



This is about making so many of the wrong things that happened at Pike River and afterwards, right. But it's bigger than Pike, it's about being clear in our actions, not just our words, that as New Zealanders we look after each other and we do the right thing. The Public Service has the power to make the next tragedy better or worse for people involved. In the name of the men we lost - make it better.”

- ANNA OSBORNE, STAND WITH PIKE FAMILIES REFERENCE GROUP



When things go wrong, public servants are there to help and bring their spirit of service. My hope is that these standards will give public servants the space to pause, reflect and do what they know is right.

- PETER HUGHES, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONER

Tā te whakarauora kōrero | The survivors' story

People in New Zealand experience loss as a result of a large-scale catastrophic event much more often than anyone would like. The underground explosion at the Pike River Mine on 19 November 2010 was one such catastrophe. Two men in the mine drift managed to escape. The twenty-nine men deeper in the mine are believed to have died immediately, or shortly afterwards. Their loved ones were left to survive the catastrophe.

New Zealanders have faced many tragedies over our history. In recent memory there have been several other traumatic events that have rocked the entire country. They include those that are natural disasters and those caused by people, such as the terrorist attacks on the Christchurch mosques in 2019, the Whakaari/White Island eruption in 2019, and the CTV Building Collapse in 2011.



“We are offering our learning as a legacy, to improve the experience of future survivors.”



“As public servants, we have an opportunity to learn from the experiences that the survivors are sharing to improve the way we work with future survivors.”

Te whānuitanga o ngā taumata | Scope of the standards

The *Working with Survivors* model standards set out the Public Service Commissioner’s minimum expectations for Public Service agencies and their staff and support them to work with and empower survivors of large-scale catastrophic events. They have been developed with the Stand with Pike Family Reference Group, who have shared their perspectives as survivors of the Pike River mining disasters, and who consulted with survivors from most of New Zealand’s large-scale catastrophic events in the last 35 years from the Aramoana massacre through to the Whakaari | White Island eruption.

Large-scale catastrophic events include both natural disasters and those caused by people. The events have casualties and also create large groups of survivors who suffered traumatic loss and need collective support from multiple parts of the Public Service. Recovery may be a long-term process for these survivors and they may continue to receive support into the future.

Survivors may include physically injured or psychologically affected people, bereaved and affected whānau, and members of the wider community including those based offshore.

Te whāinga o ngā taumata | The goal of the standards

The goal of the *Working with Survivors* model standards is to marshal the services available across government around all survivors of large-scale catastrophic events.



“We want survivors to receive the support and help they are entitled to in a way that is responsive to their cultural needs, and personal situation.”

To provide effective services, we follow and support the journey that survivors go through after a catastrophic event:

- The immediate aftermath, when the focus is on the necessities of life, reuniting with loved ones, and connecting with support networks who may not be local
- The adjustment to the new normal, when the focus is on getting day-to-day life back on track,
- The search for truth and justice, when the focus is on getting to the bottom of what happened, learning from the catastrophic event and healing.

For each of these over-lapping phases, the needs and aspirations of survivors will be different. Further, the impact of a catastrophic event is invariably wider than is immediately obvious. By listening to understand

individual perspectives, agencies will be better prepared to provide the support needed. The ability of agencies to ‘deliver’, at times amid chaos, is a critical component. It is important that agencies are present and actively involved at a local level. The Public Service needs to stay connected for the recovery and face issues directly.



“I thought that once I worked through this then eventually I would come out the other side and I would be able to reclaim who I am. Now I know as you work through it you never become the person that you used to be before the trauma - you are forever changed.”

Te whakamahi i ngā uara ratonga tūmatanui | Public service values in action

These model standards contain high level principles to guide how public servants should interact with survivors. They are not intended to provide guidance on how the Public Service responds to the large-scale catastrophic event itself, as New Zealand already has a comprehensive emergency management regime in place governed by the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002.

There are three key elements to the *Working with Survivors* model standards:

1. **Empower survivors:** Survivors may have lost their power and agency, and their ability to make decisions may be compromised. Support from the Public Service can help to empower survivors.
2. **Be upfront:** Survivors need to know what happened. They need open and honest communication.
3. **Work together:** To ensure that survivors get clear messages and equitable support, public servants work together.

The *Working with Survivors* model standards build on and explain how the public service values, recently enacted in the Public Service Act 2020, apply when working with survivors of large-scale catastrophic events. Demonstrating these values will ultimately lead to better delivery of public services to survivors, motivated by aroha ki te tangata and genuine empathy. The values are:

| Responsive | Respectful | Trustworthy | Accountable | Impartial |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <p><i>We understand and meet people's needs and aspirations.</i></p> <p>Public servants take the time to listen, connect and understand survivors' journeys.</p> | <p><i>We treat all people with dignity and compassion and act with humility.</i></p> <p>Public servants partner with survivors and support them to make their own decisions over time.</p> | <p><i>We act with integrity and are open and transparent.</i></p> <p>The Public Service shares as much information as possible to ensure survivors get the information they need, in a way that best suits them.</p> | <p><i>We take responsibility for our work, actions and decisions.</i></p> <p>The Public Service supports survivors in high pressure situations. If mistakes are made in that process, we are upfront with survivors and try to make things right.</p> | <p><i>We treat all people fairly without favour or bias.</i></p> <p>Fair treatment of survivors means ensuring that all survivors are able to access the services to which they are entitled.</p> |

The focus of the model standards is on the behaviour of public servants, but our collective role as the Public Service provides important context. The role of the core Public Service includes supporting the Crown in its relationships with Māori under te Tiriti o Waitangi.¹ In responding to a large-scale catastrophic event, the urgency of the situation does not mean the Crown's Treaty obligations can be disregarded in favour of other interests. Instead, those obligations may well be more pressing or heightened and that must be factored into agencies' operational responses.²

In implementing these model standards, agencies should draw on the work they already have underway to develop and maintain the capability of the Public Service to engage with Māori and to understand Māori perspectives.³ Agencies should also consider how best to involve survivors and other citizens, as part of their implementation process.⁴

The model standards also complement other legislation and resources, including the National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan which sets out the roles and responsibilities of agencies in relation to an emergency and the Victims Code which sets out how people can expect to be treated when they are a victim of crime. These are discussed in more detail at the end of these standards.

¹ Section 14(1) of the Public Service Act 2020

² For further information on the Crown's Treaty obligations in a time of crisis see the WAI 2575 Waitangi Tribunal, *Haumaru – The COVID-19 Priority Report* (2021), particularly at pp 46-48.

³ Section 14(2)(a) of the Public Service Act 2020

⁴ See International Association Public Participation (IAP2), *A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery v 2* (2015) [here](#)

Te whakamana whakarauora Empower survivors

Me whai wā kia mārama ai | Take the time to understand

Every survivor is different, and their needs will be different. Services offered to survivors should be targeted to specific needs and contexts, including international linguistic and cultural contexts.

People don't always seek help even when they need it. It's important that agencies work quickly to identify and remove barriers that could be preventing survivors and communities from accessing the support they need.

It can be a common misconception that survivors need the most support during the immediate aftermath. For some, the impacts of the catastrophic event may be delayed. These impacts can include loss of income, having to move home repeatedly, the effects of living under prolonged stress, physical health problems, loss of social/support networks, relationship problems, and mental health disorders. Additional vulnerability may exist for direct survivors of the physical catastrophic event (whether injured or not), short-term visitors to New Zealand or non-residents who may be without their usual support network, and for all survivors across diversity dimensions such as children and adolescents, older adults, disabled people⁵, rainbow communities, and ethnic communities.

Survivors are vulnerable to further harm from secondary stressors, that is circumstances, events, or policies that are related to the catastrophic event and which worsen existing problems and complicate recovery.

It's important that agencies think about how to support survivors to address longer-term needs that may arise because of secondary stressors⁶.

There is little time to upskill in a crisis. Training staff who will be engaging with and supporting survivors before a catastrophic event occurs will ensure appropriate services are provided quickly. Training should strive to cover: the full range of normal reactions to abnormal circumstances; the wider social context and impact of catastrophic events on individuals and communities; how helpers' actions may help or hinder the recovery of others; recognition of signs that a person is struggling; how and where to refer survivors for more specialised support and a staff wellbeing component to assist staff involved in the response. Training should also emphasise the importance of holding regular organisational debriefings, including with survivors.

As employers, agencies should be mindful that public servants working on the response may themselves have lost loved ones and so be survivors. Agencies should take the time to determine who in the workforce may be in this situation, and what support they might need.

Model standards:

- Survivors and their communities are listened to and supported to determine when and how they access services.
- Where survivors choose collective representation and/or advocacy, agencies respect this choice.
- Decisions are shared with survivors where that is possible. Where it is not possible, they are at least informed of the process and timing of any decisions that will have a significant impact on them.

⁵ We use the 'social model' of disability - more information about this can be found [here](#)

⁶ Ministry of Health, *Framework for Psychosocial Support in Emergencies* (2016) Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Āwhinatia ngā whakarauora ki te kuhu i a rātou | Help survivors to help themselves

Initially, the effect of grief and trauma can make it hard for survivors to absorb information and/or to make decisions. As part of the shift from aftermath to recovery, survivors will move along a continuum from needing support to make decisions, towards needing their power back.

Services that empower survivors and enhance mana are crucial for the recovery process to be effective and sustainable. Survivors emphasise the importance of supportive partnerships. Effective services after catastrophic events support these partnerships so survivors and their communities work towards determining their own path.

Survivors may choose to engage individually with agencies or support each other as a group to engage with agencies with a collective voice.



"Right from the start the families sticking together was all that gave us some little say over what was happening in response to the [Pike River] explosion and everything that happened afterwards. Where we had to deal with government agencies as individuals that power was lost to us."

Agencies need to recognise that collective representation can be empowering for survivors and make sharing information and decision-making easier for agencies. Where survivors wish to work collectively agencies should make every effort to facilitate this. For this to work best, it is good to have a formal process for recording and confirming that each survivor is and continues to be comfortable with this collective representation. Formal representation can ensure everyone has a voice. This should also be discussed with the group early on as part of setting up the relationship and within the scope of the agencies' respective roles. It is not unusual for survivors to have differing views, including as to representation, and their views may change. Agencies need to be mindful of that. Even if a person says they have authority to speak for the group, that may not always be the case.

Individually or collectively, survivors may choose to engage with agencies through an external representative. External representation can help to balance the capability and capacity of agencies with that of survivors. Agencies are experts in their own services and have access to many resources. Survivors may choose to access advice and advocacy from outside the Public Service to help them through the process.

Me whakaoti ngātahi i ngā whakatau i ngā wā e taea ana | Share decision-making where possible

Finding ways to share decision-making with survivors helps to ensure that actions taken by agencies are aligned with survivors' needs. Sharing decision-making will also empower survivors and build mana.

Where survivors are working together, agencies can support this by having a clear record of how all survivors will be part of any shared decision-making, particularly if some are not represented by a collective.

While not all decisions can be placed in the hands of survivors, in most cases survivors can participate in the process. As an example, the partnership agreement between the Pike River Recovery Agency and the Stand with Pike Family Reference Group records agreement to share decision-making around the content of advice to the Minister including how to identify disparate views if agreement cannot be reached.

Where decisions cannot be shared, for example due to the Privacy Act 2020 or other statutory constraints, this must be communicated clearly with survivors, including providing an explanation of the nature and extent of the constraints. At a minimum, survivors must be kept informed as to any decision-making process and its timeline. Options that can sometimes be appropriate are to include survivors in agency meetings as active listeners, proactively briefing survivors, and entering partnership arrangements that bind both parties. These options can be particularly helpful to survivors as they move through the truth and justice phase of recovery and seek accountability from those involved in the catastrophe.

Kia matanui | Be upfront

No one wants to deliver bad news and we all like to hope for the best. Having open and honest communication is the most important consideration in building trust and collaboration, but it is not always easy.

For survivors, not getting all the information brings with it increased feelings of helplessness, loss of trust and setbacks in recovery. Survivors need to trust the information, even if it's really hard to hear.

Information must be timely, consistent, and should be provided in plain language, in ways that are accessible to everyone.⁷ Agencies will consider how best to support different cultural and language needs. For instance, even if a person can speak multiple languages, in stressful situations being provided information in a person's first language works best. Taking an inclusive and culturally aware approach from the outset, requires recognition that survivors are best served by tailored support. Survivors will never be a homogenous group.⁸

Model standards:

- There is open and honest communication with survivors, in the ways that best suits their needs.
- Information is provided to survivors as soon as possible, even when it is hard to hear.
- Where it is not possible to provide certainty or to answer questions that have been asked, survivors are provided with an explanation and reasonable expectations are set.

⁷ For further information see Ministry of Social Development, Accessibility Guide: Leading the way in accessible information (2nd edition, 2020) [here](#)

⁸ See National Emergency Management Agency Review of Recoveries (2018) at pp 18-19 [here](#)

Kōrerohia tāu e mōhio ana – i te wā e mōhio ana | Communicate what you know – when you know

In the aftermath of a catastrophic event, communication to survivors cannot always wait until all information is available. Catastrophic events are often quickly changing situations requiring speedy decisions from survivors. If there is uncertainty about what has happened or when a service will be available, clearly explain that to survivors and let them know when there will be more information available. Even in the most difficult of circumstances, people are calmer and more patient when they know what is happening.

A simple matrix for deciding whether to share information with survivors is:

| | Facts | Probabilities | Speculation |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Share with survivors? | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Other information to provide to survivors | The evidence that supports the facts | The analysis that supports the probability | The evidence that refutes any speculation in the public arena |

A useful communication model is: What we know; what we don't know; what we are doing (short and long term); what we need you (the survivors) to do (short and long term). Engaging openly with survivors, responding to questions, and receiving information and feedback will ensure that the communication content and processes are relevant to 'where people are' on their recovery journey⁹.

Kia mahitahi | Work together

Whakamāramatia te wāhi ki a koe | Explain your role

A clear understanding of agency roles and powers (including as mandated by legislation), and clear communication of the scope of those roles, will help not just survivors but other public servants, agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders in providing support. Role clarity is critical.

It can be complex trying to navigate government services, especially after a catastrophic event.

It is inevitable that in some areas services will overlap and survivors will be able to choose which services to access. Clear, easily accessible information explaining the

Model standards:

- Public servants working with survivors know and can explain, their own role and scope of powers, the role of their agency, and how those fit into the overall system of government services.
- In the aftermath of a catastrophic event, agencies join up with other agencies and service providers to offer a holistic view of support.

⁹ See International Association Public Participation (IAP2), *A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery v 2* (2015) [here](#)

services each agency provides, options available, and any criteria for accessing those services helps survivors to make informed choices for themselves.

A ‘no wrong door’ approach from the public service has agencies doing the work of finding the correct agency/provider to then facilitate connecting with survivors when survivors come to them looking for support that is outside of their role or mandate. It is important that agencies that are not regionally represented to move quickly to understand the context and support the locally led approach. Agencies need to change their behavioural norms in a crisis and be responsive and dynamic in their responses.

Hono atu i te wā e tika ana | Join up wherever we can

As part of planning for recovery before a catastrophic event, agencies should consider how they fit within the overall system of government services. This includes identifying and working to resolve any legislative conflicts that exist. While the best intentions urge public servants to rush in and try to help, taking the time to join up with other agencies and service providers can result in better support for survivors. Everyday service delivery methods will not always be fit for purpose in response to a large-scale catastrophic event where many agencies are all trying to help. Survivors report feeling overwhelmed and retraumatised as they tell their story over and over to each new person.

Agencies can sometimes have a more positive impact by supporting the relationships other agencies already hold with survivors rather than sending their own people. It also helps to align with locally lead activity and stakeholders, including local government and iwi who often have a significant role in the response. For example, following a catastrophic event the local iwi, as mana whenua, will have cultural responsiveness obligations, including kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga. Agencies should consider how best to support such efforts, whilst also being mindful of any capacity constraints. The best way to do this is to build strong trust based relationships in advance that give due recognition to the mana and status of those involved. Developing cohesive, shared values and approaches with local stakeholders outside of the Public Service and involving them in the response from the start, can be challenging but can go a long way in improving the experience of survivors. Experience has shown that responses that are locally led, regionally enabled, and nationally supported work best.

When identifying the best person to talk to survivors, agencies will keep in mind the general principle that fewer voices make it easier to maintain a clear message. Agencies will ask survivors how they want to receive and contribute information. It may be via someone they already know, for instance an iwi or hapū representative, local spokesperson, a navigator, or an intermediary. Also, in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophic event, survivors’ ability to engage is compromised. They may not know how they want to receive information, or they may not want to engage at all at that stage – but it is important to note that this attitude may change over time. If survivors are not represented by a collective, documented methods need to exist about how these survivors’ views will still inform the decision-making process.

Key connectors identified by agencies can build relationships and trust to help ensure messages are getting through to survivors in the difficult aftermath phase. Options include:

- Individual case managers
- Family liaisons
- System-wide navigators
- Communications professionals to think through how to respond to media interest

Once survivors are ready to engage, they may also identify key communicators. Some options are:

- Local spokespeople
- Representatives of iwi, hapū or relevant pan Māori organisations
- Victim advocates
- Professional intermediaries
- Agencies need to think about what media liaison/support they may be able to offer, where appropriate.

Agencies will maintain effective communication as key connectors and communicators transition from one agency to another (for example when the immediate aftermath response ends, and survivors move on to being primarily supported by social services). Documented handover meetings, attended by both survivors and agency representatives, are recommended as they can provide additional clarity and assurance for survivors during the transition period. This is also likely to assist if the point of contact within an agency needs to change, although that should be avoided where possible. Agencies will sometimes also be a liaison between survivors/families and Ministers/their offices and will need to be as open and transparent as possible in coordinating and facilitating access and information-sharing.

Hononga ki ētahi atu ture, rauemi hoki | Relationship to other legislation and resources

To be effective, these model standards need to be understood in the wider context. The Working with Survivors model standards are designed to complement existing national frameworks and international instruments that may govern agency responses in particular circumstances. This includes the National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan Order 2015 (the National CDEM Plan), issued under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002.

The National CDEM Plan sets out the roles and responsibilities of agencies in relation to an emergency. Not all large-scale catastrophic events will meet the definition of an emergency, but many will and for those that do not, the same key agencies are likely to be involved in the response. The Plan aims to bring together agencies' civil defence, emergency management planning, and related operational activities at the national level.

The National CDEM Plan includes co-ordination of welfare services to support individuals, families and whānau, and communities in being ready for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. Psychosocial support¹⁰ is a sub-function of welfare services. The Ministry of Health is the agency responsible for coordinating psychosocial support during and after an emergency. Psychosocial support during an emergency and throughout the recovery period (irrespective of the duration) aims to ease the physical,

¹⁰ Psychosocial support refers to the actions that address both the mental and emotional needs of individuals and social needs of individuals, families, and communities.

psychological, and social difficulties for individuals, families/whānau, and communities, as well as enhancing wellbeing. Effective psychosocial recovery ensures that other aspects of the recovery process (e.g. rebuilding) do not result in further harm to individuals or their communities.

The model standards also complement the Victims Code. The Victims Code sets out the principles and entitlements in the Victims' Rights Act 2002. It sets out how people can expect to be treated when they're a victim of crime. Key principles include respect, fair treatment, informed choice, and communication. The principles of the Victims Code are expected to be followed by any person, organisation, or government agency that provides services to victims.

Resources

- [Code of Victims Rights](#)
- [Guide to the National CDEM Plan](#)
- [Welfare Services in an Emergency – Director's Guideline](#)
- [Policy methods toolbox for community engagement](#)
- [Mental Health Education and Resource Centre- tool to help survivors to help themselves](#)

Te whai kia pai haere tonu | Continual improvement

The Working with Survivors model standards are a first step in a journey of continual improvement. The Commission is grateful to the Stand with Pike Family Reference Group for starting this journey. The model standards will be updated as survivors and agencies share their experiences and ideas. We welcome feedback from survivors and agencies at any time. You can provide feedback to enquiries@publicservice.govt.nz.