

Red Cross bushfire recovery support

Information for partner organisations and communities

Information correct at 25 August 2020

Key information

Australian Red Cross is here to support people now and throughout their recovery.

- Red Cross bushfire grants have supported 4,995 people (and counting) and we continue to encourage those eligible to come forward. These grants help people meet immediate needs and find a safe place to live in the medium to long term.
- The community recovery program is underway and will run for three years, led by local community recovery officers.
- Red Cross has also allocated funds for emerging and unmet needs in bushfire-affected communities, knowing that people's needs change over the course of recovery. This includes a new grant to be released later in the year.

Red Cross grants help people make the choices that are right for them.

- The initial emergency grant (\$20k) was for people whose homes were destroyed
- Bereavement grants (up to \$50k) helped the next-of-kin of people who died in the fires
- Repair grants (\$10K) are helping home owner occupiers to repair their homes and water tanks
- Injury grants (\$7.5k or \$15k) help people injured in the fires
- Re-establishment grants (\$10k-\$40k) help people who lost their homes to find a safe place to live

Red Cross urges people who are eligible for a grant to come forward.

- More than 4,995 people have received a grant and a few people are still coming forward.
- Applications for Red Cross grants are have been extended to **30 September 2020**.
- People can apply at redcross.org.au/grants. The process is simple, with a few basic checks to verify people's identity, proof of residence and payment details. Our grants team is happy to support people with their applications.

Our recovery program operates across 47 local government areas.

- Red Cross recovery officers are providing psychosocial support, connecting people to useful services and helping them apply for grants.
- Red Cross is also working with local recovery committees and intra-agency groups, and supporting local leaders to identify and progress community recovery projects.
- Red Cross volunteers and staff are here to help you, however they can. They welcome questions and want to know how we can keep doing better. But abuse or threats cannot be tolerated.

Progress updates are posted at redcross.org.au/bushfirefunds

This includes reports and updates on how donations are helping.



Every dollar donated has been allocated. Here's how.

Total funds raised: \$232m



- \$5m – On-the-ground disaster services (FY19/20)
- \$56m – Emergency grants for people whose homes were destroyed
- \$20m – To help home owners make urgent repairs
- \$1.8m – Bereavement payments
- \$8.5m – Grants for people injured in the fires
- \$2m – Other financial hardship
- \$87m – Re-establishment grants for people whose homes were destroyed
- \$18m – Community recovery for 3+ years
- \$33.7m – Further support as needs become evident

Admin support costs (i.e. to pay grants, prevent fraud, legal compliance) have so far been less than 4c in the dollar for every dollar donated).

Allocation correct at 25 August 2020

Questions and Answers

What's happening to money donated to Red Cross in the bushfires?

- Every day it's going to people who lost everything in the fires.
- It's also supporting a community recovery program over three years or more

Why didn't you give all the money out immediately?

- Red Cross started distributing funds at the beginning of January and continued to significantly expand financial assistance as donations grew.
- The goal is to give people the financial support that's right for them, when they're ready for it. And giving the most support to those who lost everything.
- Because Red Cross does not have contact details for everyone impacted by the fires, they rely on people coming forward. While the majority of people affected have applied for and received grants, some people have recently come forward for the first time.
- Red Cross is providing grants that people apply for when they're ready – to meet immediate needs, to make repairs, to help with hospital expenses, and to make choices about where to live.
- Recovery takes a long time. So Red Cross has an \$18m three-year recovery program in all affected communities.

When do your grants close?

- All Red Cross grants are now open until **30 September 2020**. Apply at redcross.org.au/grants.

Can people get help with grant applications?

- Yes. If anyone needs support, please call the grants team on 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276).

If you're giving out grants, why are people still living in tents and caravans?

- No grant can ever replace what people have lost in the fires, especially their homes.
- People have said they used the emergency grant to buy household items, find a temporary place to live, replace things that aren't covered by insurance, or to purchase caravans or mobile homes to stay in while they rebuild on their land.

What are you going to do to help people through the winter?

- Many people whose homes were destroyed have been living in 'for now' arrangements while they work out what to do.
- That's why Red Cross has introduced a re-establishment grant to help people rebuild their home, buy another home, rent a home, move to a retirement home, or replace the caravan or mobile home they were living in. The aim is to ensure people have somewhere safe to stay.

Why have some people said that funds were slow and they've struggled to access money?

- When you've lost everything, no help can ever come fast enough or replace what you've lost.
- Red Cross has made the application process as simple as possible, with basic checks to prevent fraud. More than 4,995 people have received grants (at 25 August).
- But it's hard for people to find and provide information after a disaster. That's why Red Cross and other agencies are calling for a trusted information source that people can use to submit information once, and multiple agencies can access and provide financial assistance quickly.

Why are some media stories claiming you haven't helped people?

- While there have been many positive stories, unfortunately some of our work has been misrepresented. Most of the people featured in recent stories have received grants, and on the rare occasion they have not yet applied, Red Cross has followed up and supported them to apply.
- It's true that Red Cross has not been as visible in some communities as it wanted to be. This is because of COVID-19 restrictions and to protect volunteers, many of whom are aged over 60. As restrictions ease, Red Cross teams are back in communities and resuming outreach work.
- Red Cross welcomes every chance to have an open and honest conversation, whether in person, in the media, or on social media.

Do you have a presence in bushfire-affected communities?

- We have a recovery footprint in 47 local government areas.
- With COVID-19 restrictions easing in many areas, our recovery officers are back in communities, helping people apply for grants and supporting other recovery efforts.
- Red Cross has provided phone and online support, including outreach to local councils, offering webinars, using Spotify and radio ads, community newspapers and social media to inform people about financial assistance.

What does your recovery program do?

- It's a three-year program in bushfire-affected regions across New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia.
- Trained Red Cross volunteers will provide psychosocial support – at recovery centres and hubs, at community events, and face-to-face and phone outreach.
- Red Cross will continue to help people apply for grants and connect them to services and information.
- Red Cross is engaging with local community organisations, agencies, working groups and intra-agency groups to facilitate community recovery. They are also supporting people in community leadership roles with information, support and recovery expertise.
- Red Cross runs information sessions and training on recovery. These are currently offered online.

What training and support do you offer?

- Red Cross has training modules in a range of topics: Psychological First Aid, Support the Supporter, Recovery Basics, Self-Care and Managing Stress, Communicating in Recovery, and Harnessing Goodwill.

- In-person training is complemented with webinars, focussing on various aspects of recovery.
- Red Cross also supports local community leaders through our Disaster Recovery Advisors and Mentors (DRAMA) program. Our mentors are sounding boards for local leaders and help them navigate the recovery journey.

Why can't you help with fencing and business expenses?

- There are charity laws that define what Red Cross and other charities can do. As a public benevolent institution, Red Cross must provide relief to people who are in hardship or financial distress.
- This is generally interpreted to mean people who have personal losses such as homes they live in, but not people who lost investment properties and holiday homes. It also means Red Cross can only support people; not businesses or animals or community infrastructure.
- There are many government and other agencies offering bushfire relief to businesses including farms, and Red Cross regularly refers people to them.
- People whose homes have been destroyed can access the emergency grant, which is \$20,000 to help with whatever their immediate needs are.

Were you participating in the Royal Commission?

- Yes. Red Cross provided a voluntary submission to the Natural Disasters Royal Commission and was then summoned to appear as a witness.
- Red Cross sees the Royal Commission as an important opportunity to ensure the nation's disaster preparedness, response and recovery systems are as robust and strong as they can be.
- You can read the voluntary public submission at redcross.org.au/bushfirefunds.

Are you keeping money for future disasters?

- No. Apart from \$5m for emergencies work in 2019/20 (including 24/7 support and evacuations, relief centres and outreach services), all other funds donated are being used to support people and communities impacted by bushfires since July 2019, including financial support grants and a three-year recovery program.
- Red Cross advised up to 10 cents of each dollar donated will be used for administrative support costs and these costs are currently less than 4 cents in each dollar donated. All interest earned is contributed back to the fund for bushfire relief and recovery.

Who can I speak to about bushfire recovery in my community?

Community recovery officers are now working in bushfire-affected communities. To get in touch, email recovery@redcross.org.au or call 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276).

Useful information

Grant applications: redcross.org.au/grants

Phone enquiries: **1800 RED CROSS** (1800 733 276)

Bushfire response: redcross.org.au/bushfirefunds

Our first report: redcross.org.au/bushfirereport