

Managing your mental health during and after a bushfire

Sudden and overwhelming events often cause trauma and distress for individuals, families and communities.

While many people affected by such events recover over time, given social support from relatives, friends and colleagues, some will require additional psychological support.

There are a range of specific resources to help people work towards recovery in the event of a disaster.

Preparing for disasters

It is helpful for people to know how to prepare psychologically before a disaster and how to cope emotionally during or after a disaster. Knowing how a disaster situation might be experienced can help to lower anxiety levels and stress responses. The Australian Psychological Society has resources to help you prepare for disasters: <https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/c24bf1ba-a5fc-45d5-a982-835873148b9a/Psychological-preparation-for-natural-disasters.pdf>

People at risk

It is important that you look after yourself, family, neighbours and friends, and access mental health and counselling services if required. The following people may be particularly vulnerable:

- Elderly
- Isolated
- Have a pre-existing mental illness
- Have a history of trauma
- Experiencing a recent bereavement

Symptoms

It is completely normal to experience a range of emotions if you are directly or indirectly affected by bushfires. These may be experienced immediately, or sometimes much later, and may affect sleep, mood, anxiety and daily routines.

- However people who experience persistent distress that is interfering with the ability to carry out day-to-day activities are encouraged to seek support

Support for bushfire-affected residents in NSW

Talking to your general practitioner or regular health care provider is a good first step if you are experiencing health concerns or persistent mental health issues impacting your day-to-day life.

Support can also be provided by specialist mental health Bushfire Recovery Clinicians who are available in bushfire-affected regions across NSW. Bushfire Recovery Clinicians work closely with GPs and community and welfare agencies to provide direct care and respond to local needs and issues, including the provision of outreach to isolated communities and displaced community members. These clinicians can be contacted by calling the NSW Mental Health Line on **1800 011 511**.

You can also call Service NSW on **13 77 88** for practical assistance and to be connected to local support services.

24/7 telephone services offering counselling and support

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **Triple Zero (000)** or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

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health.nsw.gov.au/bushfire-smoke

The following are free services available 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- **Lifeline Australia:** 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
A crisis support service that provides short-term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.
- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 224 636 or www.beyondblue.org.au
Available by phone or online via chat or email, to provide support on a range of mental health issues.
- **MensLine Australia:** 1300 78 9978 or www.mensline.org.au/
A telephone and online counselling service for men.
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 551800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au
A free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.
- **NSW Mental Health Line:** 1800 011 511
Mental health crisis telephone service in NSW.

Farmers and business owners in bushfire-affected areas can access Farm Gate counsellors and peer support workers on the Mental Health Line, **1800 011 511**.

Looking after your mental health

During a bushfire emergency, and when returning home, it is important to take care of yourself and your mental health.

Remember to:

- Spend time with family and friends
- Try to get back to a routine but don't push yourself and work too hard
- Continue a healthy lifestyle (try to eat well, sleep and exercise)
- Take time out, but don't isolate yourself
- Accept help when it's offered
- Limit the amount of media coverage you see and hear

Other useful resources

- Information guide with links and contact details for people who have been impacted by bushfires and need immediate help: www.service.nsw.gov.au/assistance-bushfire-affected-communities
- The Mental Health Commission of NSW website includes helpful information and links to assistance for people affected by disaster: <https://nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/assistance-for-people-affected-by-disaster>

Australian Government mental health support

The Australian Government is providing mental health support for individuals, families and emergency services workers affected by the bushfires:

Up to 10 free counselling sessions if you were affected by the bushfires to support you through the immediate trauma and crisis. To speak to a social worker you can:

- Call **180 22 66**
- Visit a [Service Centre](#)

Medicare benefits for up to 10 additional face-to-face or telehealth mental health treatment services for people who require further support.

You don't need to have a diagnosed mental health condition, GP referral or mental health treatment plan. You can get the sessions between 17 January 2020 and 31 December 2021.

If you live in a rural or remote area, you'll be able to get counselling and support through video telehealth services.

If you think you'd benefit from mental health treatment, talk to any of these:

- GP
- Psychologist
- Social worker

For more information on the Australian Government's mental health support for people affected by bushfire visit: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/how-get-mental-health-support>