

NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022 Review

Lifeline's opening statement

Lifeline Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the **NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022 Review**, and whether the policy objectives and terms remain valid and appropriate.

As a national suicide prevention and crisis support organisation with 43 local centres, supported by volunteers in communities around Australia, including across New South Wales, we can attest to the impacts of disasters on suicide and mental health.

Lifeline acknowledges the physical, financial, social, and environmental impacts of disasters are wide-ranging and often interrelated.

However, in our role as Australia's largest crisis helpline and given our varied local community support services and frontline disaster response experience, we can provide unique insights into the impacts of disasters on the country's emotional and psychological wellbeing. Data from help seekers using Lifeline's services shows pronounced increases in requests for assistance related to all types of disaster events from floods and fires to the pandemic.

Research shows traumatic events, such as natural disasters and disease outbreaks, have a physical, social and emotional impact on those affected and the risk of suicide increases in the aftermath of such events.

There is also increasing evidence of the long-term psychological impacts of disasters. A study into the mental health impacts of the Black Saturday Bushfires of 2009 found the effects were still being felt ten years later. We are also seeing this trend with the 2019/2020 bushfires, with demand continuing at pace for 13 HELP, Lifeline's bushfire helpline set up in response to the 2019/2020 bushfires.

Lifeline recommends the Act reflect the critical importance of protecting the psychological wellbeing of communities in the aftermath of disasters, given evidence that disasters have long-term psychological impacts, including increased suicidality in some cases.

This focus on mental health and wellbeing should be prioritised in terms of whole of government policy approaches and included in disaster mitigation and adaptation plans. It should be considered part of NSW Reconstruction Authority's role in leading disaster prevention, preparedness and adaptation.