

Mental health in emergencies

Almost all people affected by emergencies, including bushfires, will experience psychological distress.

People with severe mental disorders are especially vulnerable during emergencies and need access to mental health care and other basic needs.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health related issues in disaster situations can present in different ways, including:



- Exacerbation of pre-existing issues: e.g. mental disorders such as depression, schizophrenia or harmful use of alcohol;



- Emergency-induced distress: e.g. grief, acute stress reactions, harmful use of alcohol and drugs, and depression and anxiety, including post-traumatic stress disorder; and



- Humanitarian response-induced distress: e.g. anxiety due to a lack of information about food distribution or about how to obtain basic services.

Effective medical responses may include:

- Community self-help and social support
- Psychological first aid
- Basic clinical mental health care
- Psychological intervention
- Links and referral mechanisms



Following a bushfire, it's common for people to experience a range of thoughts and feelings that can feel intense. If this resonates with your patients, then it may be helpful for them to seek support:

- **Lifeline** – 13 HELP (13 43 57) is a dedicated bushfire recovery line available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for any person needing support because of bushfires.
- **Beyond Blue's online forums** – Share how you are feeling about the bushfires and offer support to those affected in our dedicated 'Coping with bushfires' thread.
- **Beyond Blue's Be You Bushfire Response Program** – mental health and wellbeing support for schools and early learning services affected by bushfires
- **Head to Health** - In Gippsland, free call to 1800 595 212 to speak to the Head to Health intake team.
- For Bushfire effected people in the East Gippsland area, the Bushfire Recovery Counselling service is available. For information on the program and referral pathways please go to the **Royal Flying Doctor Website**.
- **Brother to Brother** - 24-hour crisis line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men of all ages 1800 435 799.
- **Open Arms** support for veterans offers face-to-face, telephone and online counselling 1800 011 046.

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Useful information and links

Natural disasters and your mental health – learn what's a common reaction and when to seek further support from Beyond Blue

Mental health support for bushfire-affected communities – Life in Mind

How to deal with traumatic stress – Helpguide

PTSD: signs, symptoms and available treatments – Beyond Blue

Support for General Practitioners – support for GPs working within bushfire-affected communities from Phoenix Australia

Australian Disaster Resilience – Knowledge Hub Australia Government National Emergency Management Agency

Self-care for GPs and Practice Staff



It is important that GP and practice staff look after themselves during an emergency. As part of its 'Managing emergencies in general practice' program, RACGP has a [module on practicing self-care](#).

