

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mental health of cyclone victims must be supported through Medicare

Australia's peak body for psychologists says mental health services required as a result of Cyclone Alfred (and other natural disasters) should be made available as permanent item numbers under Medicare, with the ability for people to self-refer directly to a psychologist.

The Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) has been calling for the specific Medicare item numbers, originally introduced after the Black Summer bushfires in 2020, to be reinstated and to include any large-scale disaster.

AAPi Executive Director, Tegan Carrison, said many people impacted by the cyclone and flooding would be highly likely to need mental health support in the coming weeks.

"We know that severe weather events like Cyclone Alfred and other natural disasters continue to have a long-term impact on the mental health of communities around the country - particularly for communities who have been traumatised by recent severe weather events and had only just started to recover," she said.

"Adaptation to these weather disasters requires health services to be proactive and responsive to community needs," Ms Carrison said.

"We cannot keep our heads in the sand and be unprepared when the next, inevitable, tragedy strikes. We are asking for barriers to psychological support to be removed so that when disasters occur, we are fully prepared.

"It would be a mark of care and compassion to make these Medicare item numbers permanent, together with self-referral, which means a client would not have to wait for a GP to be available to request the psychological help they need following a disaster."

Ms Carrison said that although all levels of government have already stepped in to help with the immediate physical or financial assistance after a natural disaster, support for psychological impacts was equally important.

"Early intervention and support are critical in reducing the ongoing impact of these events and reducing the barrier, cost and stigma of seeking help is vital to providing appropriate mental health support to the communities suffering trauma and loss," she said.

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