

Information for Providers – Supporting Mental Health after the Severe Weather Events

February 2023

We anticipate that those affected by the severe weather events in the Northern Region may experience psychological distress. While some level of distress is a normal and understandable response to these events, we know from previous disasters that for some this may lead to persistent stress/distress, and/or precipitate a mental health condition (e.g. depression).

Since the start of the severe weather events, there have been over 2,000 households requesting assistance and over 3,000 people requiring accommodation, indicating the large impact this has had on our community.

Expected Mental Health Consequences after Floods

Direct and indirect exposure to floods can lead to a range of negative mental health impacts.

A global systematic review of 83 studies identified that flooding significantly increases the risk of experiencing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychological distress, depression, and anxiety for up to two years following the event¹. Based on the evidence² we would expect that those likely to be most impacted in terms of mental health will be:

- People whose households or businesses were inundated or evacuated.
- People who identify as Māori, Pacific and Tāngata Whaikaha.
- Young children and older people.
- Those with pre-existing mental or physical difficulties.
- People with low social support.

There is also evidence that even if people are not directly impacted, those who live in the vicinity of flooding or in a community affected also experience mental health impacts. Loss of power/water, additional financial burden, concern about family/friends/pets, loss of access to health and social care services and health concerns are significant stressors associated with flood-related mental health burden³.

Family harm events have also shown to increase in the wake of disasters, with New Zealand Police reporting a 53 per cent rise in domestic violence after the Canterbury earthquake.

How to Support People You Are Working With

- For those presenting distressed, normalise this as an understandable reaction to a very stressful event, encourage keeping to usual routines as much as possible including sleep times, keeping active, and the critical importance of maintaining contact with whānua and friends – social support is highly protective. Reassure that for the vast majority, with time and following this self-management advice, these symptoms will pass.
- However also inform them that if these symptoms are significantly interfering with day-to-day function, and/or worsening as time passes, that seeking early help via their usual general practice is important – early intervention when required increases full recovery rates.

For those general practice clinics with the Integrated Primary Mental Health and Addiction programme implemented – hand off those patients experiencing distress to your HIP colleague, and also for those with social support, housing, income or other needs make an introduction to your Awhi Ora NGO support colleague. We are encouraging teams to be flexible in the current situation,

¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0119929>

² <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Mental-Health-Impact-of-Floods.pdf>

³ [Flooding and health: assessment and management of public mental health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444444/flooding_and_health_assessment_and_management_of_public_mental_health.pdf)

regarding making these services available to all patients affected including those not registered with the practice.

Services Available

- If you are not a general practice, please consider referring to the person's usual family doctor.
- Free 24/7 counselling is available by calling/texting 1737.
- Free online therapy for stress/anxiety is available at www.justathought.co.nz
- Family harm: people can call 0508-744-633 anytime, from any number in New Zealand.
- Attached patient resources.

Patient Resources



Flood advice _
Health information |