

Australian Red Cross Submission to the Australian Government's consultation on Postal Services Modernisation

1. Summary

- Australia Post plays an important role in supporting Australian communities before, during and after a disaster. This role is critical and can be strengthened, particularly considering the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters.
- Australian Red Cross is grateful for the strong partnership it has with Australia Post that allows it to reach hundreds of thousands of Australians with important information and resources on disaster preparedness and welcomes any opportunity to strengthen and embed the partnership in emergency management strategies across the country.

2. Australian Red Cross and Australia Post

Introduction

Australian Red Cross (Red Cross) welcomes this review of Australia Post and the opportunity to input our expertise and experience in response to the public discussion paper. We acknowledge the important – albeit changing – role postal services play in the lives of Australian communities, individuals and businesses. As modes of communication evolve, so should the services that support them.

For more than 100 years, Australian Red Cross has had a role in helping people in Australia respond to, recover from and prepare for disasters and other emergencies. Red Cross is part of the world's largest humanitarian network and have been working alongside and embedded in communities, responding to all major disasters and incorporating the lessons learnt into our work, and in our partnerships. Alongside this work, for over 30 years, Red Cross has responded to the humanitarian needs of migrants experiencing vulnerability.

Red Cross is one of 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the world's largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

Since 1941 when a Royal Charter established an *auxiliary role* for Red Cross, we have had a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of not only government, but

Australian society as a whole. Red Cross also has embedded staff, membership and volunteers across Australia and a deep reserve of evidence, experience and expertise.

Red Cross follows the seven Fundamental Principles to their complete and true sense: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles are at the very core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

Australian Red Cross and Australia Post Partnership

Red Cross is proud to partner with Australia Post to support Australians before, during and after disasters. The partnership – as detailed below – exemplifies the importance of the organisation and of postal services to modern Australian life. As well as practical support for communities, since 2019 Australia Post has raised more than \$1.8 million¹ to support people impacted by disasters across the country. Together, we have developed a partnership that focusses on supporting the community before, during and after disasters.

Red Cross' submission below responds to parts 3 and 4 of the public discussion paper.

3. Postal Services Modernisation

3.1 How can Australia Post best support the community?

Recommendations:

Red Cross:

- 1. Supports the continued, and expanded, resourcing of Australia Post's disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities.**
- 2. Recommends for Australia Post to learn from the experience and service offerings of international postal services to strengthen and expand its current activities to meet humanitarian needs.**
- 3. Recommends for Australia Post to investigate how it can support multicultural communities – including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees – by expanding its service offerings (as per the above suggestions) to meet humanitarian needs.**

Australia Post's extensive network of post offices and delivery services – spanning over 4,300 post offices and 14,000 street post boxes across Australia² – uniquely places it to serve Australian communities. Particularly those communities that do not have access to other services. Such an extensive network – and the physical infrastructure that supports it – is critical for Australia Post to support the community.

¹ Australia Post, 'We're delivering the goods for disaster impacted communities, <https://auspost.com.au/about-us/supporting-communities/disaster-relief> [Accessed 28 March 2023]

² Australia Post, 'Delivering like never before: 2022 Annual Report', https://auspost.com.au/content/dam/auspost_corp/media/documents/2022-australia-post-annual-report.pdf [Accessed 4 April 2023]

The continuation of providing essential postal services whilst adapting changing customer needs and preferences is critical. This should involve:

1. The expansion of digital products to improve accessibility, such as digital mailboxes,³ parcel lockers and e-commerce fulfilment.
2. Ensuring accessibility to all Australians, including those living in rural and remote areas, people with disability, older people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
3. Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship in the postal sector by Australia Post partnering with startups and other organisations to develop new products and services that fill service and accessibility gaps.
4. Promoting sustainability by reducing Australia Post's impact by adopting more sustainable practices, such as using electric vehicles and renewable energy for its physical locations.

Australia Post also has a specific and critical role in supporting Australians before, during and after disaster.

As Australia Post modernises, **Red Cross supports the continued, and expanded, resourcing of disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities.** These activities contribute to a safer and stronger Australia. As disasters increase in frequency and intensity.

This includes by providing information (such as preparedness resources before disaster, or evacuation advice during disasters), supporting emergency services by providing logistics and transportation services, offering services to disaster-impacted communities, and facilitating Australia-wide support for communities.

In its strategic plan, Australia Post has identified the following critical output:

'Increased distribution of information to help communities prepare for and recover from disaster'.⁴

Using its network of trucks and Post Offices, Australia Post:

- Delivered essential medical supplies to more than 24,000 vulnerable Australians through its *Pharmacy Home Delivery Service* during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵
- Partnered with Australian Red Cross to deliver essential food and medical supplies to Victorian communities facing vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Facilitated food relief for charities such as Foodbank in the aftermath of the northern NSW flood event.⁶

³ Australia Post, 'MyPost: How It Works', <https://auspost.com.au/mypost/how-to/digital-mailbox.html> [Accessed 21 April 2023]

⁴ Australia Post, 'Delivering like never before: 2022 Annual Report'

⁵ Australia Post, 'Australia post extends essential medical supplies deliveries to support vulnerable community members', https://www.psa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/200925_AusPost_MR.pdf [Accessed 4 April 2023]

⁶ Australia Post, 'Delivering like never before: 2022 Annual Report'

This has translated into the following important disaster preparedness activities:

- Supporting Australian Red Cross Emergency Ready Week through the promotion of our online, educational *Disaster Preparedness Quiz* to more than 750,000 households via a postcard, and national radio and digital campaigns. 86% of people who took the quiz reported that they felt more prepared for disaster.⁷
- Hosting a webinar for business customers on '*Connecting Australians in times of need*', which included panellists: Commissioner of Resilience NSW, National Resilience Advisor from Australian Red Cross, and the Postal Manager at Narooma Post Office.
- The launch of a refreshed 'Business & Government Disaster Toolkit' for Government departments and agencies, which was downloaded over 1,500 times in 2022.
- The launch of a 'Businesses Disaster Readiness Guide' for small and medium businesses which was downloaded over 6,480 times.⁸

Australia Post, in response to floods in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales, supported Australian Red Cross through the activation of its Disaster Response Plane, including by:

- Raising over \$197,000 for the Australian Red Cross Floods Appeal which assisted us to provide cash relief grants to impacted communities.
- Raising an additional \$34,500 for the Australia Red Cross Disaster Response and Recovery Fund via the Australia Post online shop, 'round-up' and over the counter donations.
- Using Post Offices to distribute Australian Red Cross Relief Grant information, as well as mental health information in partnership with Beyond Blue.⁹

In addition, Australia Post:

- Provided free mail direction services to over 2,774 households who could not return home due to disaster.
- Deployed a Mobile Post Office van and pop-up delivery facilities to Lismore post-disaster.¹⁰
- Used Australia Post trucks and networks to facilitate food relief for charities such as Foodbank.

Australia Post also plays an important role in allowing people to access services in the immediate aftermath of disaster, by:

- Launching the Australia Post Digital iD app which allows people to store all their important documents in one place. This makes it particularly easy for people who may have lost documents by way of disaster to access services that require proof of identity.¹¹

⁷ Australian Red Cross, 'Emergency Preparedness Campaign 2022 Report'.

⁸ Australia Post, 'Delivering like never before: 2022 Annual Report'

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Australia Post, 'Digital iD', <https://www.digitalid.com/personal> [Accessed 4 April 2023]

- Providing access to cash through Bank@Post. If local banking facilities are impacted by disaster, people can make withdrawals, deposits and balance enquiries in Post Offices.¹²
- Offering identification verification and document renewal services.¹³

An expansion of resource for disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities will see the above activities reach more people, and allow for innovation to further meet humanitarian needs.

It is important to note that postal services across the world – including the Royal Mail,¹⁴ New Zealand Post,¹⁵ Japan Post,¹⁶ and United States Postal Service¹⁷ – also support their respective communities before, during and after disaster. **Red Cross recommends for Australia Post to learn from the experience and service offerings of international postal services to strengthen and expand its current activities in order to meet humanitarian needs.** Particularly in regard to the distribution of information and resources on disaster preparedness and partnering with emergency services to distribute essential supplies and coordinate response efforts.

Australia Post also has an important role in supporting multicultural communities – including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Red Cross endorses Australia Post in offering supports including by:

- Offering multilingual services,
- Celebrating cultural diversity through its products and promotions,
- Providing access to diverse products such as international newspapers and magazines, international calling cards, and remittance services,
- Providing access to government services such as passport applications and visa applications in languages other than English,
- Ensuring access to identity verification and document authentication services,
- Partnering with government and non-government organisations – including Red Cross – to provide information on settlement services, and
- Ensuring its services are accessible and affordable to communities facing vulnerabilities, such as refugees and asylum seekers.

3.2 Are there other services Australia Post could provide to better support community?

Recommendations:

¹² Australia Post, 'Bank@Post', <https://auspost.com.au/money-insurance/banking-and-paying-bills/bank-at-post> [Accessed 4 April 2023]

¹³ Australia Post, 'ID & document services', <https://auspost.com.au/id-and-document-services> [Accessed 4 April 2023]

¹⁴ Royal Mail, 'Climate risks and opportunities', <https://www.royalmail.com/sustainability/environment/climate-risks-and-opportunities> [Accessed 20 April 2023]

¹⁵ New Zealand Post, 'Red Cross and NZ Post, a decade of delivering for good', <https://www.nzpost.co.nz/about-us/sustainability/delivering-for-our-communities/red-cross> [Accessed 20 April]

¹⁶ The Register, 14 March 2023, 'Japan Post closer to replacing snail mail with autonomous drones', https://www.theregister.com/2023/03/14/japan_post_wing_drones/ [Accessed 21 April]

¹⁷ United States Office of Inspector General, 2020, 'The US Postal Service and Emergency Response: A History of Delivering for the American Public' [Accessed 20 April 2023]

Red Cross recommends:

1. **That Australia Post take advantage of its extensive network of post offices and delivery services to address modern challenges and to work with communities to understand their needs and solve the challenges they face such as wholistic financial services support and proactively responding to future public health challenges**
2. **An expansion of its partnership with Australia Post to strengthen its critical role in supporting communities before, during and after disaster.**
3. **That federal, state and territory governments investigate how they can embed the Australian Red Cross–Australia Post partnership into established emergency response plans.**

One of the key gaps in addressing disaster resilience and disaster preparedness across the country is providing communities with access to timely and relevant information to help them make informed decisions before, during and after disasters. There is an opportunity to leverage Australia Post’s capabilities to deliver timely and relevant information to communities.

Red Cross knows from experience that when people have access to accurate and timely information and are empowered to make their own decisions it can reduce trauma during and after disasters. Australia Post can play a major role contributing to the access of information before, during and after disasters. This could be through both displaying and distributing messaging at local post offices across the country and to delivery messages to households in targeted areas, through digital, hard copy or other means.

Red Cross recommends that Australia Post take advantage of its extensive network of post offices and delivery services to address modern challenges and to work with communities to understand their needs and solve the challenges they face such as wholistic financial services support and proactively responding to future public health challenges. As service offerings, this could include:

- **Financial services:** Australia Post could expand its range of financial services, such as providing low-cost banking services, financial counselling, and support for financial literacy programs. This would be particularly important for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees experiencing vulnerability, and in communities impacted by cost-of-living pressures.
- **Health services:** Australia Post could partner with healthcare providers to offer health services – as Japan Post does¹⁸, such as public health promotion learning from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, health assessments, blood pressure monitoring, and flu vaccinations, at post offices.

¹⁸ Nikkei Asia, 18 November 2016, ‘Postal workers to deliver senior services under Japan tie-up’, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Postal-workers-to-deliver-senior-services-under-Japan-tie-up> [Accessed 21 April 2023]

Red Cross recommends an expansion of its partnership with Australia Post to strengthen its critical role in supporting communities before, during and after disaster.

There is an also opportunity to embed the Red Cross–Australia Post relationship into emergency response plans across federal, state and territory agencies. For example, when such plans are activated, Red Cross and Australia Post could be resourced to immediately disseminate information in the community and digitally, and leverage the Australia Post network to help transport essential resources to impacted communities.

Red Cross recommends federal, state and territory governments, including the National Emergency Management Agency, investigate how they can embed the Australian Red Cross–Australia Post partnership into established emergency response plans.

