icare™
Insurance and Care NSW

Supporting your employees affected by bushfire trauma

Supporting employees to seek help

The bushfire emergency across NSW and other parts of Australia continues to be very challenging for people directly involved and for those watching on. Your employees may be affected to varying degrees, however there are some practical ways to help your team members find assistance.

Counselling can help people to cope

If you feel that you or any individual is experiencing distress, struggling to cope, or using negative coping strategies, please seek help.

Connecting individuals to counselling services early on can help people to cope during times of stress and uncertainty and prevent more serious problems developing.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in place, encourage your staff to use the service in the following ways:

- Remind staff about the EAP available to them and how to contact the service. This could be during group discussions, team meetings, via email or placing posters in common areas.

- Inform individuals that the service is completely confidential, can be used for topics unrelated to work and is available for employees' immediate family members.

- Encourage staff to utilise the services via their preferred mode: telephone, online or apps (where available).

- You can contact the EAP provider to understand how best to approach individuals who may be struggling.

- You can also ask the EAP provider to provide services on-site.

Service Contacts

icare Employer and Business Owner policy enquiries:
call 13 44 22 to discuss your support and policy needs

Encourage staff to utilise services including:

Local GPs and other healthcare professionals
make an appointment with your doctor

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line:
1800 018 444

NSW Mental Health Line:
1800 011 511

Lifeline:
13 11 14

Beyondblue:
1300 224 636

APM Community Support Line:
1800 276 113 for free telephone counselling

Australian Association of Psychologists Inc. – free SMS counselling services:
text 0488 807 266

Healthy Minds:
1300 160 339 for free face-to-face or telephone counselling

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement – Counselling and Support Service:
1300 664 786 or 03 9265 2111

Managing employee stress caused by bushfire trauma

The first priority is to **check that individuals are safe and have access to food and shelter**. Once these needs are met, encourage healthy coping behaviours to manage stress.

Encourage healthy coping behaviours

- Allow time for individuals to rest, as needed.

- Encourage team members to talk. Ensure you listen and take time to understand.

- Keep things simple and check that instructions are understood. When people feel stressed, they may have trouble focusing and concentrating.

- Implement further safety precautions to minimise risk from affected concentration and decision-making.

- Remind people to look after themselves. Encourage exercise (even a 30-minute walk can be greatly beneficial), keeping a healthy diet and resting. You could provide healthy options in the lunch room or encourage team walks during lunch breaks.

- Gather material and resources that everyone can access. This can include accurate information about the bushfires and the services available or providing face masks for poor air quality. Asking what individuals need can be a good start.

- Encourage recovery skills, including positive thinking, problem solving, social connections, taking time for enjoyable activities and managing emotional distress.

- Recommend activities that help people to manage stress, such as meditation or mindfulness, journaling, breathing exercises and physical activities.

- Once the initial crisis is over, use social supports to express feelings and share the load:

  | Reflecting on the collective community response within Australia can help some individuals to feel hopeful.

  | Encourage individuals to connect and spend time with family or friends.

  | Make it clear that you are available to listen.

  | Encourage team members to talk to their colleagues and build their social networks. Link them to community groups and activities such as libraries, events, volunteering or online communities. As a group, and with time, you may like to act collectively, for example, plant a tree or provide other resources to those in need.

  | Check in with staff who are parents. Encourage them to be aware of trauma signs in their children, to listen and maintain normal routines.

Be aware of poor coping behaviours

It's also important to be aware of negative coping behaviours, including:

- Self-medication (i.e. alcohol and drug use)

- Overconsumption (including oversleeping and overworking)

- Denial, blocking out, suppressing or avoiding the event. This can prolong recovery and reinforce negative coping.

- Rumination. Constant replaying, thinking or worrying that becomes distressing and disruptive.

- Reckless, dangerous or risky behaviours.

Encourage anyone displaying these behaviours to seek help.

A range of services are available through the contacts listed on page 1.

Individuals requiring immediate assistance should contact the services listed on page 1.

icare customers who are business owners or employers can discuss their support and policy needs by calling icare on 13 44 22.