

Bushfire Case Support Program

Q and As

What is today's announcement?

The \$14.4 million Victorian Bushfires Case Support Program is now available for people in fire affected areas including East Gippsland, Mansfield, Wellington, Wangaratta, Towong and the Alpine region.

The program also includes support for people who may have been impacted by the bushfires in these areas but live in other parts of Victoria.

What will the Program provide?

The Program aims to support the personal recovery of people, and social recovery of communities, affected by emergencies. Specifically, the service includes the following services:

- **A state-wide number (1800 560 760)** to call for help or assistance
- **Case managers** who will work directly with people and communities who have been impacted by the fires in the designated areas
- **Case support coordinators** who can provide information and advice regarding access to local support services such as mental health and family support, insurance, bushfire relief and support funds etc.
- **Financial counselling** services
- **Flexible Support funding** for material aid, and access to services such as emergency accommodation, mental health services, food and clothing etc.
- **First Nations Aboriginal Service Response**, which includes case management and case coordination
- **A central support service** for people who have been impacted by the bushfires in these areas but may live in other parts of Victoria.

How can people access the Case Support Program?

Affected Victorians can access a support coordinator by contacting or visiting a designated recovery centre in the local area or calling 1800 560 760 to access the Victorian Bushfires Case Support Program

Information about recovery centre locations and opening hours can be found at

<http://emergency.vic.gov.au/>

The phone line will be open from 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 9am – 5pm on the weekends from today.

We expect the volume of calls will be high so patience is appreciated. Anyone who leaves a message will have their call returned by a professional as soon as possible.

Who is eligible to access the program?

Individuals and families who have been significantly affected by the 2020 Victorian Bushfires are eligible to access case support services. They may have experienced:

- loss of housing
- loss of other assets (i.e. car, equipment, clothing, personal items etc.)
- significant psychosocial trauma
- significant physical trauma
- business impacts or loss.

The above has not described all situations; case support workers will consider each case on its merits. The program will be prioritised to reside in local government authorities affected by the fires. The program will also include a service response that will be available to those who may have been impacted by the bushfires in these areas but reside elsewhere in the State.

If a person or household is deemed ineligible for the service, they will be provided with advice regarding other support services available.

Can people from NSW who have been in Victoria and impacted by the fires use the service?

Yes they can, and will be referred to similar services provided by NSW

Have we done this before?

Yes. A case support program was used to help communities in the aftermath of the 'Black Saturday' bushfires in 2009, and more recently in Gippsland, where people were affected by fires in 2018-19, particularly around Bunyip.

How much does it cost?

Access to this Program is completely free of charge.

Who is paying for it?

The program is being jointly funded by the Victorian Government and Australian Government, through the commonwealth-state disaster recovery funding arrangements.

Will everyone be able to get face-to-face help?

Support will be tailored to people's needs. Some people may only need some information or support over the phone, while some people will want brief assistance to say, link them with a financial counsellor or mental health professional. Others may need longer term assistance as they rebuild their lives.

How long will people be able to access help for?

The service is currently funded for 12 months and will be evaluated to determine further needs.

What services will be put in place to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians?

Culturally appropriate services will also be offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians needing support.

A First Nations Aboriginal Service Response, which includes case management and case coordination as well as access to flexible support funding, will be available in the affected Aboriginal communities in the bushfire affected areas.

A central response service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians will also be accessible for people living outside of the designated disaster areas.

When can people start accessing the service?

Right away (with the Program commencing with the establishment of the 1800 telephone service from 10 January 2020).

Affected Victorians can access a support coordinator by contacting their local council, visiting a recovery centre or calling 1800 560 760.

Information about recovery centre locations and opening hours can be found at <http://emergency.vic.gov.au/>

What will they need to identify themselves?

Initially people will just need their personal contact details. Once they are connected with a Support Coordinator, people may be asked to provide additional documentation.

All services will comply with legislative requirements regarding privacy.

What about those in communities without telephone coverage?

Access can be arranged through recovery centres for those communities without active telephony.

The service will be able to support those affected for the next 12 months so once communications is restored they can access the service and have their needs met.