

# FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

**Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC)**  
Emergency Response Meeting - Heatwave and Burns Preparedness  
Monday 7 January 2013 – 1530-1630 AEDT

## Outcomes

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### 1. Opening Remarks (Chair)

- The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) is maintaining a watching brief on health impacts of the current heatwave and fire danger situation.
- The DoHA National Incident Room (NIR) has not been activated.

### 2. Australian Government Crisis Coordination Centre (ACCC) Situation Update

- The Australian Government Disaster Response Plan COMDISPLAN has been activated to provide support in relation to the bushfire situation in Tasmania.
- Fire weather conditions are easing across Tasmania. No deaths have been recorded, though a number of people remain unaccounted for.
- Indications are that very hot weather for NSW, Victoria and SA will continue this week with Tuesday bringing extreme conditions.
- A cyclone is currently developing off the Coast between Broome and Christmas Island.
- The Department of Human Services (DHS) is providing support to the Tasmanian Government by managing the calls from people wanting to claim the Australian Government Disaster Recovery payment.
- A Liaison Officer from EMA has been located in the ACT, NSW and Tasmania.

### 3. Report from Jurisdictions

- States and territories provided an update on their capacity to respond in the event that the situation escalates, particularly burns beds numbers, Intensive Care Unit capacity and ability to assist with transfer of patients if required. Jurisdictions advised that there had not been a significant increase in heat related presentations to emergency departments for this time of the year.
- Prof. Woods advised that a marathon is scheduled to be held in Hobart this coming weekend and questioned whether this event should proceed. Dr White agreed to raise this issue at a meeting with the Security and Emergency Management Advisory Group who can make an informed decision on what advice to provide to the event organisers.
- WA reported that it has successfully used a formula to calculate the Excess Heat Factor based on a three day average. The formula is:  $\text{Excess Heat Factor} = (\text{ADT1} + \text{ADT2} + \text{ADT3}) / 3$  *Note: Average Daily Temperature (ADT) is calculated from the forecast daily maximum and the forecast daily minimum, which is the overnight temperature for the following day.*

### 4. Report from DoHA

#### *Aged Care:*

- No residential aged care facilities have been evacuated at this stage.
- DoHA will continue to monitor the situation closely given the forecasts for ongoing high temperatures.
- The Tasman Multi Purpose Service (MPS) in Nubeena on the Tasman Peninsula remains isolated. Staff are not able to get into or out of the area but this is not yet impacting on service delivery. Initial reports indicate that the MPS may be without mains power for weeks. Communication with the service is difficult as phone coverage in the area has been affected. Offers of staffing from other service providers have been re-directed by the state and territory office to the Tasmanian peak body.
- All residential aged care facilities have current evacuation plans in place for bushfires.

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## *Mental Health Services:*

- AHPPC noted that people in an area affected by extreme climatic events may access Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) by obtaining a referral from state/ territory case managers or a Centrelink social worker in place of a Medicare Local.
- Lifeline is monitoring demand for its services but is not experiencing high demand at present.
- Headspace has developed resources for young people affected by the fires (e.g. grief, loss of property, etc). Those resources may be of use and are available on the headspace website (<http://www.headspace.org.au>).

## **5. Other Business**

### *Mental Health*

- Prof. Raphael advised that heatwave conditions can present a problem for those on anti-psychotic medication and lithium, if they become dehydrated. AHPPC discussed that the key communication message is to ensure that the general public understand the importance of being well hydrated, especially for people on medications.

### *Personal Protection Kits*

- Victoria reported that they had developed personal protection kits for bushfires which may be useful for other states and territories to use.

## **6. Actions Arising and Outcome Summary**

- States and territories to continue to monitor the health effects of the heatwave.
- State and territories to email the AHPPC Secretariat communication material / fact sheets on heatwave and burns preparedness for distribution to AHPPC.
- EMA to contact Australian Medical Transport Coordination Group members on Tuesday 8 January 2012 regarding the current situation.
- Dr White to speak with the Security and Emergency Management Advisory Group regarding the possibility of providing advice to the Marathon organisers on the upcoming event in light of the bushfires in Tasmania.
- The NIR will not be activated at present.

## **7. Next Meeting and Close**

- No further meetings are currently scheduled but will be called if circumstances require it.