



# Australian Government Mental Health Response to Bushfire Trauma

**\$76 million for distress counselling and mental health support for individuals, families and communities including:**

- \$44.3 million for counselling and psychological services for people on the fire fronts:
  - \$10.5 million for immediate counselling
  - \$29.6 million for ongoing psychological support, including telehealth
  - \$4.2 million for Primary Health Networks for additional mental health services
- \$5.7 million for trauma informed care and care coordination
  - Delivery of trauma informed care to people on the fire fronts (\$2m)
  - Support for bushfire trauma response coordinators (\$3.2m)
  - National Cross-Service Framework (\$500,000)
- \$2.7 million community grants helping communities recover
- \$16 million supporting emergency services workers and their families
- \$7.4 million supporting youth through headspace
  - Funding of \$300,000 to headspace centres in fire affected areas (\$3m)
  - Expand the planned Batemans Bay headspace site and expedite funding (\$4.4m)

The Australian Government will create a *Bushfire Recovery Access Program* to provide immediate and ongoing free counselling and support to individuals, families and emergency services workers affected by the bushfires.

This program will give people the best chance of full mental health recovery from highly traumatic bushfire events.

The Government will deliver trauma care training to emergency personnel and employers on the fire fronts to help identify people at risk.

We will also support bushfire trauma response coordinators and the development of a National Cross-Services Framework to deliver mental health support effectively and efficiently across Australia.

Local communities will be eligible for small grants for activities to promote mental health healing and post-trauma recovery.

The grants will allow communities to choose their own way to respond to the losses they have experienced and reduce post-traumatic stress.

Australia's emergency services workers are invaluable and critical members of our community. The Government is committed to taking actions that ensure our emergency service workers and their families are receiving the necessary support to prevent and treat PTSD and other mental illness.

# Counselling and Psychological Services

## What we are doing

Front line emergency distress and trauma counselling will be available immediately, with up to 10 free mental health support sessions for individuals, families and emergency services personnel.

Bushfire affected individuals and families, and emergency response personnel will also be eligible to receive Medicare rebates for up to 10 psychological therapy sessions. This will provide people with the support they need during the extended recovery phase, when the deep impact of trauma is more likely to be felt.

Those affected by fires will not need a mental health plan from a GP or a diagnosed mental illness to obtain these services.

Psychological therapy sessions via telehealth will also be available to people in fire affected rural areas that don't have easy access to mental health professionals. These sessions will also be Medicare funded.

To support our youth and 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.

Additionally, Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in fire affected communities will receive funding to deliver 'surge capacity' mental health services to individuals and families who are affected.

## How will counselling be delivered?

Therapists will offer coping strategies, social supports, counselling and family-based psychological interventions.

People may also be referred for counselling through emergency relief phone lines and other government points of contact.

More intensive psychological therapy may be obtained through GPs, psychologists, headspace and other mental health professionals.

Telehealth services are available by contacting a GP or psychologist.

## When will this happen?

Mental health workers will be immediately deployed to bushfire recovery centres.

Additional counselling and psychological sessions billed to Medicare, and telehealth mental health services, will be available from 17 January 2020 until December 2021. The new GP telehealth items are available now.

# Trauma informed care and care coordination

## What we are doing

Training in trauma informed care and psychological first aid will be provided to frontline emergency staff as well as to organisations managing frontline emergency staff to identify personnel at risk.

In addition, Australia's bushfire trauma response coordinators will be the 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.

A National Cross-Services Framework will ensure we can respond to mental health challenges because of national disasters.

## How will the trauma response training be delivered?

Evidence based training will be developed and delivered by organisations with expertise in trauma informed care. Training will be co-designed with Primary Health Networks (PHN), Services Australia and state and territory government services.

## What will the bushfire trauma response coordinators do?

The bushfire trauma coordinators will be employed by the PHNs in severely impacted fire-affected region.

The coordinators will support Services Australia recovery staff by providing up-to-date information and mental health services in the region. The coordinators will also prioritise distress counselling services for affected individuals and families within treatment services.

The new National Cross-Services Framework will ensure all jurisdictions work together to develop a mental health framework. The framework will ensure we are prepared and resourced to deliver effective mental health supports in response to national disasters.

## When will this happen?

The training will be rolled out immediately and progressively over the next six months.

The bushfire trauma response coordinator support will take immediate effect.

The National Cross-Services Framework will involve a national coordination effort commencing this year.

## Community Grants to help communities recover

### What we are doing

The damage caused by the fires has been devastating to some communities, especially those that are small and isolated.

Community spirit is vital to the survival of these towns and villages and to the recovery of individuals. While many people have shown extraordinary bravery and generosity during and after the fires, people in these communities need the support of those around them to recover and face the future.

Community connectedness and recovery grants of up to \$10,000 will be available to fund grass-roots level activities to help mental health and healing activities after the bushfires.

These activities will promote peer support, with local residents helping each other and reaching out to others to identify those who are suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression, and prevent suicides.

### How will community grants be delivered?

Each Primary Health Network covering a fire affected region will be given funding for community grants and will administer the grants.

### When will this happen?

Grants will be distributed over the next 12 months.

# Support for emergency services workers and their families

## What we are doing

Our emergency services workers are invaluable and critical members of our community. To ensure workers and their families are receiving the necessary support to prevent and treat the effects of trauma, both now and after the immediate fire threat has passed, the Government is funding specialist organisation/s to provide PTSD support services to emergency services workers (and their immediate families).

The Government is also establishing a pilot program to provide a support and mental health literacy network for emergency services workers and their families/kinship groups. This network will also connect those in need of clinical services in relation to PTSD and other mental health issues.