



Ararat Rural City

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK, BELLFIELD FIRE UPDATE

TUESDAY, 19TH MARCH 2024

BUSHFIRE-DAMAGED HOMES

If your home was damaged by the bushfires in late February 2024 and it is not covered by insurance, ERV can demolish it for free. This means that you can focus your efforts and resources on rebuilding.

You can register for demolition if:

- your home or rental property is in an eligible council area
- your home or rental property was affected by the bushfires in late February 2024, and
- you don't have bushfire insurance or you are underinsured for bushfire.

What happens after I register?

A member of the team will call you to complete your registration and book in a site inspection.

A qualified contractor will visit your property to assess the site. They will make a plan to undertake any work that is eligible under the program. This plan could also include work to:

- allow access to the site if needed
- remove damaged trees or other hazards that could make it unsafe for the contractor.

If parts of your property are important to you, it is important that you let the contractor know early. They can then consider this in their planning. Due to safety on site and the scope of the program, they may not be able to accommodate all requests.

The program does not include partial demolition, or any rebuild or repair work.

The contractor will submit their plan to ERV. They will meet you on site again to agree the scope of works. If you want to go ahead, you will need to agree to the scope of work in a timely manner, including making time to meet the contractor on site.

Register for demolition - Fill out the form online or call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 to register.



GRAMPIANS COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNSELLING SERVICE

Pomonal Recovery Hub: Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday

Pomonal Outreach Service: Thursday & Friday

pop up market

Pomonal Community Hall
Sunday, March 24th
9am to 12.30pm

Set up under the trees, you will find local, fresh food producers:

Pomonal Orchard
Bellellen Organics
R&P Veggies
Blue Wren Bakery

A small market organised by the suppliers and supported by the Pomonal Progress Association



BOB'S ARMY

(Lions Club volunteers)

This Weekend! SATURDAY 23 MARCH

Teams of volunteers will be deployed with chainsaws to properties who have registered prior to this date.

Please register your interest via the ARCC Pomonal Recovery Centre or 5355 0200.

The teams will work for the morning and then return to the rec reserve for a BBQ.





how to cope with the stress of natural disasters

It's common to need support after being in or witnessing an event that may be traumatic, such as bushfires, flooding, cyclones or drought.

It's important to find the right type of support for you, as everyone will be affected differently.

There are specific things that are likely to be helpful in the days and weeks following a natural disaster. As time passes in the months after, the types of things that are likely to be helpful will be a bit different.

It can help to talk with a trusted adult about getting the right sort of help if it all feels a bit much.

Tips for the initial days and weeks after a natural disaster

In the days and weeks after a disaster, it is important to do things that make you feel physically and emotionally safe.

It can help to:

- Find ways to connect with others, especially those who help you feel OK and support your wellbeing.
- Do things that make you feel calm and grounded. Try doing things you enjoy and include these in your routine.
- Explore ways to get involved with repair and recovery of your community. This can help give you a sense of hope and connect you with others which is important to recovery.
- Be mindful of exposure to traumatic information through stories and traditional and social media. It can be helpful to take regular breaks from the 24-hour news cycle.

(Hobfoll et al, 2007)¹



Try to avoid or limit alcohol and other drugs.

Tips for the shorter and longer term after a natural disaster

- Acknowledge that it was a tough time. You may have been impacted by the disaster in other ways (e.g., through media, or losing a loved one). It's OK to remind yourself that the events were out of your control.
- Be patient with yourself. It can take time to make sense of what happened. It's OK to need someone to remind you that you're safe.
- It's OK to start small. It's important to keep up any regular routines or activities. This could be daily activities, like attending school, work, sports or catching up with friends. It could be planning your day and trying to stick to that.
- It's normal to feel like you want to help the recovery process. You might like to look for ways you can contribute to help yourself and others to rebuild. It's also OK if this doesn't feel right just yet.
- Be aware of the triggers that remind you how you felt during or after the disaster. This could include particular sounds, smells, or images.
- Practise being calm. You might try deep breathing or relaxation exercises. Rest and comfort will also help you to feel calm.
- Connect with others. Being with people who understand you and are calm can help you maintain calmness as well.
- Avoid getting into situations that are unsafe and avoid taking big risks.
- Try to eat nutritious food. Eating well can help with your mood, sleep, physical health and wellbeing.



In the weeks, months, and years after being impacted by a natural disaster there are things you can do that can help.



Common reactions to a natural disaster

Natural disasters can be hard to cope with. People can respond in very different ways, which can also change over time. Some people might feel OK immediately after the disaster but become overwhelmed later.

After a natural disaster people can experience:

- fear and anxiety
- grief and loss
- difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or describing what happened
- anger and confusion
- sadness and emptiness
- denial
- guilt
- shock.

Other challenges

Following a natural disaster, other areas of life can be impacted, these may include; **relationships with others, worrying about others, having to take care of siblings, wanting to be alone, sleep, appetite, and possibly alcohol or other drug use.**

These can be normal reactions and natural coping responses. It's helpful to try to address these early, to prevent them from becoming ongoing issues. If they're starting to impact on your life, reach out for support.



How to look after yourself during a tough time?

After a traumatic event it's even more important than usual to focus on eating and sleeping well and staying active.

It can help to:

- have a routine
- allow yourself some 'worry time'
- set some realistic goals
- limit alcohol and other drug use
- use your strengths and connect with others.

People do recover from the impacts of natural disasters

Most people who experience traumatic events are able to recover. Some people may need to access professional support to navigate ongoing challenges.



Getting support

Very strong emotions normally start to settle by about six weeks after the disaster. If you have trouble with your emotions or with your usual daily activities after this time, then think about getting some professional help.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.

1. Hobfall et al. Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. 2007; 70(4):283-315 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5668133_Five_Essential_Elements_of_Immediate_and_Mid-Term_Mass_Trauma_Intervention_Empirical_Evidence)



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

FIVE TIPS FOR REPLANTING YOUR GARDEN AFTER BUSHFIRES - CSIRO

Australians are starting to return to their homes and rebuild their lives after the bushfires. Creating a garden can be an important part of the process of recovery and reconnecting.

Bushfires have devastated towns and regions around Australia. Bushfires don't discriminate: they burn large forests, small farms, and backyard gardens alike.

Many people are now returning to their homes and starting to rebuild their lives. Creating a garden can be an important part of the process of recovery and reconnecting. So, how should you go about replanting?

We asked some of our scientists, including Linda Broadhurst (Director, Australian National Herbarium), David Bush (Director, Australian Tree Seed Centre), Tanya Doody (ecohydrologist and Principal Research Scientist), Suzanne Prober (ecologist and Senior Principal Research Scientist) and Andrew Sullivan (leader of the CSIRO Bushfire Behaviour and Risks team).

1. Replant when it's cooler

Don't rush out to replant. Replant when it's cooler and after there has been some rain. Checking if there is likely to be ongoing rain can be helpful. If it's going to be drier than normal, maybe wait a little longer.

In southern Australia, plants are likely to establish better in spring. If you plant now, during summer, you're going to put the seedlings under more stress due to high summer temperatures. Planting in late winter or spring will give your plants a better chance of surviving, as there will be water in the soil and (hopefully) spring rain on the way.

If you have a large block, you can take this 'wait and see' approach a step further. We recommend allowing the native bush to recover and regenerate itself. Many of our Aussie plants are adapted to survive in a bushfire. Native bush should recover on its own. There are some exceptions: for example, where a fire sensitive plant community (like a wetland) has been burnt in an unprecedented way or if the fire was extremely hot.

You can encourage the natural regeneration of plants by removing livestock and controlling weeds, which may be more likely to grow after the fire. This will help the ecosystem, with resilient local native species, to recover on its own.

2. Design a garden that's fire-smart

While you're waiting for the cooler months, use that time to plan a 'fire-smart' garden. It's not just about what species you plant: consider the design, or landscaping, of your garden. This can help reduce the impact of direct flames, radiant heat and embers on

your house, and reduce its vulnerability. For instance, some people recommend a row of dense tall shrubs to act as wind breaks and 'ember catchers' around the perimeter of the house. There are some great books available, including Joan Webster OAM's work on 'fire-smart' gardens,[\[Link will open in a new window\]](#) and Australian Garden Rescue: Restoring a Damaged Garden[\[Link will open in a new window\]](#) by Mary Horsfall.

The Victorian Government's Country Fire Authority (CFA) has also set out four principles for garden design[\[Link will open in a new window\]](#) in fire-prone areas:

1. Plant to create defensible space
2. Remove flammable objects from around the house
3. Break up fuel continuity (keep plants separate and avoid flammable mulches)
4. Carefully select, position, and maintain trees.

See examples of garden designs for suburban, rural, hill and coastal properties.

3. Choose more fire resistant or retardant plants

During a bushfire, the type and amount of plants around your house can play a large part in whether your house survives. You can control the amount of fuel near your home by carefully designing your garden and choosing the right plant species. Reducing the litter layer under trees is also important to reduce fuel load. Some of our research has found that unkempt gardens that were full of debris (fallen litter, twigs, branches) are more likely to lead to a damaged or destroyed house.

Replanting with native plants

So, if you're going to replant with native plants, which species are best for you? It really depends where you live. Talk to your local native plant nursery about the best species for you. The CFA's Plant Selection Key helps you choose plants for a high bushfire area. And groups like the Australian Plants Society, have created lists of fire resistant or retardant plants, including some beautiful trees, shrubs and ground cover, like:

- Native frangipani tree (*Hymenosporum flavum*)
- Native passionfruit (*Passiflora herbertiana*)
- Saltbush species, including *Atriplex* and *Maireana* species
- Dune Fan-flower (*Scaevola calendulacea*)
- Pigface (*Carpobrotus* species) and other native succulents

4. Avoid flammable plants

Some plants are highly flammable. Many of our Australian plants, like eucalypts, have highly combustible leaf litter, and peeling or ribboned bark. This, combined with volatile oil in their leaves, makes them a hazard to have close to your home during a fire.

The Australian Plants Society suggests avoiding species like these near your house:

- Eucalypt and corymbia species
- Tea tree and melaleuca species, like Crimson Bottle Brush (*Callistemon citrinus*)
- Lilly pillie trees
- Many wattle species, like Silver wattle, Blackwood and Prickle Moses
- Some exotic species, like Camphor laurel, bamboo, poinciana, English oak, gorse, lemons.

5. Seek advice from trusted sources, like local native plant nurseries

The suggestions of plant species above are not complete lists. It's best to contact your local native plant nurseries when deciding on what species to replant. The staff will know what the best species are, and they can also let you know about a plant's ability to regenerate after fire.



Landscaping for Bushfire: Garden Design and Plant Selection provides information on garden design and plant selection which can be used for new or existing gardens in high-risk bushfire areas.

- Download **Landscaping for Bushfire: Garden Design and Plant Selection - CFA Website**
- Use the online **Plant Selection Key** to help choose plants for a garden in a high bushfire risk area

<https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/how-to-prepare-your-property/landscaping>

BLAZE AID BASE CAMP AT BUANGOR

www.blazeaid.com.au/buangor

blazeaid.com.au

**VOLUNTEERS HELPED
REBUILD THIS FENCE**



BlazeAid
Helping Communities Rebuild
After Natural Disasters



About Us

BlazeAid is a volunteer organisation that helps rural property owners clear and rebuild fences after damage by natural disasters.

- We deploy teams of volunteers to work with property owners to clear and rebuild rural fences
- Team leaders are experienced fences
- We have our own equipment and fencing trailers
- Property owners supply materials, BlazeAid supplies the labour

Contact Us

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To register for assistance, please email admin@blazeaid.com.au or call into your local basecamp



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TRAUMA AFFECTS THE WHOLE FAMILY IN DIFFERENT WAYS

When a family is affected by a crisis, everyone in the family will react in a different way. Understanding distress reactions and their effect on family dynamics can help the family to cope. Don't hesitate to seek professional help if you think your family is struggling to recover.

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-families

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-children-two-to-five-years

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-teenagers-common-reactions

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-teenagers-tips-for-parents



**NATIONAL
DEBT
HELPLINE**
1800 007 007
ndh.org.au

get back on track with **free** financial counselling



I'm feeling
overwhelmed!



How can I pay
these debts?

Speak with someone

Call us for **FREE** advice on how to manage your debts.



1800 007 007

Project of Lions Clubs

SINCE 2006
15 Years

**Need for Feed
AUSTRALIA**

needforfeed.org

Supporting
our farmers and
rural communities in
times of need since 2006





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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

Partners in Wellbeing is a free and confidential helpline available seven days a week. Speak to trained financial counsellors, business advisers and wellbeing coaches for confidential 1:1 support. Call 1300 375 330.

www.vic.gov.au/Mental-health-and-wellbeing-support

Partners in Wellbeing

Support for your mental health and wellbeing.



If you are not coping or have been feeling distressed, anxious or down over several weeks, help is available through Partners in Wellbeing service.

The **FREE SERVICE** offers one-on-one support to help you improve your wellbeing, develop strategies to cope and provide emotional support when and as you need it.

Work out what is wrong

Working with a Wellbeing Coach, you explore what is causing your stress or anxiety and help you gain clarity on your thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Get things under control

Through coaching and practical advice, your Wellbeing Coach will help you find strategies to manage stress, anxiety and improve your wellbeing and resilience.

Get on with life

We help you to identify people in your life, support services, and other resources to draw on during times of stress. If required, a Wellbeing Coach will assist you in linking with other support services in your local community.

Keep Connected

We keep in regular contact with you to provide emotional support, practical assistance and help you use the strategies you have identified to manage your stress, anxiety and improve your wellbeing.

Small Business Support

If you're a small business owner, you can receive FREE and confidential specialist support which includes business advisory and financial counselling.



Eligibility

To be eligible for this service, **you need to be 16 years or over** and:

- experiencing increased life stressors and your usual coping strategies are not working
- noticing signs of anxiety and/or depression that have lasted more than a few weeks, such as:
 - low mood i.e. feeling down
 - feeling overwhelmed and unsafe
 - low energy
 - feelings of hopelessness
 - fear, nervousness or worrying
 - avoidance of social situations
 - thoughts of self-harm or harm to others.
 - are not currently using a community mental health psychosocial support service.

Carers may experience these challenges in their own right in addition to providing care to a loved one.

Get started or refer someone

Call **1300 375 330** to contact the service in your area.

If you would like to refer someone you know, you must first discuss this with them and have their consent to make the referral on their behalf.

We encourage referrals from people who identify as LGBTIQ, culturally diverse, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, veterans and people experiencing homelessness.



Contact Partners in Wellbeing



Phone **1300 375 330**

Live chat **available online**

Monday to Friday 9am-10pm
Weekends 9am-5pm

Free wellbeing support

We provide phone support to any Victorian aged 16 and up, including people who identify as LGBTIQ+, multicultural, Veterans, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and international students. There are no Medicare or visa requirements to receive support.

For more information visit www.partnersinwellbeing.org.au

@PartnersInWellbeingFB
 @partners_in_wellbeing

About Partners in Wellbeing

Partners in Wellbeing is funded by the Victorian Government and is being delivered by EACH, Neami National and the Australian Community Services Organisation (ACSO) across Victoria.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land we work on and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We celebrate, value and include people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.

