



# INFORMATION FOR AUSTRALIANS WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY BUSHFIRES

Bushfires are a devastating part of life for many people in Australia. They have a major effect on the lives of individuals, children, families and communities. The effect of a bushfire disaster is felt in the days, months and years following. This experience can be distressing and emotionally challenging. People can react in a variety of ways to these experiences.

It is not uncommon to have trouble adjusting and/or feel unsafe after a traumatic event. You may have some sleep disturbance, fear or anxiety. It is important to understand that you are not alone and that many other people will have similar feelings, or responses. The response to a trauma may be experienced immediately after the event or sometime much later.

Having distressing thoughts and feelings after a traumatic event is not a sign of personal weakness. However, when these responses persist or significantly affect your ability to return to your usual activities it may be necessary to seek additional support.

In particular, children absorb the tension, uncertainty, confusion and fear around them following traumatic events. Try to create a sense of calm. Reassure children that they are safe and there is someone there to take care of them.

## Prevention is better than cure

Recovery from exposure to traumatic events is often helped by talking it over with others. People who readily use formal and informal support from family, friends, clergy or other supports such as counselling generally recover better from stressful situations.

The Australian, State and Territory Governments provide services that can support recovery to tragic events, together with Local Government and local community groups, churches, cultural groups, and agencies.

## Australian Government mental health response to bushfire trauma

The Australian Government is providing \$76 million for mental health support for individuals, families and communities, including emergency services personnel affected by the bushfires. Activities include:

- providing immediate front line emergency distress and trauma counselling including up to 10 free mental health support sessions for individuals, families and emergency services personnel delivered by allied health professionals at recovery centres, Service Australia centres and mental health providers commissioned by Primary Health Networks
- up to 10 additional face to face and Telehealth Medicare rebateable psychological therapy sessions for people who require further support
- to assist with managing any increased demand for services, headspace sites in fire affected areas will also each be provided with up to an additional \$300 000 to ensure that young people can get support when they need it
- trauma informed care training for emergency services personnel and training emergency personnel employers in trauma informed personnel management

- providing funding for specialist organisations/s to provide post-traumatic stress disorder support to emergency services workers and their families to treat the effects of trauma, both now and after the immediate fire threat has passed
- establishing a pilot program to provide a support and mental health literacy network for emergency services workers and their families/kinship groups connecting those in need of clinical services in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues
- training will be rolled out over the next six months for front line emergency staff in trauma informed care and psychological first aid, this includes doctors, pharmacists, health professionals and organisations managing front line emergency staff
- bushfire trauma response coordinators to link individuals and communities with the right mental health supports through recovery centres and state and local services
- community connectedness and recovery grants to fund grass-roots level activities to help mental health and healing activities after the bushfires.

Further information on the Australian Government's bushfire response is available at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

## If you require care your GP is your gateway to mental health services

If you experience persistent issues that interfere with your life you are encouraged to talk to your GP, or for urgent mental health support contact the 24-hour contact number for your home state or territory on the other side of this fact sheet.

### FREE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT YOU

#### Emerging Minds' Community Trauma Toolkit

The Australian Government has funded Emerging Minds and the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health to put together a collection of evidence-based resources. The materials focus on supporting children and families during and in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

If you're a first responder, GP, health or social worker, parent or carer, an educator or community leader, these resources will support you to respond, in the most challenging of circumstances.

The toolkit is free and available at: <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit/>

#### Primary Health Networks supporting individuals and communities in recovery

Primary Health Networks play a critical role in supporting individuals and communities through the measures detailed below. You can find the contact details for all PHNs by visiting [www.health.gov.au/phn](http://www.health.gov.au/phn) and clicking on the map locator.

Bushfire Trauma Response Coordinators will be employed in fire affected regions to provide a single point of contact for individuals and communities to ensure the right mental health supports are offered in the right place at the right time.

PHN regions that have been severely affected will provide small community grants of up to \$10,000 for activities at the grass-roots level to strengthen social connectedness and peer support activities,

as well as assertive outreach initiatives to prevent suicide and identify post-traumatic stress disorder.

PHNs will also be provided with additional funding to expand their mental health services in fire affected regions. PHNs will be able to use this funding to provide tailored support based on the specific needs of local communities.

## Australian Psychological Society and Australian Red Cross

The Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Red Cross have a network of APS psychologists deployed through the Red Cross to provide assistance across bushfire affected areas.

There is a guide to supporting people affected by disaster at [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

## Black Dog Institute

[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

The Black Dog Institute aims to improve the lives of people affected by mental illness through quality research into improved clinical treatments and services, education and e-health products. In response to the recent bushfires the Black Dog Institute has established:

- a free Online Clinic which provides the public with easy to use online mental health assessment tool to measure their levels of distress, and then links to tailored self-help materials
- a new online Bushfire Mental Health website that will link communities with a range of different support services
- advice on how to best manage the mental health of first responders and emergency services personnel including volunteer firefighters.

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESOURCES

## Visit your GP

[www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services)

Your GP can refer you to the most appropriate mental health services within the Better Access Scheme.

## Digital Services

[www.headtohealth.gov.au](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au)

Digital health services can be used as an alternative to face-to-face therapies in times of need, or when and where convenient.

## Primary Health Networks

[www.health.gov.au/phn](http://www.health.gov.au/phn)

Primary Health Networks can help you find person-centred health services near you as they commission and coordinate services in based on local community need.

## Headspace

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

headspace provides young people from 12 to 25 years old with free or low cost services to young people, their families and friends.

## 24/7 Telephone services offering counselling and support

### Lifeline Australia

13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

Lifeline is a crisis support service that provides short-term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.

### Kids Helpline

1800 551800 [www.kidshelpline.com.au/](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/)

Kids Helpline is a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.

### Beyond Blue

1300 224 636 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Beyond Blue is available 24/7 by phone or online via chat or email, to provide support on a range of mental health issues.

### Suicide Call-Back Service

1300 659 467 [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

For anyone considering suicide, living with someone who is considering suicide, or bereaved by suicide, the Suicide Call Back Service is available.

### MensLine Australia

1300 78 9978 [www.mensline.org.au/](http://www.mensline.org.au/)

MensLine Australia is a telephone and online counselling service for men.

### Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling

1800 011 046

[www.openarms.gov.au](http://www.openarms.gov.au)

Open Arms provides current serving armed forces personnel, veterans and their families with free and confidential counselling, group treatment programs, suicide prevention and community and peer network to support mental health and wellbeing.

## MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS TELEPHONE SERVICES IN AUSTRALIAN STATES AND TERRITORIES

<b>ACT</b> 1800 629 354	<b>NSW</b> 1800 011 511	<b>NT</b> 1800 682 288	<b>QLD</b> 1300 64 22 55
<b>SA</b> 13 14 65	<b>TAS</b> 1800 332 388	<b>WA</b> 1300 555 788	<b>VIC</b> <a href="http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-families">www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-families</a>