

# GO PACK! THE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS BAG FOR NDIS PARTICIPANTS IN THE LMPHU MURRAY SUB-REGION

## Rationale

### (Campaspe Shire - Phase one rollout)

People with disability experience greater risks to their safety and health during emergencies and natural disasters compared to the general population. In fact, they are two to four times more likely to die or sustain injuries during disaster events.

Risk is particularly pronounced for those who live regionally and rurally. In fact, a greater proportion of people with disability live outside major Australian cities.

The Loddon Mallee region was severely affected by the 2022 floods. This meant many residents homes were inundated with water and had to evacuate. The lived experience of community disability organisations during the flood events identified that many people with a disability living independently in community were not prepared for evacuation of their homes. Project partners advocated that communication for people living with disability requires consideration of unique and inclusive needs.

A 2016 report by the Climate Council, [On the Frontline, Climate Change & Rural Communities](#), revealed that extreme weather events disproportionately affected people living rurally, resulting in serious social, health and economic impacts. There are around 2,000 National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants in the LMPHU Murray sub-region (Campaspe, Buloke, Swan Hill, Gannawarra shires).

The region is characterised by two townships of populations greater than 10,000 people. Smaller townships and communities are geographically dispersed. Many are limited in their access to essential services; medical care, transport, food, fuel, emergency services and more.



Go Pack! emergency preparedness bag - front view

## At a Glance

Go Pack! helps people with cognitive disability and their support workers / family and carers prepare for emergency situations (flood, fire, storms, extreme heat).

**With increased extreme weather events predicted in coming years, it is vital for health, community and emergency service agencies to assist regional and rural people with disability to prepare.**

Go Pack! bags will be distributed to 2,000 NDIS participants in the LMPHU Murray sub-region in early 2026.

The first phase roll-out, funded by the Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit includes a check-list fridge magnet, USB card, a 'First 72 hours' flyer and an emergency plan work sheet. Thank you to Campaspe Shire for providing these materials and paying for the 2000 magnets.

## Intervention

Go Pack! is a bright green two-litre drawstring “back sack”. It is designed to help Murray region NDIS participants and their carers (support people) prepare (pack) for an emergency (fire, flood, storms).

Through a co-design process, project partners Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU), Campaspe Shire, Vivid and Community Living & Respite Services, developed Go Pack!, the design of which was undertaken with NDIS participants at Vivid.

People with disability, particularly those with lower levels of literacy, have different communication needs. For example, requiring communications in Easy English and images / icons (that connote meaning).

Key stakeholders and participants have told us that the current ‘black’ emergency preparedness bag, designed for the general population, do not meet these requirements. Go Pack! was created to meet the needs of people with disability, while complementing Campaspe Shire’s emergency planning work and the First 72 hours framework.

Go Pack! is accompanied by a fridge magnet which features important items to pack, together with the First 72 hours brochure, an emergency plan worksheet and a USB card. The card can hold copies of essential documents such as a care plan, personal identification, insurance policies etc.

Go Pack! is funded through Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (2024/2025). It is being produced in partnership with the Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit, Vivid, CLRS and Campaspe Shire.

Campaspe Shire provided funding for 2,000 fridge magnets, USB cards and a First 72 hours emergency plan worksheet and brochure.



Vivid Echuca participants with the Go Pack! bag

## Potential outcome

Go Pack! has the potential to help save lives. The process of co-design and partnering with disability service and local government agencies has given insight into how we can best help vulnerable populations prepare for an emergency.

While the bag will be distributed to 2,000 people in the Murray region, it is possible the concept can extend to communities in Victoria and around Australia.

Go Pack! is designed to complement the emergency planning and preparedness work undertaken by Local Government Authorities and larger agencies including the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) and Red Cross Australia. It is also aligned with the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Framework (Plan).

The LMPHU Murray Team will conduct an evaluation in early 2026. It will assess the efficacy of Go Pack! as a tool to help people with cognitive disability understand, and prepare, for an emergency.

## Lessons learned

### Nothing about us, without us

Pre-packed emergency bags can protect human safety and lives. It's not just about the bag and what's inside, it's about the conversation it sparks, particularly for people living rurally, with intellectual and cognitive disability.

The LMPHU engaged 20 participants (and their carers / support people) from Vivid and CLRS (Echuca) to design the Go Pack! an emergency preparedness bag. Complementing Campaspe Shire's Emergency Planning work, together with the First 72 hours framework, participants were engaged in a co-design process. This occurred through a face-to-face facilitated workshop and general feedback (survey).

During the workshop, participants shared their lived experience of the 2022 floods. They described how it made them feel (scared, confused) together with items they might pack "next time".

Participants reached consensus that "The bag should be green, as the green traffic light means "go".

"The bag should be called "Go Pack!" because "that tells us what we need to do".

Participants told us which icons were easy to understand, and which weren't. For example, packaged food is easier to understand when linked with a muesli bar icon, not a can.

Importantly, participants told us which items were vital to pack. These are listed in descending order (columns) on the back of the bag.



Vivid Echuca participants with the Go Pack! bag



## Lessons learned (continued)

Finally, participants told us that a backpack would be easier to pack and carry their belongings. They said the current bag – designed for the general community – is difficult to carry (one strap) and it does not have a zip.



Vivid participants and staff with Go Pack! emergency preparedness bag



Vivid participant Josh Cheep showcases Go Pack!, Riverine Herald, Tuesday December 2 (Page 1)

## Next steps

On 27 November a 'packing day' was held onsite at Vivid and CLRS. Participants and staff members from these organisations, plus LMPHU, Campaspe Shire and Intereach packed 1000 bags for the first stage rollout (Campaspe Shire).

Distribution of the bags (Campaspe Shire) is anticipated through January and February (2026).

Distribution of bags across the Gannawarra, Swan Hill and Buloke LGAs will occur during the same period.

Evaluation of the project will occur in March 2026.

### Feedback from Vivid participant Josh Cheep on the co-design process and assisting with packing the bags:

*"For me, it's the best thing I ever did. I live near the Campaspe River, and I actually got to see the floods a couple of years ago. For people with disabilities like myself, I like this bag because it's very visual, and they've got pictures of what goes in".*

### Broader applicability

Should further bags be produced, VICSES has suggested additional information to be included. Specifically, a one-page document with detail on Vic Emergency and Emergency+apps, translation services and local radio stations.

Expansion of the Go Pack! project could also assist delivery of workshops for NDIS participants and their families / carers, to embed emergency preparation in their lives.

Further funding may assist in the expansion of Go Pack! bags into wider regional / rural communities.