

MEDIA RELEASE



Thursday, 9 January 2019

Coping with the impact of bushfires

With so many communities and individuals impacted by the bushfires, the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP) team want to remind people that they are not alone, it is normal to feel overwhelmed and there are strategies and support which can help.

RAMHP Manager Tessa Caton said many individuals and communities impacted by the bushfires will be feeling frightened and emotional.

“During any disaster, it is normal and very common for people to be stressed and anxious,” said Tessa.

“People in bushfire affected areas may be experiencing memories of the fire or they may be feeling anxious as the body goes into ‘fight or ‘flight’ mode in response to keeping themselves safe. They may be feeling sadness, anger or guilt that they couldn’t do more or have difficulty sleeping. These are all normal reactions”.

“It is when these feelings and emotions last more than a few weeks, or people stop doing things they’d usually be doing, when seeking help is important. The earlier we notice a problem and find help, the better chance we have of a quick recovery and reduce our risk of mental health problems in the future”.

During and following a bushfire disaster, there are some self-care strategies you and your family can use to keep well. These include:

During a bushfire

- eat well and limit alcohol
- take a break when you can and prioritise sleep
- try to spend time with family, friends and don’t isolate yourself
- try to get back to a routine but don’t push yourself and work too hard
- limit the amount of media coverage and social media you and your family see and hear
- know that you won’t have all the answers
- accept that it is okay to not be okay and ask for support

Following a bushfire

- spend time with family and friends
- take time out but don’t isolate yourself
- accept help when its offered
- understand you are not alone in your experience
- write down your worries and concerns
- express your feelings in your own time and way
- know you won’t have all the answers
- try not to take big risks and make life changing decisions until you are ready



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While it's normal to be distressed and upset by what has happened and the losses which have occurred, you should see a mental health professional for assistance if you are experiencing:

- extreme feelings of distress
- emotional reactions that are lasting longer than a few weeks
- distress that is interfering with your ability to carry out day-to-day activities
- withdrawal from usual relationships or avoiding pleasurable activities
- feelings of overwhelming fear for no apparent reason
- panic symptoms (e.g. racing heart, lightheaded, breathing difficulties)
- avoiding things that bring back memories, so much that you can't carry out your normal activities
- feelings of excessive guilt
- using alcohol or other substances to cope
- a loss of interest in the future
- thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Where to get help

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call **000** or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

- **General practitioners (GPs)** for advice, treatment, Mental Health Treatment Plan or referral
- **Specialised mental health clinicians and services**, such as psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses or psychiatrists (can be referred by a GP).
- **Online counselling and information services**

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.redcross.org.au

www.phoenixaustralia.org/

www.kidshelpline.com.au

www.headspace.org.au

www.disasterassist.gov.au/

- **Telephone support services**
NSW Mental Health Line **1800 011 511**
Kids Helpline **1800 551 800**
Suicide Call Back Service **1300 659 467**
Beyond Blue Support Service **1300 224 636**
Lifeline **13 11 14**
MensLine **1300 78 99 78**

The following free services are available to people impacted by fires.

Free face-to-face support

- North Coast - Connect to Wellbeing **1300 160 339**
- NSW New England region of the Hunter / New England – HealthWISE **1800 931 540** – Go to <https://healthwisenenw.com.au/services/> for more information



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