INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

When tragedy strikes, the media are often first to the scene. A number of residents from the Black Saturday communities felt that some media were intrusive during the worst experience of their lives. Journalists, however, were not necessarily equipped with the skills to navigate such tragedy and were left to rely on their own ethics and experience.

A study conducted six years after the fires revealed that a quarter of survivors were still experiencing serious mental health problems. Extra supports are currently being put in place to support people in the lead up to, and during, the 10th anniversary of the bushfires.

To support media agencies in reporting the 10th anniversary of the 2009 bushfires, we have collated a range of articles, research findings and resources. Beyond Bushfires, a study group led by the University of Melbourne, has details of people who have expressed interest in being available for interview. To contact the group, email beyondbushfires@unimelb.edu.au

Our hope is that commemorations can be told in an inclusive, respectful and sensitive way to help promote recovery and local resilience, while including help-seeking information and support. Media professionals who covered the bushfires and their aftermath are also encouraged to be mindful of their own mental health in this time.

Resources and information

- Black Saturday: How the media covered Australia’s worst peace-time disaster
- Journalists adrift: the reporting of Black Saturday
- Humans First, Journalists Second. The Journalism of Black Saturday
- Media Coverage of the Black Saturday Bushfires (2009) and Discussion of Climate Change in Australia
- Lessons from media reporting of natural disasters: A case study of the 2011 flash floods in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley
- In the Media Spotlight: The Survivor Stories
- Mindframe: media professional reporting guidelines for portrayal of suicide and mental illness and help-seeking information
- Tragedies & Journalists: a guide for more effective coverage
- How should media report breaking news about bushfires?

Information for people needing mental health and/or alcohol and other drug support regarding bushfires or any other trauma:

1. If you need immediate support call Lifeline 13 11 14. If your life is at risk, call 000.
2. Contact your local health professional to ask for support and assistance to access local services
3. headtohealth.gov.au provides links to trusted Australian online and phone supports, resources and treatment options