

Sunday, 12 January, 2020

## Beyond Blue welcomes Federal Government's initial mental health response to bushfires crisis

Beyond Blue welcomes the Commonwealth's announcement today of \$76 million for immediate mental health support for anyone affected by the Australian bushfire crisis.

The package particularly targets affected individuals and communities in bushfire affected areas, and firefighters and emergency services personnel including volunteers.

Measures include on-the-ground counselling and support in affected areas, more Medicare and tele-health consultations, expansion of local headspace services for young people, trauma care for first responders and their families, and grants for grassroots community events.

**Beyond Blue Chair The Hon Julia Gillard AC** said community-led activities would be critical to the recovery and to help people cope and rebuild after the disaster.

"Australians are known for coming together and supporting each through times of crisis and this disaster has touched each of us in different ways. Our shared concern and the resilience that is so much a part of our national identity are strengths that will serve us well as we rebuild," Ms Gillard said.

"Beyond Blue has a long history of working with others to help in addressing the trauma felt by communities immediately after a disaster and, importantly, over the longer term. Given the scale of the 2020 fires, a co-ordinated response from the Commonwealth, states and territories and the sector will be more important than ever."

**Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman** said: "These initiatives are a good start on the road to recovery for all those affected by this disaster, including by scaling up existing services and supports so hopefully people get access as quickly as possible. They empower communities to lead their own recoveries, make it easier for individuals to get the immediate mental health support they need, and give our firefighters and emergency personnel the specialised trauma care they will require."

"With time, many of those touched by the bushfire crisis will recover. For those who need more support, we know early intervention can improve the outcomes and management of these issues."

Ms Harman expressed the hope that any inquiry or royal commission into the bushfire crisis would consider ways to build psychological resilience into Australia's national disaster planning.

For those affected by the bushfire crisis, Beyond Blue has developed a [Bushfires and Mental Health](#) web page offering advice about common reactions to disasters, and the signs and symptoms that people may benefit from more support.

Its [online forums page](#) offers people a place to share their stories of hope, recovery and resilience.

"We know that sharing stories during times of crisis can actually support people from a mental health perspective, and we've had a number of people share their experiences here already," Ms Harman said.

Mental health professionals are available on the Beyond Blue Support Service via phone 24/7 on **1300 22 4636** or via [www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support) for online chat (3PM – 12AM AEST or email responses within 24 hours).

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