

# Emergency Relief Handbook



## Have you been impacted by an emergency?

It is important to make sure you and your loved ones stay safe.

This relief booklet outlines what you need to do and what resources and support you can access at different stages.

If you are in a life-threatening situation, you should always call **Triple Zero (000)** for police, fire or ambulance.

To receive this document in another format, email DFFH Emergency Communications <emergency.communications@dffh.vic.gov.au>.

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# Stage 1 - First response

Keeping informed can help you stay prepared.

## Stay up to date

- Check VicEmergency for warnings and incident notifications about fire, storms, floods and more. You can download VicEmergency from the App Store or Google Play, or visit the website [emergency.vic.gov.au](https://emergency.vic.gov.au)
- You can also call the VicEmergency hotline on **1800 226 226**

## Let others know you are safe

- Send a message to family and friends letting them know where you are and that you are safe

### If you are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment, contact us through the **National Relay Service**:




- TTY users phone **1800 555 677** then ask for **1800 226 226**
- Speak and Listen users phone **1800 555 727** then ask for **1800 226 226**
- Internet relay users connect to the NRS then ask for **1800 226 226**

If you don't speak English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450** for translated information from the VicEmergency Hotline.

## Managing physical, mental and emotional reactions

You may be experiencing a range of physical, mental and emotional reactions as a result of the emergency. These reactions can vary from person to person. At this time, it is important to take care of your own and your family's mental health, and where possible, to look out for friends and neighbours.

-  Stay connected with others – even if you don't want to talk about what has happened – and use coping strategies that have been helpful when you've dealt with stressful experiences in the past. Remind yourself what you did well to support yourself and others to get through safely.
-  Good physical health supports good mental health. Try to keep some structure in your day that allows you to get regular exercise and rest, eat well and have opportunities for enjoyment.
-  Avoid using drugs or alcohol to cope, as this can lead to more problems.

-  If you are experiencing strong emotions remember talking about your worries and feelings when you are ready makes them more manageable.
-  Farmers can access a selection of resources from the National Centre for Farmer Health at [farmerhealth.org.au](https://farmerhealth.org.au) including the booklet: Managing Stress on the Farm.
-  If you are feeling overwhelmed and finding it difficult to manage, reach out for help from friends and family or contact support services. If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

# Stage 2 - Finding support

There are many resources available depending on what you need.

## Find out what support is available to you

- Call the VicEmergency hotline
- Visit the VicEmergency website
- Call your local council or visit its website. If you aren't sure which is your local council, visit: [www.vic.gov.au/know-your-council](http://www.vic.gov.au/know-your-council)

## Decide where you will stay

- If you have been told you can't return to your home, you need to find somewhere else that is safe to stay. Contact family and friends and ask for help.
- If you don't have a suitable location to go to, call your local council to discuss what emergency accommodation support options may be available to you.

## Find out about financial assistance

After an emergency happens in Victoria, financial support may be available.

Find out about what support is available:

- On the VicEmergency website or via the hotline
- In person at an Emergency Relief Centre.

## Emergency Relief Payments

You might be able to get an Emergency Relief Payment from the Victorian Government if it is available.

An emergency relief payment can help you to pay for things you need most, including:

- food
- clothing
- medication
- accommodation.

Emergency relief payments are based on a fixed amount for each member of your household.

The payment is not based on how much money you earn.

You will need to apply for a payment. Someone from the Victorian Government will look at your application. They will let you know if you qualify for the payment.

You might be able to apply in person, at an Emergency Relief Centre near you.



## Other financial assistance

- Other payments may be available from the Australian Government. To find out about what payments are available, visit: [www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/natural-disaster-support](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/natural-disaster-support)
- If you are a farmer or primary producer, you can call the Rural Financial Counselling Service to access free and independent financial information, options and decision-making support. They can also help you apply for financial assistance. To connect with your local service call 1300 771 741 or visit: [rfcsnetwork.com.au](http://rfcsnetwork.com.au)

## Find financial support at VicEmergency

VicEmergency Hotline - 1800 226 226  
(press 9 for an interpreter)

VicEmergency Website -  
[www.emergency.vic.gov.au/relief](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/relief)

# Stage 3 - Returning home

You must only return home when emergency services say it is safe to do so. Remember to take care when you return home as damage to your property can be dangerous.

## Contact your insurer

- Contact your insurer for advice about how to lodge a claim and what information you will need to provide.
- If possible, and before you touch or move anything, take photos or videos of damage to the property and possessions as evidence for your insurance claim. If you have security footage of the event, this may be helpful.
- Make a list of each item damaged and include a detailed description, such as brand, model and serial number if possible.
- Take photos before removing any water or fire-damaged items that may pose a health risk.
- Store damaged or destroyed items somewhere safe where they don't pose a health risk.
- Do not throw away goods that could be recovered or repaired.
- Speak to your insurer before authorising any building work, including emergency repairs.

## Cleaning up

There are a number of health and safety concerns when you return to a home that has been affected by a fire, flood or storm.

- Before you return to your property, make sure you read official clean up advice so you know what to take with you. This may include protective clothing and clean up equipment.
- Avoid taking your children and pets to your damaged property. If they must come with you, make sure they remain protected against physical dangers at all times, and minimise their exposure to traumatic scenes.

For clean-up advice after a flood or fire, visit the Better Health Channel website and search either 'Flood' or 'Fire': [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

## On-farm

- Farmers who have urgent animal welfare needs can call the VicEmergency Hotline.
- Visit the Agriculture Victoria website at [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au) for resources on managing on-farm impacts after a natural disaster or a biosecurity incident.
- Seek advice from your local council or Agriculture Victoria about the safe disposal of deceased livestock or visit [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au) for information on disposing of carcasses after a natural disaster.



## Find support for returning home at VicEmergency

VicEmergency Hotline - 1800 226 226 (press 9 for an interpreter)

VicEmergency Website - [www.emergency.vic.gov.au/relief](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/relief)

# Next steps – Thinking long term

## Managing your mental, physical and emotional reactions over time

Some things you can do to support recovery include:

- Make sure that you are in a place and location where you know that you are safe.
- Recognise that recovery often involves going through a period of stress and additional life challenges.
- Cut back on unnecessary demands to conserve energy.
- Try to maintain an optimistic and hopeful outlook, even if at times everyone needs to talk about their fears and worries.
- Keep up regular communication and connection with others. Make free time to be together with family or friends in a positive and supportive environment
- Plan regular time out and maintain activities you enjoyed before – even if you don't really feel like it. Taking time out for rest, recreation, enjoyment and relaxation supports the mind and the body to recover and to re-establish health and wellbeing.
- While it is natural to think about what still needs to be done, remember to keep track of your progress in recovery and acknowledge your achievements.
- Remind yourself that individuals, families and communities mostly get through the hard times, and are sometimes even stronger as a result.



**If you've tried these strategies and things aren't improving after a few weeks, or if you are having trouble coping,**

talk to your general practitioner or mental health clinician about getting some professional support to help with your recovery.

## Stay connected

The recovery journey is different for everyone, and people might need to access different supports at different times. Staying connected with your local community will help you understand what is happening and what support is available.



- Follow your local council for local recovery information
- Visit the VicEmergency Website or call the VicEmergency hotline to find what recovery support is available
- Keep in contact with your local community and support networks.

## Family violence after emergencies

Emergencies can put a lot of additional stress on close relationships and families as they struggle to deal with the aftermath.

People who have never been violent or controlling may find themselves behaving in ways they didn't before; or existing violent behaviour may start to increase or escalate.

- Call **Triple 000** if you, or someone you know, is in immediate danger.



### Where to get help

Whatever your situation, if you or someone you know needs help, there is a wide range of family violence support services available.

A full list of services is available via the following QR Code:



- If you prefer to get help over the phone, you can call Safe Steps, Victoria's 24/7 family violence response centre for confidential crisis support, information and accommodation: 1800 015 188
- You can also call 1800 RESPECT or visit [1800RESPECT.org.au](https://1800RESPECT.org.au) for support 24/7.

