

MEDIA RELEASE

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Psychologists and Red Cross join forces to improve disaster services for Australians

The Australian Psychological Society and Red Cross today signed a Memorandum of Understanding which will link the two organisations and lead to the improved delivery of emergency services for Australians.

“The overall aim is to reduce the psychological impact of man-made or natural disasters on the community,” says APS president Professor Bob Montgomery. “In the first instance, we will be working together to prepare communities for disaster so that they are more resilient, don’t suffer unnecessary or prolonged distress and are able to recover more quickly .”

Red Cross CEO Robert Tickner says; “We recognise that disaster has not only a physical impact on people and their environment, but also psychological effects which can be exacerbated if services are not delivered quickly or well and which can last long after the actual event. We want to equip our staff and volunteers to deliver the most beneficial procedures before, during and after an emergency. We also want to protect our staff and volunteers and enhance their own psychological wellbeing.”

Under the agreement, Red Cross will provide training for APS psychologists on how to work effectively in an emergency situation, so they may become approved Red Cross volunteers. Red Cross volunteers will receive training in ‘psychological first aid’ for those affected by emergencies and disasters. The aim is also to facilitate the provision of on-site support by APS psychologists for Red Cross volunteers, staff and community members during emergency operations.

“We now have a great deal of evidence about how disasters affect people psychologically and how we can enhance people’s psychological wellbeing both pre- and post-disaster,” says APS president Professor Bob Montgomery. “It is important to work across agencies and organisations to develop and deliver a consistent world class disaster response. This agreement is a historic first step to achieving that goal.”

For more information, please contact:

Karen Coghlan or Ellise McLoughlan
Media Team
Australian Psychological Society
03 8662 3300

Jacqui Pringle
Media Adviser
Australian Red Cross
0448 571 484

The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 17,500 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.

Relief in times of crisis, be it big or small. Care when it’s needed most and commitment when others turn away. With almost 100 million volunteers worldwide and 60,000 members and volunteers in Australia, we reach people and places like nobody else and care for local communities in Australia and Asia Pacific. Red Cross is there for people in need, no matter who you are, no matter where you live.