



CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK PRIORITISES BUSHFIRE VICTIMS

January 8, 2020

Supporting families and communities through the trauma and lasting impact of the bushfire devastation in New South Wales and Victoria is a national priority for Catholic Social Services Australia and its members.

With staff and volunteers working in some of the most bushfire-affected areas of the country, the national network of Catholic social service agencies is mobilising to help communities recover and rebuild from the current crisis.

Ursula Stephens, CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia, said CSSA members operate at more than 650 sites across the country. Dozens of those are in areas affected by bushfires in recent weeks and months.

“Our network members, including CatholicCare Wollongong and Canberra-Goulburn and, in eastern Victoria CatholicCare Melbourne, have well-established family and welfare services working in those communities,” Dr Stephens said.

“We are ready to help them meet the emerging needs of the families and communities as they come to terms with the bushfire devastation.

“We have local staff and volunteers who have also lost their homes and property. They know only too vividly the challenges that many others are also facing.

“Local insights and knowledge allow our agencies to respond with compassion and to work closely with other agencies on the ground through local partnerships and arrangements.

“Our strengths in responding are in areas of trauma-informed counselling and support services, critical incident debriefing, financial counselling and children and family therapies.

“For Catholic social services responding to disasters, the efforts are targeted and sustained for weeks, months and years – well after the national spotlight has faded,” she explained.

Dr Stephens said CSSA will liaise with the Commonwealth Government and other Catholic organisations, including parishes, schools, health and aged care services, Vinnies and religious orders, to harness the Church’s significant reach to respond to this bushfire emergency.

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Catholic Social Services Australia is a national network of more than 60 agencies working in 650 communities, supporting over 500,000 people and employing 15,000 staff and volunteers.