Disaster Response Strategy

**Purpose**

Disasters affect the wellbeing of individuals and communities and have enormous cost and impact. PACFA members are able to make a significant contribution to the psychosocial recovery of individuals and communities during and post disasters.

**Levels of Government Responsibility for Disaster Response**

**Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Office is responsible for issues relating to disasters. The Commonwealth Government provides financial assistance to State, territory and Local Governments to implement Disaster Response programs.

Emergency Management Australia is a division of the department of Home Affairs that delivers programs, policies and services that strengthen Australia’s national security and emergency management capability. They coordinate the Australian Government’s physical and financial support for disasters and emergencies.

**State and Territory**

State and territory governments manage emergency responses in their jurisdictions. State and Territory Government Disaster Management plans target the physical safety of disaster-affected communities and the provision of financial assistance. Interventions occur on a district and local level.

Relevant State and Territory emergency response agencies:

- [ACT Emergency Services Agency](#)
- [Northern Territory Emergency Service](#)
- [NSW Office of Emergency Management](#)
- [Queensland Community Recovery](#)
- [South Australia Fire and Emergency Services Commission](#)
- Tasmanian [State Emergency Service](#)
- [Emergency Management Victoria](#)
- Western Australia [State Emergency Management Committee](#)

**Local Councils**

Local Councils are responsible for implementing Disaster Management and Recovery Plans in their local areas.
PACFA’s immediate disaster response

- The PACFA Office will maintain current awareness of the Disaster Management arrangements for each state and territory.
- PACFA will respond quickly in times of disasters:
  - Volunteer Registrants in the affected State or Territory, or who are able to travel to the affected areas, will be asked to respond immediately if they are willing to volunteer.
  - Volunteer Registrants’ names, contact details and availability will be sent to the responsible state or territory disaster response services together with a message of support.
  - PACFA will liaise with the Red Cross in the affected state or territory and provide the contact details for Volunteer Registrants.

PACFA’s longer-term disaster recovery response

- Registrants interested in providing longer terms support to individuals and communities recovering from disasters, either as volunteers or if employed in recovery roles will be invited to attend training developed by PACFA on disaster recovery.

Requirements for Volunteer Registrants

- Volunteer Registrants will be aware that the recommended response to the psychosocial needs of individuals, families and communities affected by disasters is based on the principles of Psychological First Aid (see Appendix 1).
- Volunteer Registrants are encouraged to undertake training and professional development in disaster recovery and psychological first aid. Relevant professional development resources are available in Appendix 2.
- Volunteer Registrants should have a current Working with Children’s check.
- Volunteer Registrants should seek supervision and support for their disaster recovery work. This will help to support self-care in accordance with the PACFA Code of Ethics. Volunteers should be particularly aware of the potential for vicarious trauma when working in natural disaster areas and seek to address these risks through supervision or personal therapy if required.
Appendix 1

Psychological First Aid Principles

- Support the natural resilience of individuals, families and communities.
- Engage supportively and unobtrusively with survivors in field settings and assess their immediate needs.
- Ensure physical safety and provide emotional comfort.
- Support short and long term adaptive coping strategies.
- As far as possible, reunite individuals separated from their family and supports with their support systems/primary attachments.
- Resource parents to provide emotional support and be responsive to their children.
- Reduce the initial distress/stress response to the disaster by providing information on adaptive coping skills.
- Refer on to other services as required.

Appendix 2

Psychological First Aid

Australian Psychological Society and the Red Cross, Psychological First Aid: A guide to supporting people affected by disaster

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Psychological first aid skills for psychological recovery

Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network, Disasters: Psychological First Aid

General

Australian Psychological Society, Recovering from Bushfires and disaster

Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network, Disasters – bushfire resources
https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/resource-centre/disasters-bushfire-resources?fbclid=IwAR2ZQJuwsCHYi2piX2a-R31p2gl_nelxy4lmR0YoqZGuG7ethploO4PNJ40

Australian Childhood Trauma Group, Supporting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Times of Devastation
https://theactgroup.com.au/bushfires-trauma/?fbclid=IwAR2PX1I-xYcm4sHS5bJq2Zb2SY2ChFqD2V6M4zPikFmznG9j-y5-APF0

UnitingCare, Disaster relief and community recovery - Self help toolkits and information factsheets

Life in Mind, Mental Health Support for Bushfire affected communities
https://www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au/mental-health-support-for-bushfire-affected-communities?fbclid=IwAR2Z8gl7q1UDc1bFyqtflFGaITIKignP4idtB3QOMWTYr4EhEEmCCluAyy
Children, families, and specific cohorts

Australian Psychological Society, *Helping children who have been affected by bushfires.*

Autism Tasmania, *Autism and bushfire emergencies*  
https://www.autismtas.org.au/autism-and-bushfire-emergencies/?fbclid=IwAR2xX8v171dsfp6XC9QpOQU6ocw1j750kordrlf_v3rjj3V3BPMUoyeOw

Children’s Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, *Natural disaster resources – Birdie stories*  

Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network, *Case examples of trauma reactions in young people*  
https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/ACATLGN_TraumaResources_CaseExamples_D1%20%2828%29.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1xCQzd2x8S1ExSpSjyve-N7C_yOg2XiX-4Q1976gA9nAjPdak5y9c8

Sonoma County ACES Connection, *Helping young children recover after the Northern California wild fires*  

Community

Emerging Minds, *Community Trauma Toolkit*  
https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit/?fbclid=IwAR3YZlsVX6mS-wm7vAlekvQjNpHfclz0_CU3Uqd25n5rSRPyRfmEI7qaQ

The Australian Journal of Rural Health, *Face to face, person to person: Skills and attributes deployed by rural mental health clinicians when engaging with consumers*  

Ethics

Counselling Today, American Counseling Association, *Disaster mental health: Ethical issues for counsellors*  
https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/ethics-columns/ethics_january_2018_disaster-mental-health.pdf?sfvrsn=ba25522c_4

Vistas Online, American Counseling Association, *An ethical decision making model for crisis counsellors*  
https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/vistas_2010_article_89.pdf?sfvrsn=9