



MEDIA RELEASE

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The true impact of natural disasters on Australian men's mental health

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) has released the fourth and final report of their landmark *Ten to Men* research series, a longitudinal study following the lives of 16,000 Australian men. Revealing one in four Australian men were impacted by a natural disaster between 2019 to 2021, it examines the adverse mental health impacts of one of the most devastating periods in Australia's recent environmental history (2019-2021).

"It's critical that we understand the full spectrum of support these men need to recover. With support going well beyond financial assistance or the immediate clean up but extending mental health recovery as well," says lead researcher Karlee O'Donnell.

Bushfire, floods, severe storms, cyclone, droughts were considered but bushfires were found to have the greatest mental health impact with men affected by bushfire 1.3 times more likely to report moderate or severe depressive symptoms, even after accounting for related factors like age, location, and social factors.

Likewise, men affected by cyclones were 1.6 times more likely to report mild anxiety symptoms and those affected by storms were 1.5 times more likely to report moderate or severe anxiety symptoms.

The report also highlights barriers men face when trying to access mental health services following natural disasters. These barriers include work commitments, a lack of services, cost, long wait times, and practices not taking new patients.

"We need to know what barriers need to be addressed. The data shows a greater likelihood of adverse mental health outcomes when men experience more than one natural disaster. In years to come some living in at-risk areas are likely to experience multiple natural disasters, so we need to know how to best support these groups," says Ms O'Donnell.

Dr Sean Martin, program lead for the *Ten to Men* research series said that at the time of writing the report, Northern NSW and Queensland were experiencing flooding events, whilst at the time of release, many areas around Victoria were either recovering, or still experiencing flooding events.

The report found innovative care delivery models (e.g. community-led mental health services, enhanced access to telehealth, resilience-focused interventions) could supplement traditional health care, and improve outcomes for flood-affected Australians.

The *Ten to Men* Chapter 4 is available via the below link:

<https://static.aifs.gov.au/files/dtyhrfe5/2022-TTM-Insights-Report-Chapter-4.pdf>





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About *Ten to Men*

Ten to Men is a national research initiative aimed at filling the gaps in knowledge about why males on average have poorer health outcomes than females, and why certain groups of males have poorer health than males in general. The knowledge gained in the study will be used to improve programs and policies for male health in Australia.

The study is longitudinal – meaning that we will return to participants every few years for an update so that we can understand how changing life stages and circumstances might affect health and wellbeing over time.

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