

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mental health of natural disaster victims must be supported through Medicare

Australia's peak body for psychologists is calling on mental health services required as a result of natural disasters to 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 since 2020 for the Medicare item numbers, originally introduced after the Black Summer bushfires, to be reinstated and to include any large-scale disaster.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said in light of this summer's floods in far north Queensland and now this week's bushfires in Victoria that people's mental health continued to suffer, along with those providing services.

"As the NSW parliamentary enquiry into outpatient mental health care is showing, support workers in communities hit by natural disasters are also suffering.

"We know that worsening weather events and natural disasters continue to have a severe long-term impact on the mental health of communities around the country," 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 although governments stepped in to help with immediate physical or financial assistance after a natural disaster, support for long-term 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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Tegan Carrison is the Executive Director of the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi), a not-for-profit peak body representing all psychologists in Australia.

About Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)

AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for all psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia. Formed in 2010 by a group of passionate grassroots psychologists, AAPi's primary goal is to address inequality in the profession and represent all psychologists and their clients equally to government and funding bodies. Its primary mission is to lobby for equitable access for the Australian public to professional psychological services.