

Managing your mental health during and after a bushfire

Large parts of NSW are being affected by bushfires and the recovery effort may continue for some time. NSW Health is providing additional staff and resources to support bushfire-affected communities in rural and regional areas. This includes advice and pathways to care for people who need specialist assistance.

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 include:

- Overwhelming anxiety or fear
- Persistent sleep disturbance
- Distress that is interfering with your ability to carry out day-to-day activities
- Panic symptoms (e.g. racing heart, lightheaded, breathing difficulties)
- Withdrawal from usual relationships or avoiding pleasurable activities

Support for bushfire-affected residents in NSW

Talk to your general practitioner or regular health care provider if you are experiencing health concerns or persistent mental health issues impacting your day-to-day life.

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.

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.

Managing your mental health during and after a bushfire

- **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

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. Speak to social workers to organise counselling sessions at:

- Mobile Service Centres and Mobile Servicing Teams
- Recovery centres and Disaster Welfare Assistance Points
- Mental health services commissioned by Primary Health Networks

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 bushfire response visit:
www.health.gov.au