



## Participant Information Sheet

**Project title:** Australian National Bushfire Health and Wellbeing Study

**Researchers:** This research is conducted by researchers at ANU, led by Professor Iain Walker in the Research School of Psychology.

**Funding:** The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Emerging Priorities and Consumer Driven Research (EPCDR) Initiative.

### General outline of the project:

- **Who can participate?** We are aiming to recruit about 50 participants who are:
  - a) aged 18 years or older;
  - b) have lived in Australia since August 2019 in one of the following communities:
    - a. Snowy Valleys Shire, Eurobodalla Shire, Bega Valley Shire, Shoalhaven, Mid-North Coast, ACT, or other areas classified as bushfire affected.
- **Research description:** We want to understand the health and wellbeing needs of people and communities who have been affected by bushfire or smoke and what promotes resilience and recovery. We will interview people to hear their lived-experiences of bushfires, including what has helped and challenged recovery, and what people and communities need to continue their recovery. We will also ask about the extra impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Use of data and feedback:** We plan to share outcomes from this research in scientific publications, conference presentations, student research theses, media updates, or similar. A report of the research findings will be made available to the public and posted on our project website: [bit.ly/3a71pAt](https://bit.ly/3a71pAt). Once the report is finalised, we will hold community gatherings to present the report and the findings.

### Participant involvement

- **Voluntary participation and withdrawal:** Taking part in the interview is voluntary and you may stop at any time. You may also withdraw from the project after the interview by telling a researcher via email or phone (contact details below), however, once data has been de-identified and merged, your data will be anonymous and can not be separated.
- **What's involved in the research?** In this audio or Zoom recorded interview, you will be asked questions about your bushfire experience, the way that the bushfires have impacted you/your community, and what has supported or prevented your recovery. You will be asked questions about the impacts of bushfire on you, your family, parenting (if relevant), and community, feelings regarding changes in the environment, and personal and community factors that have facilitated resilience and recovery following the bushfires. We will also ask about your experiences with COVID-19, as the pandemic started shortly after the bushfires. After the interview, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on your interview experience. You will also be invited to take part in future research, which will include a follow-up survey, and possible future interviews. Doing the next part of this research is entirely optional. You do not have to agree to take part in future research to take part in the research described here.
- **Location and duration:** It is expected that the interview will take 1 to 2 hours, depending on what you want to tell us - it is your story. The interview will be conducted in one of 3 ways: in person in your community, online via Zoom (an online video conferencing platform), or via a phone call. The

interviewer will talk with you to decide which type of interview would work for you and will take into account current advice relating to COVID-19 restrictions. Here is some more information on each interview type:

- **In person** interviews will be held in your community, and the researcher will tell you the location. Interviews will be audio-recorded, and you will get a copy of the recording to keep.
- **Online** interviews will be through a private Zoom link (on the ANU server) that will be sent to you before your interview. For Zoom interviews, you will need access to a computer, a microphone and a stable internet connection, and somewhere you feel safe to talk. The interviews will be audio- and video-recorded (if you elect to use your camera during the interview) using the Zoom recording function but only the audio recording will be retained and used in the research. You will get a copy of the audio recording to keep.
- **Telephone** interviews will be through a landline or cellphone. You will need access to a place where you feel safe to talk with a landline or stable cellphone connection. Interviews will be audio-recorded, and you will get a copy of the recording to keep.

All interviews will be professionally transcribed for analysis. During your interview, your interviewer will check with you about whether you would like a break, and you are welcome to take one or more breaks when you need.

- **Risks:** People have unique stories, emotions and experiences with bushfire and bushfire-smoke. Some people may feel higher levels of distress when recalling their experience. It is important to remember that it is entirely your choice what information, and how much information, you wish to share with your interviewer, and you can stop the interview at any point. If you begin to feel distressed, your interviewer will check with you about what you need (a break, further support, to stop the interview). Your interviewer will also encourage you to contact a support person, and/or your local GP or a mental health support service to discuss your experience. Nationally available support services include: [Lifeline \(lifeline.org.au or 13 11 14\)](http://lifeline.org.au), [Lifeline's dedicated Bushfire Recovery Crisis Support line \(13 HELP or 13 43 57\)](http://lifeline.org.au), [Beyond Blue \(beyondblue.org.au or 1300 22 4636\)](http://beyondblue.org.au), and the [Suicide Call Back Service \(1300 659 467\)](http://1300659467). Links to further supports can be found on our project website listed below.

Participants' confidentiality will be ensured by removing names, addresses, or other identifying information from transcripts and publications, carefully selecting direct quotes, and pooling data. Every effort will be made to minimise the risk that participants could be identified by their comments. You can choose to review your transcript to give feedback and discuss the handling of sensitive information.

- **Remuneration:** To thank you for your services in sharing your time, knowledge and personal experiences with the researchers, you will receive a \$50 voucher.
- **Benefits:** This research will help our understanding of the mental health impacts of bushfire on Australian people and their communities. The research will help us understand the ongoing mental health needs of a range of people and communities across Australia following bushfire disaster and the subsequent pandemic. It will also help us understand how individuals and communities can prepare mentally and physically to support mental wellbeing following future bushfires. We hope that the research outcomes can be used by health professionals, communities and policy makers to shape local and national strategies for bushfire resilience and recovery.

## Confidentiality

**Interview data:** Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected in line with *The ANU Privacy Policy* (ANUP\_010007) and the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*. Your interview will be given a unique code (with any

identifying information removed) and only the research team can access it. The interview data will be reported in groups, without identifying individuals. If individual examples are used in publications (e.g., a sentence or paragraph), the example will have identifying details removed so that it is anonymous. Every effort will be made to protect participant confidentiality. However, please be aware there is a small chance you may still be identifiable from your comments. You can choose to review your transcript and discuss any problems identified with the research team.

**Contact details:** If you want to participate in follow-up studies, you will be asked to provide your contact details (first name and phone number). These details will be coded and stored separately to your interview. Your details will only be used to plan follow-up research, and will not be used for any other purpose. Once you have completed your participation or have withdrawn from the research, your details will be deleted.

### **Data Storage**

**Audio recordings:** The in-person and telephone interviews will be audio-recorded on a digital recording device. The Zoom interviews will be video- and audio-recorded via Zoom technology within a secure ANU server. Only the audio recordings will be retained and used (video recordings will be deleted). Audio recordings will be uploaded to, and stored on, a secure server at the ANU. Audio recordings will be professionally transcribed (typed into a word document) for analysis, and the transcripts will be also stored securely on the ANU server. Only the approved research team will have access to the data. Data storage is required for at least 5 years after all publications arising from the work. After this, de-identified interview data will be deleted.

**Privacy notice** By collecting your information for this research, the ANU must comply with the Privacy Act 1988. The ANU Privacy Policy is available at [https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP\\_010007](https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_010007) and it contains information about how a person can: Access or correct their personal information, complain about breach of an Australian Privacy Principle, and how ANU handles complaints.

**Questions or concerns** If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the research team on the contact details below. This research has been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Protocol number 2020/591). If you have concerns or complaints about this research, please email The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee ([human.ethics.officer@anu.edu](mailto:human.ethics.officer@anu.edu)), or call +61 2 6125 3427.

### **Contact Details**

Dr Emily Macleod, Research School of Psychology, The Australian National University  
Website: [psychology.anu.edu.au/research/projects/bushfire-study](https://psychology.anu.edu.au/research/projects/bushfire-study) or [bit.ly/3a71pAt](https://bit.ly/3a71pAt)  
Email: [bushfirestudy@anu.edu.au](mailto:bushfirestudy@anu.edu.au)  
Phone: +61 2 6125 1664

Please call and leave a message with your best contact number and a team member will get back to you as soon as possible.