

Plain Language Statement

Title:	Promoting Resilience and Recovery in Regional and Rural Victoria
Short title:	Resilience and Recovery in Rural Victoria
Protocol number:	2057569.1
Project funder:	State Trustees Australia Foundation
Responsible researchers:	Dr Sean Cowlshaw, A/Prof Meaghan O'Donnell, Dr Katherine Chisholm, Dr Julia Fredrickson, Sophie Alexander

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in this research study. The following pages provide information about the project, which will help you decide whether or not you would like to take part. Please read this carefully, and ask questions if you don't understand or want to know more. Participation is voluntary. If you don't wish to take part, then you don't have to. If you begin participating, you can also stop at any time.

If you decide that you do want to take part in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be given a copy of this Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

This project is being conducted by the Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, in partnership with the Mental Health Professionals Network (MHPN). It has been funded by the State Trustees Australia Foundation.

What is this research about?

Experiencing a disaster (e.g., bushfires) or severe stressor (e.g., COVID-19) can be distressing and overwhelming. For some people, the effects can last a long time and leave them feeling stressed, down, and irritable. They can also impact on work, relationships, and other day-to-day activities. However, there are different skills and techniques that people can use in daily life that can promote resilience, and help them return to the way they felt before the event. These techniques involve using online resources, as well as skills that can be taught by a coach over a telephone or video call or are self-directed.

The current project will evaluate whether there are particular skills or techniques that promote resilience, and may be most helpful to people in rural Victoria impacted by major events including bushfires, drought, and the stressors of COVID-19.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to take part in this research because you live in a rural community and have been impacted by major events including bushfires, drought, and COVID-19. When you contacted the study research team you completed an eligibility screening process to find out if you would benefit from techniques and resources that promote resilience in this study. On the basis of this telephone conversation and assessment you were found eligible.

If you consent to be part of this study, you will be randomly assigned to one of two different groups where you will receive different types of resources, or instruction on ways to promote resilience. One group involves the SOLAR program and the second group involves the ONLINE program. Each group will help you learn skills that will help improve mood, reduce stress, strengthen relationships, and improve your quality of life. As well as assisting in your recovery, these new skills will also help you be more prepared for future hardships by giving you the skills to handle tough times. See details about these two groups below. All participants will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires before and after the 5 week study period, which will help track changes in your wellbeing over time. These questionnaires will be completed online and take approximately 30 minutes each. They will take place after the initial telephone conversation, 2 weeks after the 5 week study, and then again 2 months after the study period ends. Questionnaires will ask about your background characteristics, and your emotional, and social functioning, sleep quality, alcohol use, gambling habits, and general questions about your personal and household finances.

SOLAR Program: The SOLAR program will be delivered over 5 weeks via telehealth format (videoconferencing) or face-to-face with a SOLAR coach. The introductory session will last 80 minutes and the remaining 4 sessions will be 50 minutes each. With consent, participants may be asked if their sessions with a SOLAR coach can be recorded in order for the project to monitor and ensure that sessions are conducted according to protocol. Participants are free to accept or decline this request at anytime without this affecting their participation in the program.

ONLINE Program: Weekly materials will be sent for 5 weeks with information on common reactions to major events, and instruction on skills to manage these reactions. Instruction will be self-directed and provided entirely online, and you will be instructed to practice the skills at home. The weekly content will take about 1 hour to read each week.

At the end of the study and assessment period, if you were allocated to the ONLINE Program, you will be able to access the SOLAR Program if you wish to.

What are the possible benefits?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive direct benefits from taking part in this research. However, we expect that the resources and instructions you receive will lead to improvements in mood, sleep, activity and social connection. We also expect that taking part in the study will help connect you with other support services, if required.

By being part of this research you are helping to improve understanding of what can be done to promote resilience and what can be done to support people who are impacted by disasters and severe stressors. We expect that the resources shown to be helpful in this study will inform the kinds of resources provided to rural communities in Victoria after disasters and other major events in the future.

What are the possible risks?

This project is focussed on common emotional reactions to disasters and major events, and it is possible that you may experience distress whilst participating in the study. Importantly, the resources you receive are intended to help provide skills to manage distress. However, if you become upset because of your

participation in the research, you should contact the research team immediately and they can help you with strategies to manage your distress. If required, they can also help you to access mental health support from a GP, or a mental health professional locally or in another area.

Can I have other treatments during this project?

You may continue to take regular medications (e.g., antidepressants) during this study. If it seems that you would benefit from receiving mental health support from a counsellor or psychologist then you will be provided with a referral, instead of taking part in this project. If at the end of this study you would also like to speak to a counsellor or psychologist then you will be referred to appropriate support services.

However, for the 5 week duration of this study we request that you do not seek any other types of mental health care that you are not already receiving.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you can also withdraw at any time. If you decide to withdraw, please contact someone from research team and they will help you with this.

If you choose to withdraw you may also request to have any information about you withdrawn from the study. The only data that we can withdraw will be the data that we would use for research purposes, which is collected after the initial telephone screen.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

The results will be published and presented in different forms including technical reports, news stories, and scientific publications, and other types of articles. A report containing a summary of the project findings will also be made available on the Phoenix Australia website (www.phoenixaustralia.org). If you consent for us to do so we will email you with a copy of the report or link to this report when the study has concluded.

What will happen to information about me?

Any information about your identity and participation in the study will be fully confidential, and all your individual data will be 'de-identified'. This means that your identifying information (e.g., name, date of birth) will be kept separately from your research data, which is thus 'de-identified'.

We plan to publish results from the study in scientific journals. All published information will involve group or 'aggregate' data, which combines your information with other research participants, and thus refers to study participants as a whole. Individual information about you will not be released or published in any situation.

In consenting to this study, you are also giving consent for us to make **extended use** of your de-identified data for future research that is closely related to the aims of this project. In all circumstances your information will be kept fully confidential and will only be considered with information from other research participants.

Only the research team at Phoenix Australia will have access to your personal information. This will be stored electronically on password protected computers at Phoenix Australia, University of Melbourne, using a VPN (Virtual Private Network). Any hard copy information or data will be stored in locked cabinets at Phoenix Australia. Personal identifying information about you will be kept in a separate electronic password protected file with no other records attached. Research data will be attached to a unique identifying code with no personal identifying information. If you provide consent to participant in this study by verbal consent, this will be audio recorded and relevant audio files will be stored on a password protected computer.

Who is conducting and funding this project?

The research project is being conducted by a research team at Phoenix Australia which is led by Professor Meaghan O'Donnell. Phoenix Australia is Australia's national center of excellence in posttraumatic mental health and is located at The University of Melbourne (www.phoenixaustralia.org).

The project is being supported by the Mental Health Professionals' Network (MHPN), which aims to improve mental health practice and collaborative care within Australia, and supports mental health practitioners through local networks and online professional development programs (www.mhpn.org.au).

The research has been funded by the State Trustees Australia Foundation, which is a philanthropic and charitable giving service that aims to create positive change in the lives of vulnerable community members, and also supports regional communities in Victoria (<https://www.statetrustees.com.au/philanthropy-and-charitable-giving>).

Phoenix Australia will receive payments from State Trustees Australia Foundation in order to undertake this research project; however, no member of the research team will receive any personal financial benefit from your involvement in this research project (other than their ordinary wages).

Where can I get further information?

If you would like more information about the project, please contact the project manager Dr Sean Cowlshaw at sean.cowlshaw@unimelb.edu.au.

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Melbourne. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, you should contact the Manager, Human Research Ethics, Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010. Tel: +61 03 8344 2073 or Email: humanethics-complaints@unimelb.edu.au. All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence please provide the name of the research team or the name or ethics ID number of the research project.

THIS PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT IS YOURS TO KEEP