed a distinct lack of disability planning by service providers in Supported Disability Accommodation settings, particularly in households accommodating several participants and participants with physical disability. Additionally, SUFY have expressed concerns for residents of boarding houses during natural disasters and have suggested that the minimum staff ratios boarding houses and other group homes should be increased leading up to and during natural disasters.



## Recommendations

Considering insights from the Pathways team, other disability advocacy organisations and people impacted by Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, we recommend the following:

### Local Government

1. All local governments should ensure they have an inclusive and accessible disaster action plan co-designed with people with disability based on the [Disaster Inclusive Emergency Management toolkit](#).
2. Local governments should publish and promote a list of potential evacuation centres including details about the accessibility and supports available. This should be continuously updated rather than waiting until a disaster is apparent.
3. Local governments should proactively promote and engage with Pathways as a support for people with disability in their communities.

### State Government

4. The Queensland Government provide brokerage funding to local NGO's to provide financial assistance and funded emergency accommodation to people with disability during natural disasters.
5. The Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety should continue to coordinate meetings of Government Departments, Disability Peaks and Disability Advocacy Organisations during natural disasters to address and escalate urgent issues for people with disability.
6. As an initiative of 'Get Ready Queensland' the Queensland Government should provide each household with at least 1 power bank.
7. Local Members of Parliament Offices should maintain a voluntary list of people with disability who may require additional or proactive assistance to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters. Informed consent should be obtained by people with disability to share this information with services including the SES, NGO's, Community Recovery Hotline etc.

8. The Queensland Government should actively promote disaster preparedness planning and support services (including Pathways) throughout the year, particularly during 'Get Ready Queensland Week'.
9. As an initiative of 'Get Ready Queensland' establish a government funded generator purchase scheme that offers free of cost or concessions to people with disability to assist people to shelter in place.
10. Establish specialist disaster response teams for people with disability and people experiencing domestic and family violence that may include alternative evacuation centres that are accessible and have low occupancy, ensuring a provider of last resort during disasters to ensure people can stay in their homes and community while safe to do so.

#### Federal Government

11. The NDIS should publish clear, accessible guidance about plan flexibility and participant rights during natural disasters.
12. The NDIS Regulation should be amended to allow the purchase of generators with NDIS funds where a generator would assist a participant to shelter in place.

## Conclusion

Natural disasters such as Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred pose significant and disproportionate risks to people with disability, including the impacts of flooding, power outages, disrupted supports, and heightened psychological stress. Without coordinated preparedness and responsive systems in place, these disruptions can escalate rapidly. Clear themes emerged during this event, highlighting the need for proactive communication, access to backup power solutions, improved flood prevention assistance, and safe, accessible evacuation options. The unpredictable nature of natural disasters demands urgent implementation of the recommendations outlined in this report. In many cases, having access to a centralised, responsive service like Pathways not only improved individuals' ability to access support but also boosted morale during times of significant uncertainty and distress.