



Bushfire Psychological Counselling Voucher Program Information for service providers – July 2011

The Bushfire Psychological Counselling Voucher Program has been developed through a \$3.5 million gift from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. It aims to assist people directly affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires to access psychological counselling support.

What does the program do?

The program provides six counselling sessions to each individual (including dependant children over five years of age) who has been directly affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires. Applicants will be sent six vouchers that can be used to see an eligible counsellor of their own choice and in their own time.

Applicants who have used all six of their vouchers can apply for an additional six vouchers for further counselling support. This includes parents who have used their own vouchers in family counselling to support the care of children under five years of age. A maximum of 12 vouchers will be issued to any individual.

Applicants who require additional counselling support beyond the Bushfire Psychological Counselling Voucher Program or who require specialist treatment should be advised to visit their local general medical practitioner for ongoing advice and referral.

It is expected that service providers, with the consent of the applicant, will forward a discharge summary/letter to the applicant's general medical practitioner and facilitate referral to other specialist services and supports as required.

Each voucher is redeemable for a one hour session of psychological counselling, and is expected to cover the total cost of the session. **No additional co-payment can be requested from the applicant.**

People can apply for vouchers until 1 June 2012, and they will be redeemable until 31 August 2012. Funding for this service is not retrospective of any sessions delivered before 10 August 2009.

Who is eligible for this program?

People eligible for the program include:

- people who have received grants paid by the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund
- people receiving or who have received Victorian Bushfire Case Management
- dependant children (over five years of age) of eligible people above

- other people who have been directly affected by the Victorian bushfires, for example, family and close friends of people affected by the bushfires and those people who have lost their livelihood directly through the effects of the bushfire.

This is a statewide program and it is anticipated that people beyond fire-affected areas will apply for counselling under this program.

Which service providers are eligible to provide counselling under this program?

Only service providers who are eligible to participate in the program can accept vouchers. Eligible providers are:

- psychological counsellors employed in community health services receiving funds from the Department of Health.
- psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists registered as approved Medicare providers under the Commonwealth Government's Better Access to Mental Health Care initiative.
- psychological counsellors working with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.

There is no additional credentialing process.

How does the program work?

The program has four steps.

Step 1. Registration for program

People eligible for the program will complete and submit an application form to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.

Application forms have been sent to households who have received a grant under the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. Forms have also been made available online at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal

Parents/guardians are able to apply for counselling vouchers for children over five years of age. Young people may also apply independently for counselling vouchers if they wish.

Individuals who have used all of their vouchers may apply for an additional six counselling vouchers by completing an **Application for Additional Bushfire Counselling Vouchers** form available from www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal or calling our hotline directly on **1800 180 213**. Please note individuals applying for initial vouchers must complete an initial application form.

Step 2. Receiving counselling vouchers

Vouchers will be returned to each person nominated on the application form. Vouchers for minors will be forwarded to parents/guardians. Each voucher is redeemable for one session of counselling treatment. Vouchers will have the applicant's name and a unique identification number - they can be used anytime from 10 August 2009 to 31 August 2012. Vouchers are not transferable.

Step 3. Making an appointment with a counsellor

Applicants will make contact with eligible counsellors to organise an appointment.

Contact details of eligible counsellors have been forwarded to all applicants.

Current eligible providers are:

- community health services www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/service_provider/community_health_directory
- Medicare providers under the Commonwealth Government's Better Access to Mental Health Care initiative including:
 - psychologists www.psychology.org.au/MedicareProvider/SearchByMap.aspx phone 1800 333 497
 - social workers www.aasw.asn.au/membersdirectory
 - occupational therapists www.ausot.com.au/images/File/BAMH%20Practitioner%20Directory%20100608%20Edited%20v2.pdf
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, Bereavement Information and Referral Service on **1300 664 786 (toll free)**

When making an appointment, applicants have been asked to confirm that counsellors participate in the program and can provide the care required, for example, child and adolescent counselling.

Only eligible service providers can redeem vouchers.

Step 4. Using a voucher

Vouchers can be used for individual counselling, family and couple counselling. For individual and couple counselling only one voucher is required. For counselling sessions of three or more people, two vouchers are required as it is anticipated the sessions will be more than one hour.

The choice of therapy is up to the applicant in consultation with the counsellor. Treatment modalities must be evidence-based. The use of Skills for Psychological Recovery for people following a disaster is encouraged. If more specialist treatment is required, service providers should make appropriate referrals to a relevant specialist.

Applicants do not need to use all of their vouchers, or attend all visits with the one counsellor.

At the completion of each counselling session the applicant must co-sign the voucher and the provider must retain it for financial reimbursement.

Financial reimbursement

To receive financial reimbursement under this program you must provide:

- a co-signed counselling voucher/s
- an invoice clearly stating:

- your name, business name and address, ABN
- Medicare provider number (if you are a private provider)
- bank details for payment.

Forward the above to:

**Operations Bushfire Appeal
GPO Box 4032
Melbourne 3001**

Terms and conditions

If you are a private provider you **must** provide your Medicare provider number as evidence of eligibility to participate in the program. If you do not have a current Medicare provider number you will **not** be eligible for payment.

Payments to community health services and the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement will be made to the agency not individual counselling staff.

Each voucher is redeemable for one hour of psychological counselling, valued up to \$150.00. No GST is applicable on this amount. For individual and couple counselling only one voucher is required. For counselling sessions of three or more people, two vouchers are required.

Remittance advice will be forwarded to you on payment. It is expected that payment will be made within five days of receipt of invoice.

It is acceptable for service providers to submit invoices in batches rather than after each consultation.

Please check vouchers carefully to ensure the name is correct and is valid for use.

Role and conduct of the service provider

It is expected that all service providers will provide care according to the code of conduct of their profession, clinical governance requirements of their agency and adhere to all relevant professional standards including compliance with health privacy principles, and client record management.

Any complaint against professional conduct will be forwarded to employing agencies or professional bodies.

Referrals

The preparation of a mental health plan is **not** a requirement of this program. However, it is expected that a discharge summary/ letter will be forwarded to the applicant's local medical practitioner where an applicant provides consent.

It is also expected that referrals will be made to ongoing supports and services during and after the course of treatment as required by the applicant.

Accountability

Counselling vouchers provide a fee for service income to private practitioners and state-funded agencies. Therefore, contacts made under this program **must not** be reported or claimed against any other state- or Commonwealth-funded program.

State-funded agencies must use a non-government cost code when entering data in their systems.

All data collected from this program will be audited for reporting purposes.

Where do I go for more information?

For further information visit our website at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal or contact our hotline on **1800 180 213**. Should any modifications be made to this program eligible service providers will be advised accordingly.