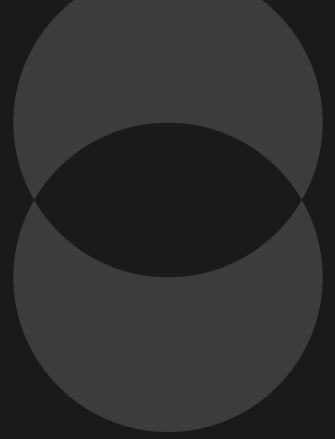




Jasper's Wildfire Recovery

A Socio-economic Perspective on Disaster Recovery

Recovery as an interconnected system

The 2024 Jasper wildfire underscores the need for a more comprehensive and nationally consistent approach to integrating socio-economic considerations into disaster recovery across Canada. Recovery extends beyond the restoration of physical infrastructure, encompassing an interconnected system of environmental remediation, insurance, housing, workforce capacity, business continuity, and community wellbeing. Impacts within one domain can generate cascading effects across others, influencing recovery outcomes. Jasper illustrates how variations in local capacity, governance arrangements, and resource availability can shape recovery experiences. Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of embedding socio-economic considerations within recovery planning and governance frameworks to support more coordinated, adaptive, and resilient recovery outcomes.

Cascading challenges

Jasper's recovery highlighted several interconnected challenges that influenced recovery timelines, outcomes, and community resilience. These challenges underscored the complexity of coordinating recovery across environmental, financial, housing, economic, and social systems.

- **Debris removal and environmental remediation:** Debris removal, soil testing, and environmental remediation required extensive coordination among governments, contractors, insurers, and regulators. While necessary for safe rebuilding, these processes added complexity to early recovery efforts and highlighted the need for greater role clarity and coordination.
- **Insurance and financial pressures:** Insurance played a critical role in recovery, although experiences varied. Rising construction costs and prolonged rebuilding timelines created challenges, particularly for businesses with limited interruption coverage. The recovery highlighted the need to better align insurance systems with evolving disaster realities.
- **Funding and recovery assistance:** While recovery was supported through government assistance, insurance, and community-based funding, eligibility restrictions, coverage limitations, and differing timelines created gaps for some residents, businesses, and recovery activities. Needs such as soil remediation and extended business interruption were not always fully addressed, highlighting the importance of flexible funding mechanisms and the role of not-for-profit organizations in providing timely support throughout recovery.
- **Housing and workforce capacity:** The wildfire destroyed approximately 30 per cent of Jasper's structures and intensified existing housing shortages. Limited housing constrained workforce availability, business reopening, service restoration, and broader economic recovery.

- **Business recovery:** Occurring during peak tourism season, the wildfire considerably affected local businesses. Revenue losses, labour shortages, rising costs, and uncertain rebuilding timelines created ongoing pressures.
- **Community wellbeing and long-term recovery:** Displacement, uncertainty, and prolonged recovery timelines affected residents' wellbeing, highlighting the importance of sustained mental health, case management, and community support services throughout recovery.

Innovation and adaptation during recovery

Despite the scale and complexity of the wildfire, Jasper's recovery demonstrated important strengths in coordination, innovation, and community collaboration. Governments established coordinated governance structures, including the Jasper Recovery Coordination Centre, which aligned efforts across federal, provincial, municipal, not-for-profit, and community partners.

Collaboration across governments, not-for-profit organizations, local businesses, and community organizations enabled adaptive decision-making and practical recovery solutions under evolving conditions. Several initiatives helped maintain recovery momentum and support residents and businesses during a highly challenging period, including flexible funding mechanisms, policy adjustments, interim housing initiatives, temporary business spaces, expanded social supports, and community-led recovery efforts.

Pre-existing relationships, trust, and strong community networks further supported coordination across sectors, demonstrating the value of adaptive governance, cross-sector partnerships, and community-based leadership in complex disaster recovery efforts.

Implications for Canadian disaster leaders

Jasper's experience highlights the need for a more integrated and proactive approach to disaster recovery in Canada. Recovery is not solely a reconstruction challenge, but a complex socio-economic process requiring coordinated governance, adaptive decision-making, and sustained cross-sector collaboration. The recovery also demonstrates how interconnected systems can create cascading impacts across housing, workforce availability, business continuity, infrastructure restoration, mental health, and community wellbeing, reinforcing the importance of comprehensive and community-centred recovery planning before disasters occur.

Key recommendations:

- **Strengthen recovery governance and coordination:** Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and pre-disaster partnerships to support coordinated recovery efforts across sectors.
- **Embed adaptive and agile recovery frameworks:** Enable timely decision-making, flexible policy adjustments, and coordinated action under evolving recovery conditions.
- **Enhance financial resilience:** Improve insurance literacy, claims navigation supports, and access to flexible funding mechanisms.
- **Improve preparedness for complex recovery operations:** Strengthen planning for debris management, soil remediation, surge capacity, and interim housing solutions.
- **Prioritize long-term community wellbeing:** Integrate sustained mental health, psychosocial, and community support services into recovery frameworks.

For the full research, see our impact paper [*Recovering Jasper: Understanding Disaster Recovery Through a Socio-economic Lens*](#).

