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I am a Psychologist registered with the Psychology Board of Australia (PSY 0001256101).

My practice is located in Manly, NSW. However, I have regular contact with communities directly impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires. I have previously owned property on the south coast of NSW and know the Bega Valley area well. I have worked pro bono with the Cobargo Folk Festival for ten years providing research services and consider myself a part of the local community. Over the last several years I have also been employed contractually to support the InterACT addiction recovery program delivered by Australian Recovery Centres in Clarence NSW. This facility was tragically razed during the Dargan/Clarence fire which swept through the Blue Mountains.

There are several aspects and consequences of the December and January fires which I believe need to be reinforced to the committee from a psychological and support perspective. This is based on my clinical observations and experiences over the last four months.

- The bush fire events have both created new trauma and triggered existing trauma. In the wider NSW community, the fires have left few people with existing mental health issues untouched. The enormity of media coverage has penetrated and at times overwhelmed the psyche of virtually all my clients. The ability to tolerate life's ebbs and flows has diminished, feelings of vulnerability have increased and previously latent thoughts of suicide have re-emerged. These elements will subside with time. However, the process is likely to be long-tailed rather than short for the most vulnerable i.e. those who have been traumatised or carry existing trauma related conditions. The horrific devastation experienced directly and second-hand will take some people many years to resolve.
- It is important to note that the care of wild life and animals is frequently a passion for people who have experienced trauma in their lives. The sound of "*colonies of koalas screaming in the trees*" is not something which will easily fade. Even today (17/4/20), in the midst of Corona-19, the consequences of the fires sit heavily with many impacted animal carers. Like the broader community, their media consumption is a double-edged sword which both promotes and aggravates psychological wellness. The therapeutic supports and funds required for treating people impacted must remain in place for at least five years whilst rebuilding and psycho-social adjustments take place. The 2009 Victorian bushfire suggests that some memories will never fully dissipate.
- The treatment of people in addiction recovery at the Australian Recovery Centre in Donald Road, Clarence has sadly ceased due to the fires. This facility provided live-in, evidence-based group psycho-therapy under the guidance of skilled addiction recovery therapists. The destruction of this facility and its program offerings are a significant loss to those in addiction recovery and the local area economy. Financial support for the reconstruction of this visionary but rarely heralded facility and its demonstrated programs is warranted.

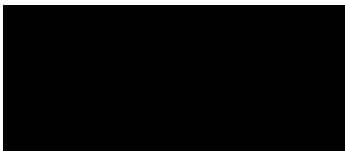
APTITUDE & INSIGHT...



- Trauma experienced as a direct and indirect consequence of the December-January fires requires committed and unequivocal ongoing support. Extending the availability of Medicare items for Allied Health workers is necessary to sustain and regain the mental health of those directly and vicariously impacted.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinions.

Yours faithfully,



Francis Wilson
Registered Psychologist