



Support for bushfire-affected school students and families in Victoria

A range of support is available from the Australian and Victorian governments if you have a child starting or returning to school in 2020 in a bushfire-affected area.

Information about schools and school safety

If you have questions about starting or returning to school please contact your school or the **Victoria Department of Education and Training** (www.education.vic.gov.au), **Catholic Education Commission of Victoria** (www.cecv.catholic.edu.au) or **Independent Schools Victoria** (www.is.vic.edu.au).

The Victoria Department of Education and Training website has information relating to schools and early childhood services and the 2020 bushfires: education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/bushfires.aspx.

The Australian Government Department of Education has information about support for bushfire-affected communities on its website: www.education.gov.au/support-bushfire-affected-communities.

Financial support

Additional payment for children

The Australian Government has announced an Additional Payment for Children of \$400. You'll automatically get this payment if you are the principal carer of a child affected by bushfires after 30 June 2019 and you are eligible for the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP).

The payment is in addition to the existing \$400 AGDRP (for a total payment of \$800) for children and is not subject to income tax.

It is available to new applicants from 20 January 2020. Families of the nearly 20,000 children who have already applied for the AGDRP do not need to re-apply, the additional payment will follow automatically.

www.humanservices.gov.au/disaster

Community support

Staff from Services Australia (formerly Department of Human Services) are visiting bushfire affected communities to help people access Australian Government payments and services.

They can also help people access Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support services using free self-service facilities at these locations.

www.humanservices.gov.au/access

The National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA) is coordinating the national response to help rebuild communities.

www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au

Stay up to date with what the government is doing to help Australian families, communities, wildlife and businesses rebuild and recover:

- Facebook National Bushfire Recovery Agency – [@FireRecoveryAU](https://www.facebook.com/FireRecoveryAU)
- Twitter National Bushfire Recovery Agency – [@FireRecoveryAU](https://twitter.com/FireRecoveryAU)



Mental health support

Extra mental health services from Beyond Blue

An extra 25 mental health liaison officers will work with local schools and early childhood education and care services in bushfire-affected communities as part of an Australian Government funded expansion of the mental health services provided by Beyond Blue.

This support will be delivered through *Be You*, the Australian Government's national education initiative to support child and youth mental health. Schools and early childhood education and care services that have yet to participate in *Be You* can sign up for free at any time.

www.beyou.edu.au

Ongoing mental health and wellbeing support

Schools and students can access a range of mental health and wellbeing services including counselling. Please talk to your school about the support available or the support you might need as the school year gets underway.

Australian Government support will complement existing school counselling services including state and territory responses to the bushfires. \$76 million of Australian Government funding will provide distress counselling and mental health support for individuals, families and communities affected by bushfires. This includes additional funding to support young people through *headspace* centres in bushfire-affected areas.

www.health.gov.au/health-topics/emergency-health-management/bushfire-information-and-support/australian-government-mental-health-response-to-bushfire-trauma

Useful resources and contact details

Emerging Minds

A range of resources, including a toolkit to support children through a natural disaster or traumatic event, is provided by Emerging Minds. The toolkit is grouped into the timeframes surrounding a natural disaster — preparedness, immediate, short-term recovery, and long-term recovery.

www.emergingminds.com.au

Student Wellbeing Hub

The Student Wellbeing Hub is an online space for educators, parents and students to build safe, inclusive and connected school communities that promote wellbeing and learning.

www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au

School chaplains

The Australian Government is offering extra funding, available to state and territory governments on request, for school chaplains.

School chaplains work together with school communities to support the wellbeing of students through pastoral care, running programs such as breakfast clubs, and coordinating volunteer activities within the school community.

www.education.gov.au/national-school-chaplaincy-program

Child care assistance

Additional Child Care Subsidy

Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) (temporary financial hardship) is a short-term payment, in addition to the Child Care Subsidy.

This subsidy is available to families who:

- have experienced temporary financial hardship due to an event that happened in the last 6 months
- have a substantially reduced ability to pay child care fees.

www.humanservices.gov.au/accs

Child Care Subsidy activity test

Families in bushfire-declared areas have also been given an exemption to any potential Child Care Subsidy (CCS) activity test debt for the 2019–20 financial year by the Australian Government. No action is required by families at this time. This will be applied automatically when CCS is balanced at the end of the financial year.

Assistance for early childhood education and care services

Funding is also available for early education and care services in bushfire-affected areas to enable them to remain viable, and help pay for things like temporary premises, the replacement of damaged playground equipment, or wages for affected staff.

www.education.gov.au/community-child-care-fund-cccf-special-circumstances-bushfire-and-drought-support

Higher Education students

HELP repayments

For students who are studying, or thinking of studying, at university, there may be help available from your education provider or Study Assist. You may also be able to defer or amend your HELP compulsory repayment.

www.ato.gov.au/individuals/study-and-training-support-loans/deferring-repayments

Scholarships

Scholarships of up to \$18,000 are available through the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program. Special consideration will be given to students from drought and bushfire-affected communities.

www.education.gov.au/rural-and-regional-enterprise-scholarships