

## PHNs Help to Support Bushfire Recovery Mental Health Programs

As we all know, the past few months, have been incredibly devastating for Australia as bushfires continue to wreak havoc across our beautiful nation. As of 13 January, the Rural Fire Service said there were more than 100 fires still burning across NSW and many would take some time to fully contain, with 36 fires still burning out of control. Nationally, 30 people have died, over 2,000 homes have been destroyed and an estimated half a billion animals have perished during this awful bushfire season.

While the Western Sydney region has largely been spared, we know many people, including staff and our medical professionals have been either directly or indirectly affected by this terrible situation and we are mindful that as a PHN we need to work with other PHNs across the county to offer support and if needed assistance.

PHNs across the country have mobilised to provide services to support those affected and the federal government has announced a funding package to assist in this work.

Earlier this week \$76 million has been committed to support the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, including first responders, who have been affected by the devastating bushfires.

“This is a particularly distressing time for everyone across the country. We know that the impacts of natural disasters extend beyond the end of emergency, with mental health impacts of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires being felt up to 5 years post disaster for some people. Because of this, it is important that the mental health and wellbeing of Australians is supported immediately, as well as providing ongoing long-term interventions” Ms Christine Morgan, CEO of the National Mental Health Commission said.

The funding provided will go towards several initiatives, falling under six elements, to support Australians:

- **Immediate and longer-term support:** Immediate free counselling support is being provided for individuals and families in affected communities, including emergency services workers. This will be available at recovery centres, Services Australia centres and existing local centres in fire affected communities, without the need for referral or a mental health care plan. For ongoing support, a newly created set of 10 Medicare rebated psychology therapy sessions will be available for anyone affected by the bushfires, which do not require you to first have a mental health plan or GP referral. Telehealth support will also be expanded to allow people affected by the bushfires to access mental health and wellbeing support services from the location of their choice, particularly those in regional, rural and remote areas who may be unable to travel.

- **Youth services:** As well as being eligible for the newly created set of 10 Medicare rebated sessions, additional funding for headspace sites in bushfire affected areas will be provided, so young people can get help when they need it. This funding includes fast tracking and expanding the planned Batemans Bay headspace site.
- **Specialised training:** Training in trauma informed care and psychological first aid will be provided for emergency service personnel and organisations managing front line emergency staff to identify and support people at risk.
- **Coordination:** Bushfire trauma response coordinators will be deployed within bushfire affected Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to ensure integrated service delivery on the ground. A national cross-jurisdictional mental health framework will also be developed to enable whole of government preparedness for future natural disasters.
- **Community resilience and recovery:** Primary Health Networks (PHNs) covering fire affected areas are being funded to expand existing mental health services in fire affected regions to deliver support tailored to community needs, as well as community connectedness and recovery grants to fund activities at a community level to help mental health and healing activities post bushfires.
- **Extra support for emergency services workers:** Appropriate organisations will be funded to provide post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) support services to emergency services workers and their families. In addition, a new program around developing a mental health literacy and support network will include connecting people to the right mental health services. A national action plan will be developed to lower suicide risk and improve mental health outcomes for emergency services workers.

For further information:

**Immediate distress and trauma support** - Individuals can contact Services Australia on 180 22 66 or their local Primary Health Network (PHN) found [online](#) to locate and access these sessions.

In addition, anyone experiencing distress as a result of these events can seek immediate advice and support through Lifeline 13 11 14, Beyond Blue 1300 224 636, the Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800, or the Government's digital mental health portal, [Head to Health](#).

**Mental Health Support through Medicare** - Individuals should contact their GP or eligible mental health professional to access these services. GP's or other health professionals seeking advice should visit [www.humanservices.gov.au](http://www.humanservices.gov.au) or call 132 150.

**headspace** - Local headspace services can be found at:

<https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/>. For young people unable to attend a headspace centre, eheadspace is available online at [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au) or via telephone at 1800 650 890.

**Bushfires and your health** - Australia's bushfires are affecting our health in many ways. [Learn more](#) about smoke and air quality, how you can access the medical help you need, and what the Australian Government is doing to support your health during these devastating times.

A joint [media release](#) from the Prime Minister's Office and Minister Hunt's Office detailing the government's response has been published.

The department have also published a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) which goes into more detail.



*Mental Health Support for Bushfire Affected Communities*

## Events



Jan

30

### Western Sydney Mental Health Plan - Workshop for Service Providers

Thursday 30th Jan, 9:00am - 1:00pm

[FLYER](#)

Jan

30

### Western Sydney Mental Health Plan - Evening Workshop for Primary Care Providers, General Practitioners and Allied Health Professionals

Thursday 30th Jan, 5:00pm - 8:30pm

[FLYER](#)

Jan

31

### Western Sydney Mental Health Plan - Workshop for Service Providers, Peak Bodies, Academic Partners and the Local Health District

Friday 31st Jan, 9:00am - 1:00pm

[FLYER](#)

Feb

25

### An Introduction to Quality Improvement for PIP QI

Tuesday 25th Feb, 6:00pm - 8:30pm

[FLYER](#)

## Other News



### Tender Closing Soon

We are seeking proposals that address the priorities for Older Persons Mental Health and provides support for residents of aged care facilities within Western Sydney. The activity will work with clients that reside in the Western Sydney Local Health District. Proposals must directly address Older Persons Mental Health and barriers faced by the residents of aged care facilities in our region. Tender will close on Friday 17th January.

For more information or to apply for this Tender visit [tenderlink.com/wentwest/](https://tenderlink.com/wentwest/)

### Viral Hepatitis Update

NSW Health has created an information sheet for primary health care practitioners, regarding chronic hepatitis B and C.

Access to this update is available [online](#).

### EOI: Primary Healthcare Institute Executive Committee

The [NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation](#) (ACI) is seeking Expressions of Interest (EOI) from General Practitioners for membership of the above Committee. The main goal of the Committee is to support the ACI's Primary Healthcare Institute to achieve its strategic goals and objectives. Membership is for a term of two years and it will comprise people with a strong interest and/or expertise in primary and integrated care in NSW.

Please return the [EOI form](#) to Val Middleton at [val.middleton@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:val.middleton@health.nsw.gov.au) by Friday 31st January.

### GP Association Meetings

The following GP association meetings are coming up in Western Sydney:

[Mount Druitt](#): Women's Imaging, Friday 31st January.

[Hills](#): Beat the Heat Three - GP Responses to Heat and Smoke, Tuesday 4th February.



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