

Media release

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Under embargo

Black Dog Institute launches Bush Fire Support Service for first responders

As fire season begins, the Black Dog Institute is putting a different kind of fire plan together and launching a scheme to support the mental health of emergency service workers and their adult family members.

The *Bush Fire Support Service*, launched today, offers emergency service workers and their adult family members up to twelve one-on-one psychological mental health care sessions with experts, free of charge via Telehealth. This new service is available to all first responders who helped in the bush fires including firefighters, SES, ambulance, forestry, animal rescue, lifeguards and other Emergency Services Workers and their adult family members. It will also offer people a variety of ways of accessing the service, including a confidential online mental health assessment through a website designed to link people with the most appropriate support.

[The Grant Program for Emergency Services Workers trauma Care, including PTSD support services, is funded by the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs.](#) For the first time, Emergency Services Workers and their adult families from across Australia will have access to free specialist psychological mental health care from Australia's premier PTSD, anxiety, and stress clinics at Black Dog Institute and UNSW Sydney. This service comes under funding for a range of programs to support Essential Service Workers.

"These first responders fought tirelessly to put out bushfires that raged around the country and to keep people and animals safe. Their time at protecting us has stopped for now and the Black Dog Institute is proud to be able to do its part in looking after them," said the Black Dog Institute Chief Psychiatrist A/Prof Sam Harvey.

"We understand that people respond to stress and trauma in different ways and want to offer them multiple ways to seek support."

"As well as the sessions with a clinician there is support for those who prefer to guide their own treatment, with a range of tailored digital resources and evidence-based tools. These services are open to those people who responded to the bushfires, no matter where they live – our aim is to use telehealth and other digital channels to make sure everyone has access the best care possible."

The Bush Fire Support Service also includes professional development and the latest mental health evidence training for GPs in bushfire-affected areas to ensure local support for first responders and their families and streamlined referral to specialist mental health care. Anyone wanting to know more or start the process of getting support can visit blackdoginstitute.org.au/bush-fire-support-service

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Notes:

Black Dog Institute research shows at any time one in ten emergency service workers will have symptoms suggestive of PTSD, with a similar number reporting symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.

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