

Australian Psychological Society – Bushfire Briefing, Tuesday 3 March

A briefing for psychologists and other health professionals involved in support for fire survivors will be provided by the Australian Psychological Society (APS) on Tuesday. To be held in Storey Hall at the RMIT campus in Melbourne between 10am and 12pm, the purpose of the briefing is to provide an update on best practice for helping trauma survivors and those who are trying to help them, including family, friends, counsellors and other health professionals.

'We are fortunate in having several recognised experts in disaster preparedness and response on our APS Reference Group and they will be helping participants understand the psychology of how people respond to disasters, how best to help them, and how to avoid some of the common mistakes that can be made, with the best of intentions, but to the detriment of survivors,' says Professor Bob Montgomery, President of the APS.

'The major contribution psychologists will be making to help bushfire survivors will actually start in a few weeks time,' said Professor Montgomery, 'when the 10-20 per cent or so of survivors who have not been able to do most of their recovery for themselves will be showing lasting symptoms of extreme traumatic stress. Research has shown that this group benefits most from evidence-based treatment within the first three months. Without it, there is a strong risk they will develop Chronic Post-Traumatic Stress which is potentially very serious involving depression, substance abuse, social isolation, and risk of suicide.'

'The demand for this specialised service will go on for at least a year, partly because some survivors, mostly men, will be reluctant to ask for help, and partly because the material recovery, such as rebuilding homes, is going to take such a long time due to the extent of the disaster. In addition, what isn't recognised is the accumulating impact on psychologists and other health professionals of trying to meet that demand. Psychological services are already typically stretched in rural and regional areas, exactly where most survivors are located, and there will now be even greater demand on their services. An important part of our briefing message will be to emphasise self-care so that we remain available to those needing our professional help.'

Interview Opportunities:

Experts in the field of disaster response will be available for interview including:

- Professor Bob Montgomery, APS President;
- Professor Richard Bryant, Scientia Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of New South Wales;
- Professor Mark Creamer, Director of the Australian Centre for Post-Traumatic Mental Health;
- Dr Rob Gordon, Consultant Psychologist to the Victorian Emergency Recovery Plan and to Red Cross.

WHAT: Victorian bushfire briefing for psychologists and allied health providers

WHEN: Tuesday 3 March, 10am-12pm

WHERE: Storey Hall, Building 16, RMIT City Campus, close to cnr of Swanston and Latrobe Sts, Melbourne

For media enquiries please contact:

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The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 16,500 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.