



Supporting disaster-impacted communities

Working in disaster-impacted communities can be personally and professionally challenging and mentally and physically exhausting. Many GPs will already have experience of this from previous emergencies.

Sustaining energy across the long haul of the community's recovery journey can be difficult, particularly when you might be dealing with your own recovery needs alongside providing comprehensive health and mental health support to the community.

Children and families who suffer loss in the disaster are the most vulnerable to negative effects from excessive media viewing.

This checklist offers a few practical tips to help address the challenges of working in disaster-impacted communities.

- **Prioritise your own wellbeing.** No one living in a community that is regularly impacted by disasters is immune to the physical and psychological impacts of the fires. Your capacity to support your community in the short and long term will be determined by how well you manage your own stress and/or distress.
 - **Do regular self-checks**, watch for signs of burnout or exhaustion.
 - Acknowledge when you are feeling stressed, fatigued or upset and give yourself time to practise good self-care.
 - **Take regular breaks**, even if you think you are coping well.
- **Connect with other GPs** in your community, other health professionals, GP organisations and colleges, or more informally with colleagues in other affected communities. Seeking the support of colleagues to share your experiences and discuss issues is an effective way of building and maintaining your resilience.
- **Monitor and support your team's wellbeing.**
 - **Team morale** is of heightened importance when working with trauma-impacted individuals. Small issues arising between staff members in a practice can quickly turn into major concerns in the context of working in a disaster zone.
 - **Regular team meetings** with your practice staff can help address developing issues quickly. It provides an opportunity for the whole team (practice nurses, practice managers, receptionists, and other practitioners) to support each other and discuss management strategies for working with distressed individuals, helping to build their own confidence and resilience whilst also enhancing team morale.



- Provide patient tip sheets in the waiting room – download from the Disaster Mental Health Hub at www.phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub.
- **Have one staff member tasked to keep an updated list of agencies** providing support in your region, together with what they can offer, their eligibility criteria, and how to refer patients:
 - in particular, ensure there is a list of mental health providers.
- Stay updated with community recovery plans and ongoing events.
- Register for Phoenix Australia's online training and review the online resources for GPs (and your staff (e.g., Psychological First Aid) on the Disaster Mental Health Hub at phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub. This will assist you in supporting traumatised communities.

For more information

Visit the Disaster Mental Health Hub at phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub

Resources

Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/trauma-reaction-and-recovery

Australian Psychological Society

www.psychology.org.au

Red Cross

www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies