

Human Health and Social Impacts Node

Research Showcase

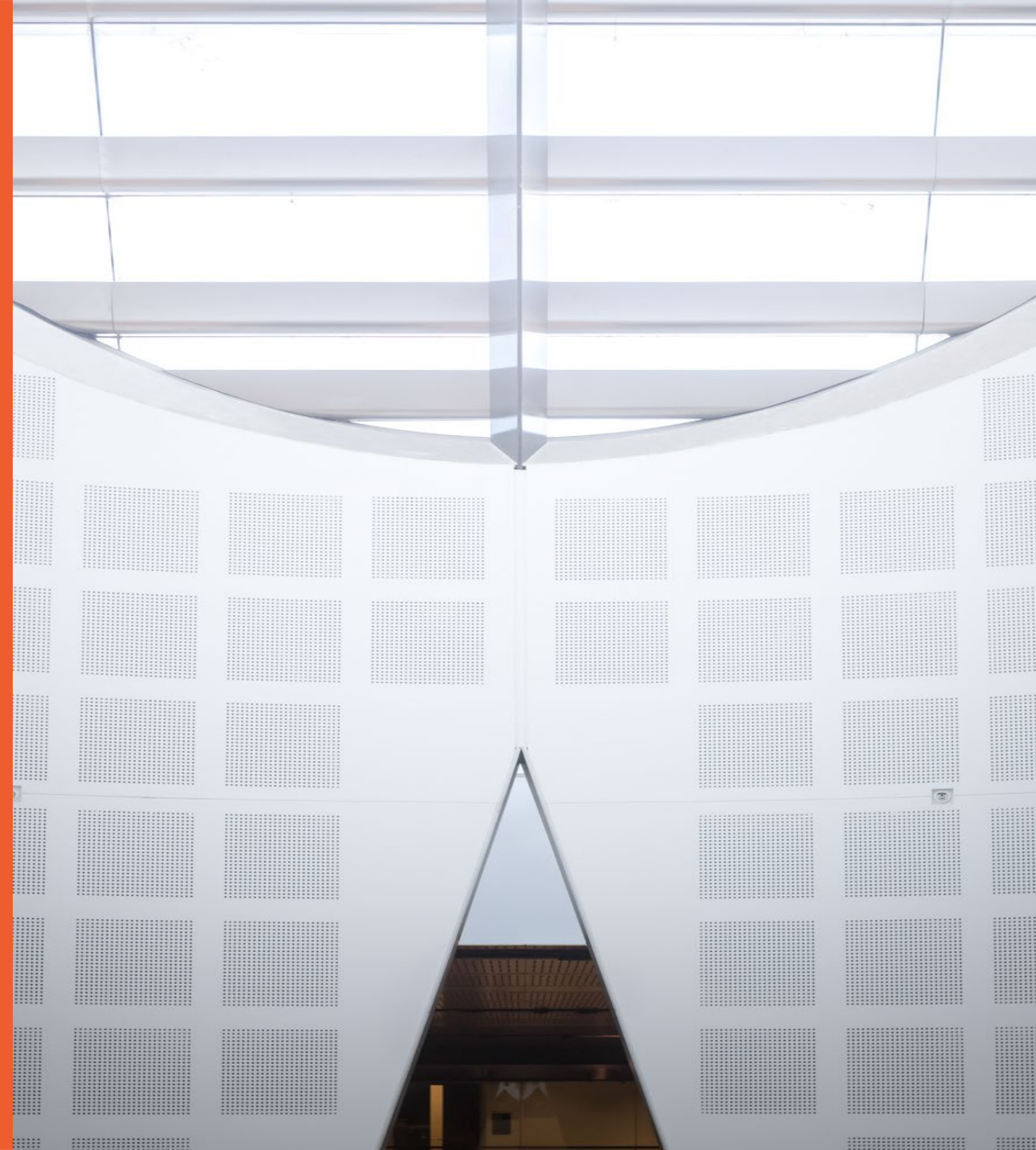
The Community Recovery After Flood study

Dr Jo Longman
University Centre for Rural
Health (University of Sydney)

March 31st 2020, 1-3pm



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



Background

- 2017 Cyclone Debbie: extreme rainfall across Northern Rivers region within 24hrs, devastating flooding



Artist *Theresa Mason*

Aim

To explore associations between mental health and:

- degree of flood damage
- adequacy of pre-flood mitigation/warning systems and relief service response
- level of personal and community resilience

to inform existing and future service provision

Methods

- A cross-sectional survey, using a community-academic partnership approach

Findings

- Over 2,500 local residents responded
- Almost all respondents were affected by some level of flood damage
- Socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups were more likely to have their homes inundated and to be displaced
- Respondents 'still not home' after six months had double the probability of reporting continuing distress and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression when compared to those who were briefly displaced
- Feelings of belonging and informal social connectedness such as chatting with neighbours and spending time with friends reduced risk of probable post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression

Policy implications / recommendations for future research

- Disaster risk reduction strategies need to involve all stakeholders, including community representatives and organisations working with people most at-risk
- Mental health impact evident six months after the flood. Disaster recovery programs should extend beyond the immediate aftermath
- In disaster response, develop individually tailored and sensitive mental health care-pathways specific to experiences and risk factors
- Critical to re-home people quickly to mitigate the impact of displacement
- Initiatives which promote social cohesion and well-being may mitigate negative mental health and wellbeing outcomes of an extreme weather related event