Tell Your Story – Disaster Recovery and Resilience in the Grampians

Participant Information Guide

Project Team:

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Introduction:

Thank you for your interest in participating in this project. This information sheet has been made to give you more information about the participation options so you can decide if you would like to take part. Please read this information carefully. You can ask questions if there is anything you are unsure about. Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to. If you start participating, you can stop at any time. If you wish to take part in this project but are unable to complete the online survey due to disability or any other reason, please contact us so we can help you complete the survey in a different way that is easier for you.

Project Summary:

This project aims to listen to, and gather, the lived experience stories of women, men and gender diverse people across the Grampians region that experienced the 2024 and 2025 bushfires.

We are interested in knowing more about your personal experience during this time, hearing your stories and reflections on the strengths of local community coming together, the challenges faced, and how the community could be better prepared for future bushfire events. In particular, we are hoping to better understand the specific needs and concerns of women and gender diverse people in our region.

It provides a unique opportunity to hear directly from those affected and provide us with evidence and insights of lived experience that cannot be captured by numbers or statistics. Local stories of disaster, resilience and recovery are powerful tools for change.

To take part in this study, you can:

- Complete an online survey
- Participate in one of the small, location-based focus groups (women and gender diverse people only) that we will be holding; or
- Have an individual interview with us to discuss your experiences further.

Who we are?

Women's Health Grampians is a not-for-profit organisation working to improve women's equality, health and wellbeing across the Grampians region. One of our priority areas is climate change, gender and disaster. By listening and learning from local experiences we can better prepare for future events.

Why are we doing this project?

Research tells us that natural disasters, such as bushfires, can impact women, men and gender diverse people differently. While this research is helpful and insightful, we would like to understand more about the lived experiences of people in the Grampians region.

By listening and learning from local experiences we will build a greater understanding of the needs and challenges facing communities in our region, allowing us to better prepare for future events. Your stories will enable more effective advocacy for the needs of women, girls and gender diverse people in disaster planning, response and recovery efforts across the region.

The findings will be shared, publicly and with organisations directly involved in emergency management in our region, with the intention of improving outcomes and better supporting not only women, children and gender diverse people, but communities more broadly across the Grampians region.

Information from this project will help us make sure we are focussing on the issues that local people feel are most important.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is completely voluntary. You will be able to stop and leave the survey, focus group or interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

What will I be asked to do?

Online Survey – This is open to women, men and gender diverse people from fire affected communities in the Grampians region. If you agree to participate you will be asked to complete an online survey. There will be multi-choice questions. You will be asked some questions about yourself and what you might have experienced during the bushfires of 2024 and 2025. If you agree, you will also be asked open ended questions about your experiences, observations and reflections, where you can type your own answers. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

If you wish to be contacted about the results of this project you will be asked to provide your email address. You do not have to provide your email address if you don't want to.

In person focus group – The focus groups are for women and gender diverse people from fire affected communities in the Grampians region. If you agree to participate you will be taking part in a small group session (5 to 10 people) that will take about two hours. We will spend some time setting the scene and getting to know the other participants. You will be asked some questions about yourself and what you might have experienced during the bushfires of 2024 and 2025. If you agree, as a group you will also be asked open ended questions about your experiences, observations and reflections. The sessions will be recorded for the purpose of documentation and write up following the focus group. Your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

If you wish to be contacted about the results of this project you will be asked to provide your email address. You do not have to provide your email address if you don't want to.

One on one interview - This is open to women and gender diverse people from fire affected communities in the Grampians region. If you agree to participate you will be asked some questions about yourself and what you might have experienced during the bushfires of 2024 and 2025. If you agree, you will be asked some short answer questions and you will also be asked open ended questions about your experiences, observations and reflections. The interviews will be recorded for the purpose of documentation and write up following the interview. Your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

If you wish to be contacted about the results of this project you will be asked to provide your email address. You do not have to provide your email address if you don't want to.

What are the possible benefits?

There will be no immediate direct benefit to you. Your participation will contribute to a better understanding of disaster, recovery and resilience in the Grampians region and help us to gather local stories and lived experience of the bushfires in 2024 and 2025. By listening and learning from local experiences we can better prepare for future events.

What are the possible risks?

There are minimal risks to completing this survey or participating in a focus group or interview. However, this project is about potentially sensitive topics and experiences that may have been difficult for you.

Online Survey - If you feel emotionally distressed, you can skip most questions if you don't want to answer them, or you can exit the survey at any time. Please note that once the survey has been completed the project team will be unable to remove your responses as they are not identifiable.

In person Focus Group – Participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to participate in any part of the focus group, opt out of answering any of the questions, take a break if needed, and you can choose to leave at any time. We will endeavour to have support services available in person or at a minimum, contactable after the focus group.

One on One Interview – Participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any of the questions, take a break at any time, and you can choose to end the interview at any time.

If you need further support you can contact the following organisations:

- Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline: 13 11 14 lifeline.org.au
- 1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 1800 respect.org.au
- Kid's Helpline: 1800 55 1800 kidshelpline.com.au
- Grampians Community Health Intake - (03) 5358 7400

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Yes, if you select the option at the end of the survey to let us know you would like to know about the results of this survey or notify us of this at a focus group or during an interview, we will email you a digital summary of the findings.

How do you intend to publish or share the results?

We anticipate that the results of this survey will be published or presented in a variety of formats. In any publication or presentation, information will be provided in a way that ensures participants cannot be identified

What will happen to information about me?

You will never be personally identified in any of the results from this project. Any personally identifiable information collected (e.g. your name, your email address, interview or focus group recordings) will only be accessible to the team members named at the top of this information sheet. If you opt in to be contacted about results/future Women's Health Grampians' newsletters your email address will be used for this purpose only. All data will be stored securely on a Women's Health Grampians server. All identifiable data (e.g. names, email addresses) will be destroyed after the completion of this project, by the end of 2026.

Where can I get further information?

Please contact Claire Evans, CoRE Consultant at Women's Health Grampians, should you wish to discuss this project further before deciding whether to participate.

Email: claire@whg.org.au

Phone: 5322 4100

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, please contact Jennie Courtney, CEO at Women's Health Grampians, on 5322 4100. All complaints will be treated confidentially.