

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Beyond Bushfires Recovery Matters webinar series

Mental health recovery after disaster

Exploring the 10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report

 24 August, 2021  2pm AEST  aidr.org.au/events

SPEAKERS

Professor Meaghan O'Donnell and Alexandra Howard,
University of Melbourne

HOSTED BY

Andrew Coghlan, Australian Red Cross

Beyond Bushfires Recovery Matters webinar series

Welcome

Andrew Coghlan

Head of Emergency Services, Australian Red Cross

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Acknowledgement of Country

AIDR acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all join us from today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this event.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters across Australia.

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Housekeeping

- Today's event will be recorded and made available after the event.
- Please enter questions for our speakers in the Q&A function, not the chat box.
- Please use the chat box to share any thoughts or reflections during the presentation – remember to select 'all panellists and attendees' to ensure everyone can read your message.
- Please be respectful to each other when posting your comments or questions.

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The topic of today's webinar may be sensitive for some people. Some services to access support will be posted in the chat.

- Lifeline: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- Beyond Blue: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

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Meaghan O'Donnell | Head of Research, Phoenix Australia – University of Melbourne

Meaghan has published widely in the area of posttraumatic mental health. She is the Research Director of the Phoenix Australia Traumatic Research Clinic, which tests new and emerging treatments to promote recovery following trauma exposure.

She is on a number of scientific advisory committees including the 2020 National Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics) and Australian Veteran Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council (Department of Veterans' Affairs). Meaghan is Past President of the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies and is a recipient of an Experienced Researcher Humboldt Fellowship. She is on the editorial board for the European Journal of Traumatic Stress Studies, and guest editor on a special COVID-19 edition of this journal.

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Alexandra Howard | Director, Disaster and Public Health Emergencies, Phoenix Australia – University of Melbourne

Alexandra has more than ten years' experience working in the field of posttraumatic mental health - as a clinical psychologist, educator and specialist in policy and service development. She has worked with disaster-impacted communities, emergency service and military personnel, traumatic injury patients, as well the professionals who support them.

Alexandra's current work focusses on translating evidence into policy and practice change that improves psychosocial outcomes for those impacted by disasters and public health emergencies, with a particular focus on marginalised populations. Alexandra has published in the field of posttraumatic mental health, and has presented her work at national and international conferences.

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Mental Health Recovery After Disaster

Professor Meaghan O'Donnell, Head, Research
Alexandra Howard, Director, Disaster & Public Health Emergencies



Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health



Our expertise



10 YEARS BEYOND BUSHFIRES REPORT



Contributors:

Lisa Gibbs, Robyn Molyneaux, Louise Harms, H. Colin Gallagher, Karen Block, John Richardson, Vaughn Brandenburg, Meaghan O'Donnell, Connie Kellett, Phoebe Quinn, Lauren Kosta, Kate Brady, Greg Ireton, Colin MacDougall, Richard Bryant.

Funding partners:



Partner organisations:

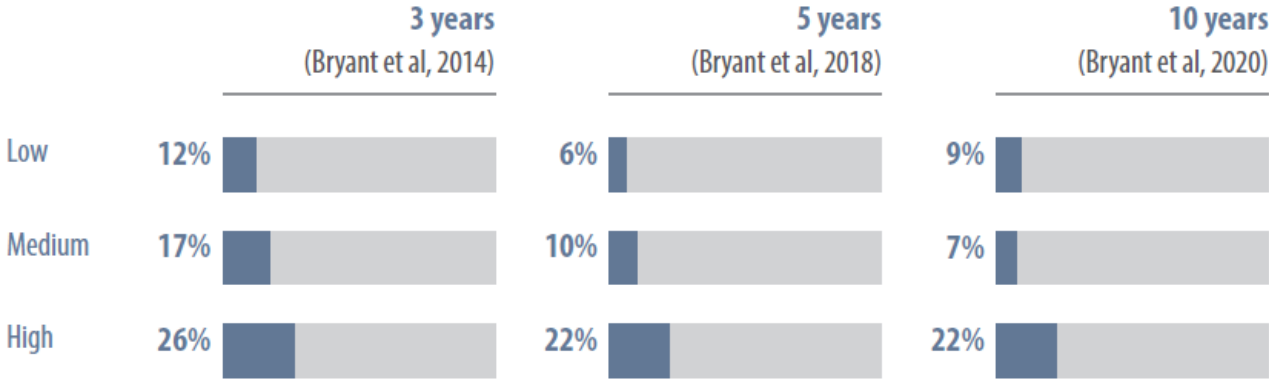


MARCH 2021

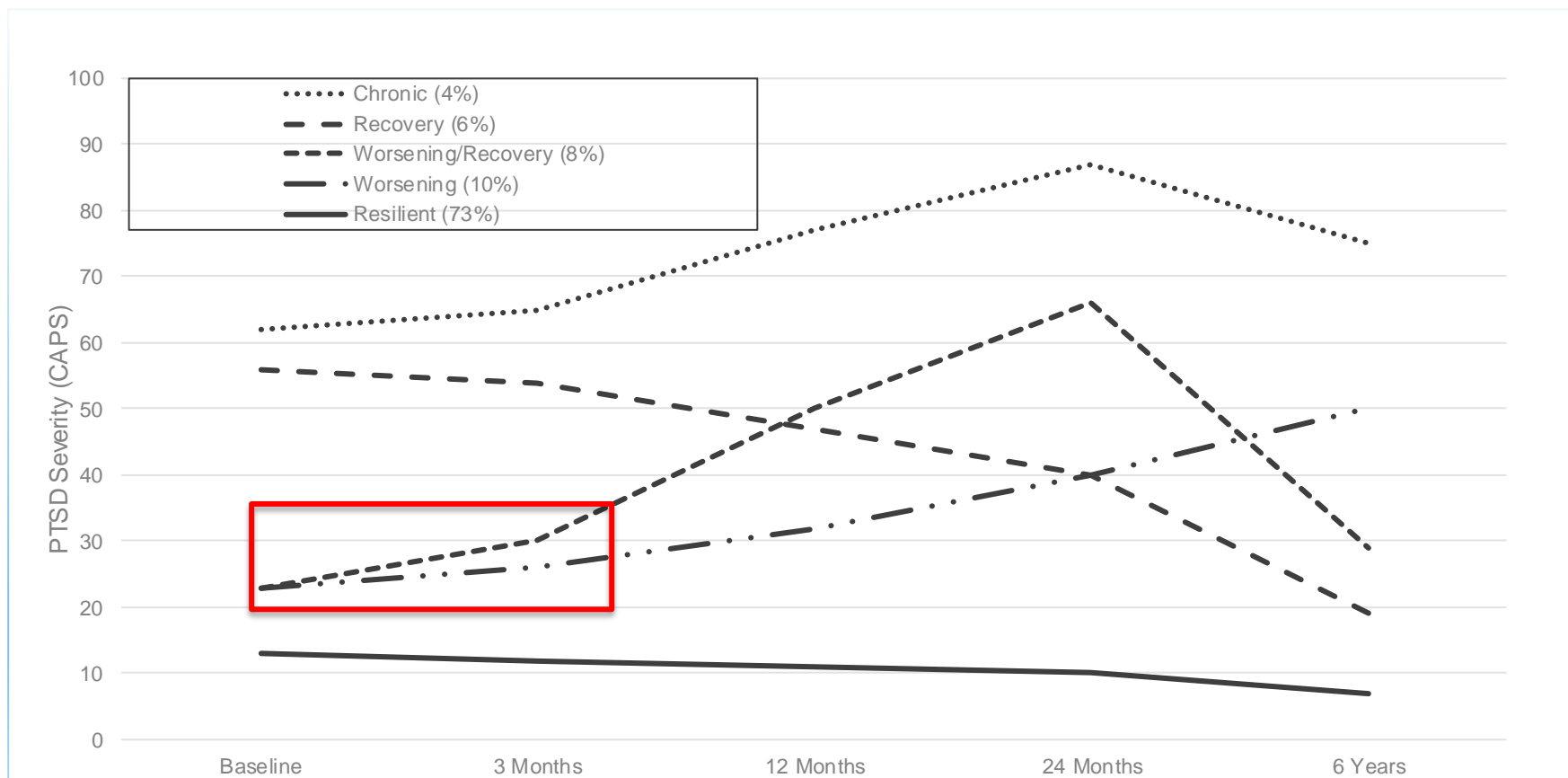




Rates of probable disorders across all communities - PTSD, depression, and/or severe distress



Trajectory of PTSD symptoms



Bryant, R., Nickerson, A., Creamer, M., O'Donnell, M.L., Forbes, D., Galatzer-Levy, I., McFarlane, A., and Silove, D. (in press 2015). The trajectory of posttraumatic stress following Traumatic Injury: a six year follow-up. British Journal of Psychiatry

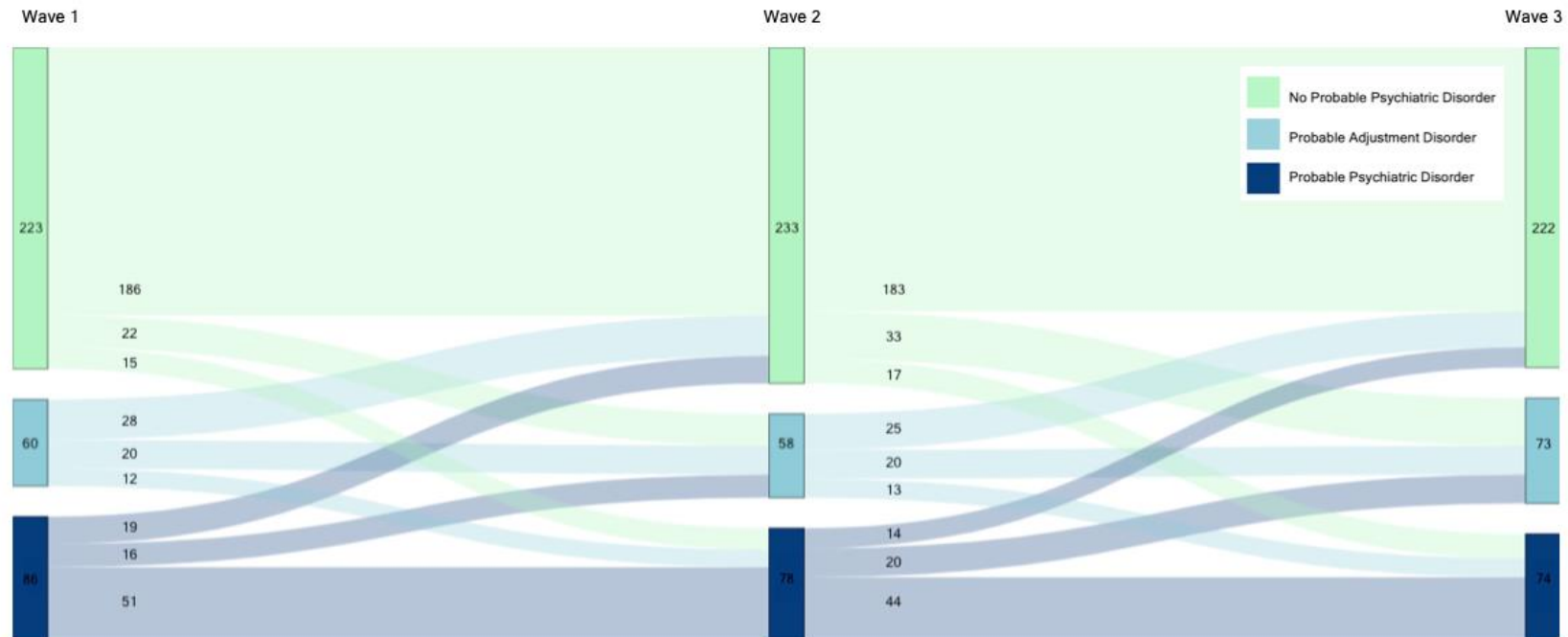
Adjustment following bushfires

Probable psychiatric diagnostic status	3 years N = 802		5 years N = 596		10 years N = 436	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Adjustment Disorder	126	15.7	88	14.8	81	18.6
Psychiatric Disorder						
Fire-Related PTSD	110	13.7	58	9.7	28	6.4
Depression	97	12.1	57	9.6	39	8.9
No Psychiatric Disorder	489	61.0	393	65.9	270	61.9

Adjustment difficulties as a risk factor

Figure 1

Sankey Diagram Revealing the Trajectory of Probable Psychiatric Diagnosis Across Ten-Year Period Following Black Saturday Bushfires



Note. A total of 369 participants completed all measures at the three waves of data collection, comprising the longitudinal sample. The width of the lines in the Sankey Diagram are proportional to the number of participants that transition to each probable psychiatric diagnostic status at each wave.

Predictors of transition to PTSD Diagnosis

- Female gender
- Income stress
- Relationship stress

Hierarchy of Interventions





Promoting Resilience and
Recovery in Regional and Rural
Victoria

The Skills for Life Adjustment and Resilience (SOLAR) program



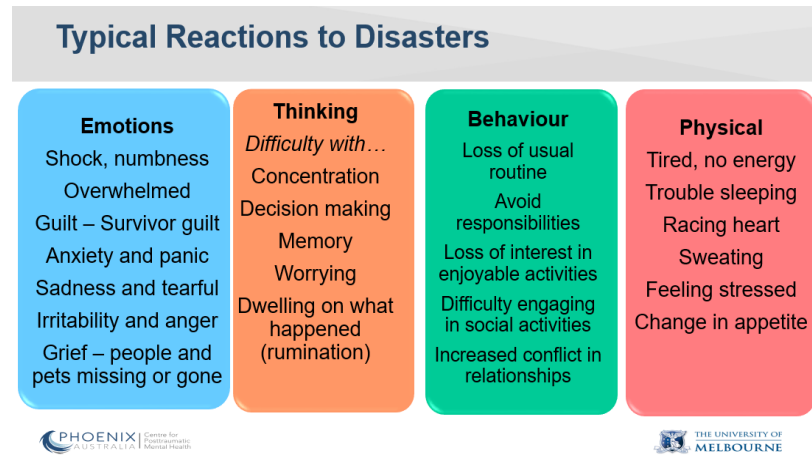
History of SOLAR: Intervention Development

- Developed by an international roundtable of leader disaster and trauma experts, who met to discuss
 - What should SOLAR include?
 - Who is best to deliver SOLAR?
 - How to evaluate and gather evidence to inform policy and service delivery for disaster survivors?
 - How to build local capacity and offer sustainable solutions?



What is SOLAR?

- Brief / low intensity psychosocial skills based program for
 - Reducing psychological distress
 - Preventing the onset of relatively severe mental health problems
- Targets emotional symptoms associated with re-adjustment to life after disaster or severe stressors
- Simple and scalable – can be delivered by non-mental health specialists (EG. community nurses, volunteers) as well as mental health workers





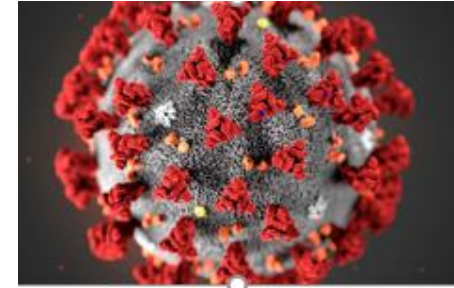
SOLAR: Emerging Evidence

- Pilot testing with bushfire survivors in SA
 - Demonstrated safety + acceptability
 - Follow-up studies in Tuvalu with cyclone survivors, Germany with trauma survivors
 - Demonstrated efficacy
 - Testing digital versions with emergency service workers
-
- O'Donnell, M.L., et al. (2020). An open label pilot study of a brief psychosocial intervention for disaster and trauma survivors. *Frontiers of Psychiatry*.
 - Lotzin, A., et al. (in press). The SOLAR group program to promote recovery after disaster and trauma - A randomized controlled feasibility trial among Germany trauma survivors. *Psychological Trauma*
 - Gibson, K., et al. (in press - June). Piloting a scalable, posttrauma, psychosocial intervention in Tuvalu: The Skills for Life Adjustment and Resilience (SOLAR) Program. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*.



The Current Project - 1

- Aims to deliver and evaluate SOLAR in rural and regional communities in Victoria impacted by disaster and COVID-19
- Specific objectives are to:
 - Develop an approach to delivering SOLAR that works in rural and regional communities in Victoria
 - Provide evidence to show effects of SOLAR for community members impacted by bushfires, drought and COVID-19.



The Current Project - 2

- Project offers training and supervision in becoming a SOLAR Coach
 - Contact Phoenix Australia to register your interest in becoming a Coach
- If you or community members might benefit from using the SOLAR program, they can register their interest here:
 - <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/expertise/research/current-treatment-trials/promoting-resilience-recovery-trial/>

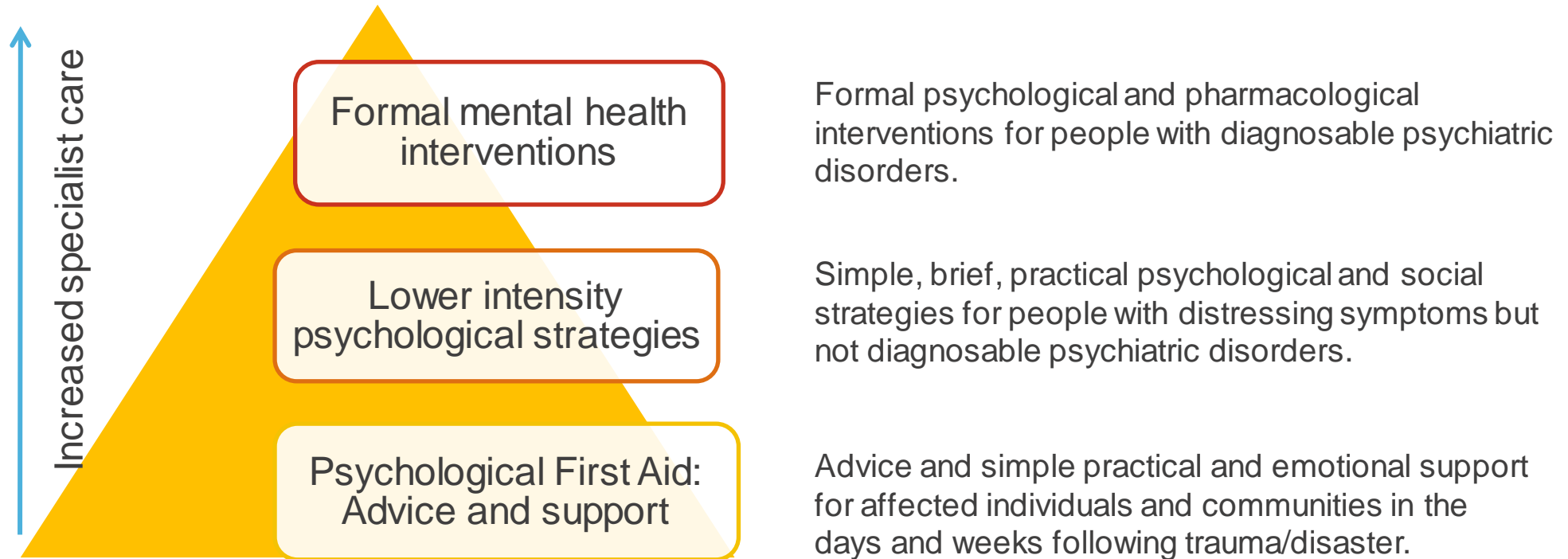
Applying stepped care to bushfire recovery

About the programs

Helping you help others

- Through a range of free courses, Phoenix Australia aims to work with frontline workers to enhance their ability to:
 - support community members' recovery from the bushfires
 - promote their own resilience and psychological recovery from the bushfires
 - support the resilience and wellbeing of their teams and organisations.
- This project has been made possible through the Federal Government Mental Health Supports for Bushfire Affected Australians, and the Victorian Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Bushfire Recovery packages.

Hierarchy of Interventions



All delivered within a trauma-informed environment

PROBLEM SEVERITY



Level 1 Mild distress (and first few weeks)	Level 2 Moderate Weeks-months	Level 3 Severe Months to Years
STRATEGIES		
E.g. Psychological First Aid (PFA)	E.g. SOLAR	E.g. Trauma focused CBT, pharmacotherapy
ISSUES		
Informal Flexible	More formal 1-6 sessions	Formal longer term
APPROPRIATE CARE PROVIDERS		
Anyone	Primary care, Allied health and others	Mental Health providers

What is Psychological First Aid?

- PFA is a practical, flexible, and recommended approach that anyone with the appropriate training can use to help people affected by trauma. PFA helps you to reduce a person's distress and link them with supports - days, weeks or even years after a trauma.



Calming



A sense of safety



A sense of self and community efficacy

Principles of PFA



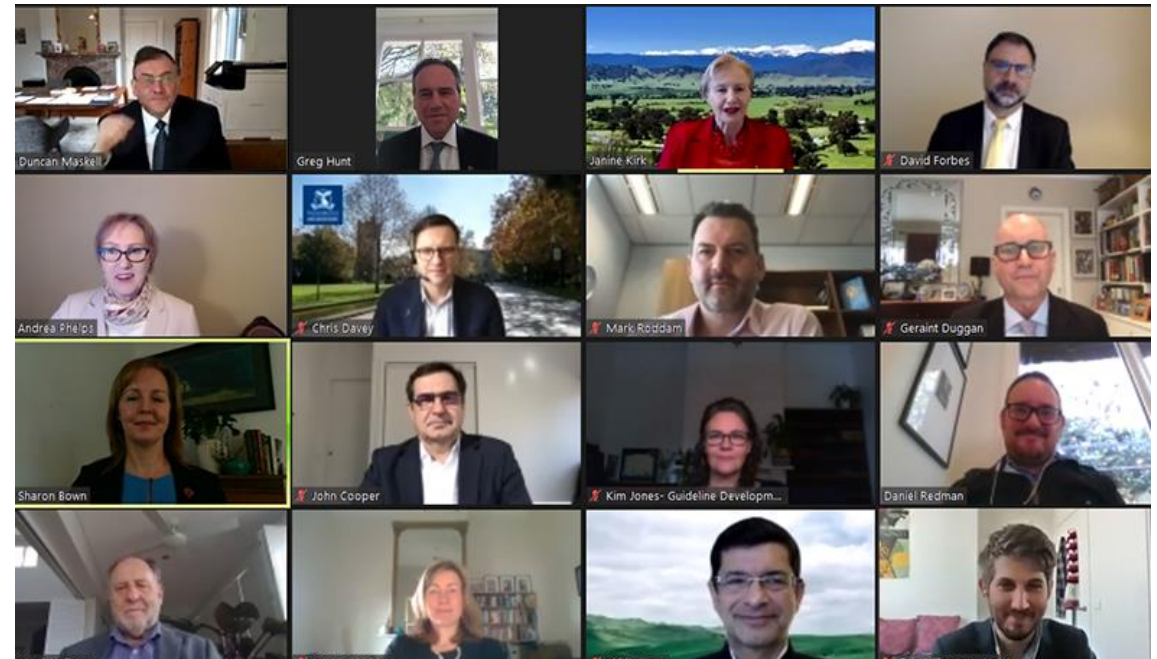
Connectedness



Hope

Formal mental health intervention

- For **adults with PTSD**, strong recommendations for:
 - **Trauma-focussed CBT**
 - Cognitive processing therapy
 - Cognitive therapy
 - Prolonged exposure
 - Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)



2020 treatment guideline recommendations

Creating trauma-informed interactions and environments

- Trauma-informed care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.



Bateman's Bay, NSW

- Drought, fires, COVID-19 and floods
- Heightened anger and frustration within the community, especially in relation to insurance payments with passing of anniversary
- Due to COVID-19 our face-to-face training was first opportunity for many to share experiences in this forum
- Training still considered highly relevant more than a year on from fires, and definite sense that COVID-19 restrictions had delayed community recovery

Corryong, VIC

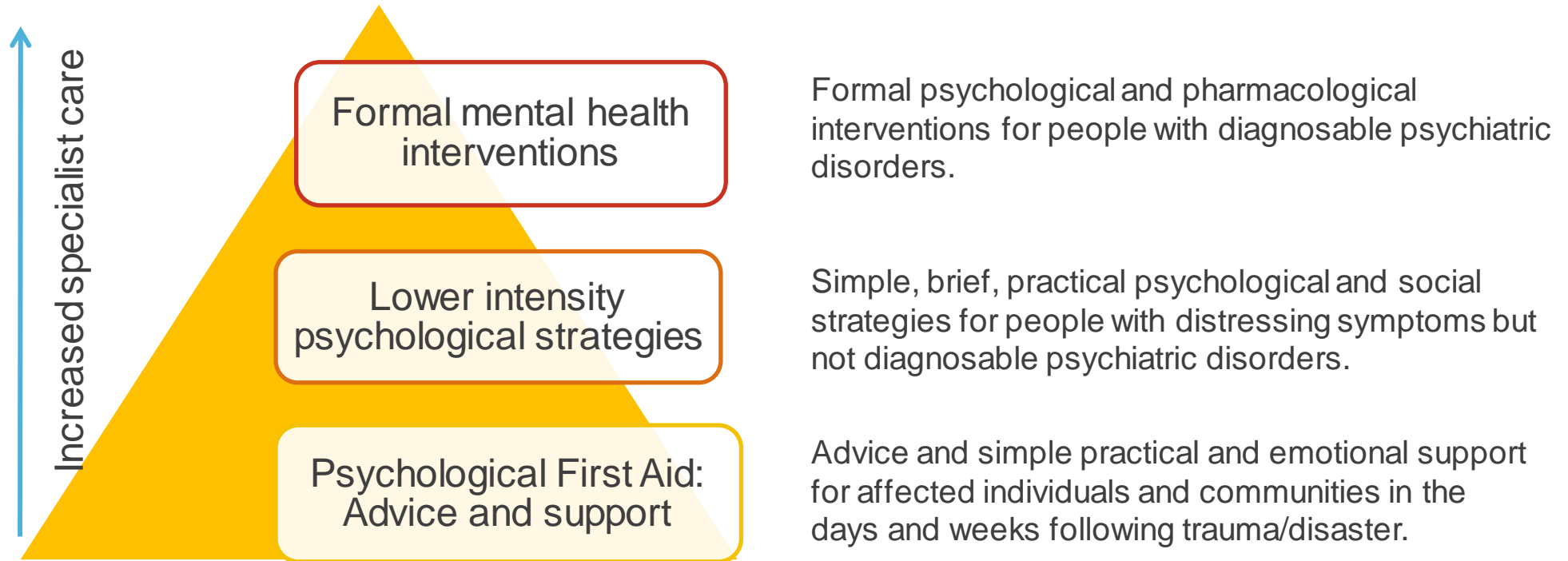
- Four deaths of young men in the across the past year, with three by suicide
- Community grief and trauma from these events
- Federal and state services working with community
- Shift of focus from bushfire recovery, but will need to return to it

Kangaroo Island, SA

- Current concerns regarding lack of rain, and fears of looming drought and mice infestation
- Community, workforce and volunteer fatigue, and community fracturing resulting in bullying within schools
- Limited and inconsistent health services on island
- Want continuation of support programs and services, rather than additional programs
- Return of tourism of island has seen problems with homelessness and rentals increase

Summary and resources

Hierarchy of Interventions



To register for the training or SOLAR support

- If your organisation is interested in accessing some of the limited places for these training programs, then you can find out more about the project and register your interest here:
 - <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/resources/bushfire-recovery/>
- If you or community members might benefit from using the SOLAR program, they can register their interest here:
 - <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/expertise/research/current-treatment-trials/promoting-resilience-recovery-trial/>

Disaster Mental Health Hub

The Disaster Mental Health Hub provides resources and training programs for people who support disaster impacted individuals and communities, including:

- General practitioners and nursing staff
- Allied health practitioners including specialist mental health practitioners
- Community support and volunteer workers
- Emergency Services

It is a three year project supported by funding from the *Australian Government under the Disaster Response – Improving Mental Health Outcomes and Promoting Recovery from Trauma Program.*

<https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub/about/#st-partners>

Resources: www.phoenixaustralia.org

The screenshot shows the Phoenix Australia Disaster Mental Health Hub website. The header includes the logo and navigation links: Prepare, Respond, Recover, Resources, Training. The main content area features three large cards: 'Prepare BEFORE A DISASTER', 'Respond DURING A DISASTER', and 'Recover AFTER A DISASTER', each with a 'Find out more' button. Below these cards is a paragraph: 'Information, resources and training programs that will help you to support the mental health needs of individuals and communities before, during and immediately after a disaster.' At the bottom, there are search filters and four resource categories: TRAINING (Working with the effects of disaster and trauma), TRAINING (Working with posttraumatic attributions), COMMUNITY RESOURCE (Helping yourself recover after a disaster), and PRACTITIONER RESOURCE (RACGP Emergency Response Planning Tool).

[/resources/disaster-resources](#)

This screenshot displays a list of disaster resources. It includes three entries: 'CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)' with a tip sheet for health practitioners and community members; 'BUSHFIRES' with resources for health practitioners, first responders, and community members; and 'FLOODS' with tip sheets for practitioners and helpers working with flood-impacted people. Each entry has a small image and a right-pointing arrow.

[/recovery-online](#)

The screenshot shows the 'Recovery Online Toolkit' page. The main heading is 'Understanding and coming to terms with psychological trauma'. Below this is a video player with a play button. To the right of the video are four teal buttons: 'RECLAIMING LIFE', 'MANAGING EMOTIONS', 'CONNECTING WITH OTHERS', and 'SELF-CARE'. A sidebar on the left contains text about trauma and a list of bullet points: 'Many people experience some form of trauma throughout their lives' and 'Traumatic events occur in many forms, from accident or abuse to war or natural disaster'.

[/australian-guidelines-for-ptsd](#)

Acknowledgements

- **State Trustees Australia Foundation**
- **Victorian and Commonwealth Department's of Health**
- **Mental Health Practitioners Network**



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 [@phoenix-trauma](https://www.linkedin.com/company/phoenix-trauma)



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Q & A session

Don't forget to enter your questions into the Q&A box.

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Event concludes

View the 10 Years Beyond Bushfires report at
www.beyondbushfires.org.au

Mental health support

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

www.beyondblue.org.au

Further resources:
knowledge.aidr.org.au/recovery

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