



The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP  
Treasurer  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

31<sup>st</sup> January 2020

## SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO AUSTRALIA'S BUSHFIRE CRISIS

Dear Treasurer,

Youth Insearch would like to add a supplementary submission to our pre-Budget submission sent on 20 December, 2019. Youth Insearch runs one of the most successful youth intervention programs in the country. We work with at risk youth aged 14 to 20 supporting them to turn their disadvantages into their advantages, enabling them to reach their full potential. The program has a peer focus, with young people helping young people.

Youth Insearch currently runs very successful programs in the fire-affected areas in Victoria and New South Wales. Youth Insearch is currently mobilising a long-term crisis response to address the catastrophic aftermath that these events will have on the community long after the fires are extinguished.

Youth Insearch was a youth mental health first responder during and after the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria. Our leaders were able to offer a deeper level of support to local youth and their families by providing an immediate program and access to the local support workers. Many of the Youth Insearch leaders were impacted directly by the Black Saturday fires. They were able to give the young people empathetic support by having a direct understanding of what the community was facing immediately and in the future.

Youth Insearch points to The *Beyond Bushfires: Community Resilience and Recovery* study., This was conducted by the University of Melbourne to examine the impacts of the Black Saturday and related bushfires of February 2009 on community members' physical and mental health and wellbeing. The research also aimed to build understanding of the interplay between individual, social and community-level recovery. The six-year study involved over 1,000 participants across Victoria. There

was progressive recovery at community level over time but there was also evidence of delayed impacts on individual mental health and extended impacts at five years post bushfires. The results highlighted the influence of close friends and family, social networks and community groups, and natural environment on resilience and recovery.

There are clear opportunities to use these findings to inform individual decision making, community-level strategies to strengthen resilience, and targeting and timing of recovery services. Disasters don't end when the debris is cleared, and buildings are rebuilt. The trauma and disruption echo on for people caught up in the mayhem and suffering. For young people, the fallout can be particularly pernicious, interrupting their normal development and potentially undermining their future chances in life.

The report said long term support was needed at a community level for those communities impacted so they could rebuild their lives. The report made the following recommendations to the State and Federal governments:

**Recommendation 1: Invest in community groups**

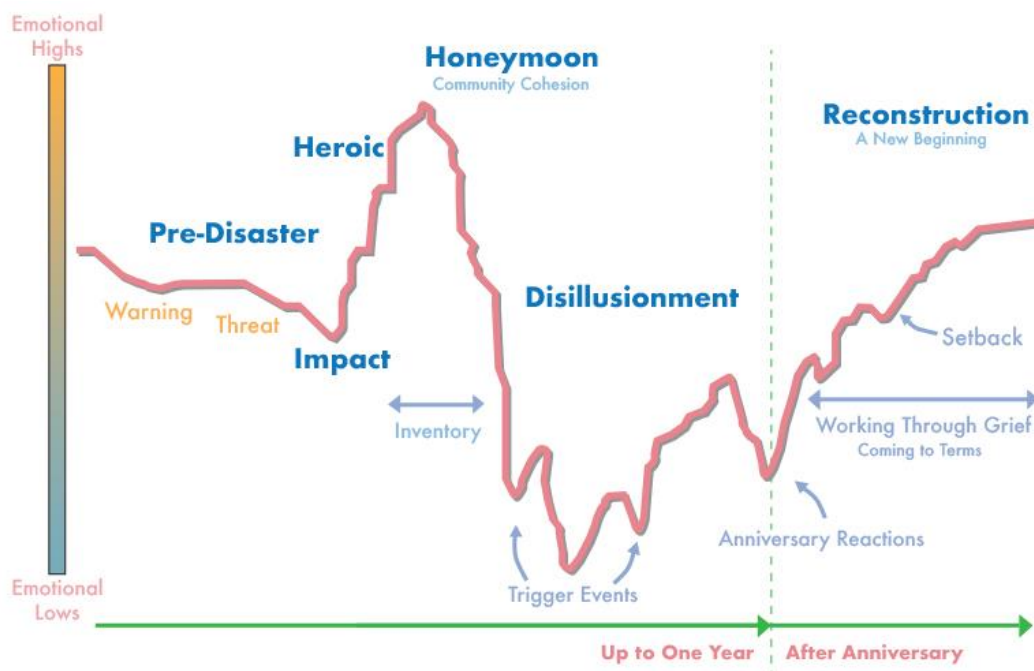
The Department of Health and Human Services, Emergency Management Victoria, Municipal Association of Victoria and local government continue to recognise and support community groups as critical influences on social connection and individual and community level recovery, and to promote inclusion and facilitate wide participation.

**Recommendation 2: Government mental health and wellbeing planning**

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) includes consideration of disaster impacts in the broader mental health and wellbeing support service planning, including the *10-year Mental Health Plan*.

Youth Insearch has been delivering these highly successful programs to vulnerable Australian youth for over 35 years. Our program sites are deeply engaged in some of the most bushfire impacted communities and we are asking the Federal Government to invest in our programs over the next two years to support the recovery and rebuilding efforts for these locations. You will see from the chart below our response needs to be swift to support the research that early intervention has a greater

success rate.



Adapted from Zunin & Myers as cited in DeWolfe, D. J., 2000. [Training manual for mental health and human service workers in major disasters](#)

The graph above created by GP Australia shows the timeline of mental health issues that arrives over a long period after a disaster.

Youth Insearch could increase the number of local community support workers servicing its current programs as well as more ongoing mental health and wellbeing programs to fire affected areas if the Federal Government provided Youth Insearch funding through the Mental Health Support Package in 2020.

The Youth Insearch program works by allowing young people to confront and deal with the reality of the pain in their lives and will be especially beneficial to the youth living in the fire-affected areas. By drawing on the resources of other young people who have experienced the same issues, and addressing the real problem or underlying issue, young people seek positive alternatives within themselves. Youth Insearch will provide early intervention and ongoing support to assist in addressing the immediate response to a crisis and prevent any long-term impacts. The program intervenes early allowing young people to deal with their issues as they start to appear.

Treasurer, we ask that you provide Youth Insearch additional funding through the Mental Health Support Package so we can increase access to community-based early intervention programs. These programs focus on youth mental health prevention, promotion and education, and will provide additional critical response and long-term mental health support to Victorian and New South Wales bushfire impact zones.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Stephen Lewin

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Chief Executive Officer

Gary Rothwell

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Rothwell' in a cursive style.

Chairman

cc The Hon Greg Hunt MP Minister for Health

The Hon Zed Seselja MP Assistant Minister for Finance, Charities and Electoral Matters