# Australians face worsening mental health challenges after multiple climate disasters



Australians who have endured multiple climate disasters face significantly greater mental health challenges and experience slower recovery times, according to a new study conducted by the University of Melbourne. This research highlights the ongoing impacts of repeated exposure to natural disasters such as floods, fires, and cyclones, prompting calls for an overhaul in how communities are supported in the aftermath of such events.

The longitudinal study, published in The Lancet Public Health, analysed data from 2009 to 2019 and included over 1,500 individuals who had been exposed to at least one climate disaster. These individuals' mental health outcomes were compared with those of 3,880 Australians with similar sociodemographic profiles who had not experienced disasters during the same period. Results showed that people exposed to multiple disasters suffered more severe mental health declines. Moreover, the study found that the closer in time these disasters occurred—for example, one or two years apart—the more pronounced the negative mental health effects were.

Dr Claire Leppold, a Research Fellow in Community Resilience at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, emphasised the growing urgency of the situation. Speaking to Science Media Exchange (Scimex), she said, “Unfortunately we know that future generations will experience multiple disasters throughout their lifetimes and it is now estimated that children born today are expected to experience seven times more disasters across their lifetimes than past generations.” Dr Leppold added that the research provides valuable insight into what individuals need to recover from repeated disasters and what health services, governments, and emergency organisations can do to better support affected communities.

The findings suggest that clinical services, including general practitioners, should implement screening processes to identify patients’ previous disaster exposures. Emergency services are also encouraged to focus more on at-risk populations and incorporate the effects of past disasters into disaster recovery planning rather than concentrating solely on the most recent event.

Professor Lisa Gibbs, Director of the Disaster, Climate and Adversity Unit at the University of Melbourne, highlighted the study’s relevance to public health planning. She stated, “It is increasingly important to understand the public health impacts of multiple disaster exposures in a climate-changed world. The detailed new findings in this study are exactly what is needed to help guide the necessary changes in disaster planning and recovery services.”

This research underlines the complex and accumulating toll that repeated climate disasters take on mental health in Australia. It also points towards necessary changes in healthcare and disaster response systems to better address the long-term psychological impacts on communities facing a future marked by frequent environmental catastrophes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2023/june/climate-related-disasters-exacerbate-health-and-housing-vulnerability> - This article discusses a University of Melbourne study published in The Lancet Planetary Health, which found that Australians whose homes were damaged by climate-related disasters experienced significant negative effects on mental health, social functioning, and emotional well-being, with impacts lasting at least 1–2 years after the event.
2. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381080915_Mental_health_impacts_from_repeated_climate_disasters_an_australian_longitudinal_analysis> - This study, published in The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific, utilized data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey to demonstrate that exposure to multiple climate-related disasters is associated with a relative decrease in mental health scores compared to baseline, highlighting the cumulative impact of repeated disasters on mental health.
3. <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2022/january/new-study-highlights-ways-multiple-disasters-impact-public-health> - This review, published in The Lancet Public Health, examined the public health implications of multiple disasters and found that risks of poor mental and physical health outcomes tend to increase with each disaster experienced, underscoring the need for greater attention to the cumulative effects of multiple disasters on public health.
4. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/disaster-medicine-and-public-health-preparedness/article/pandemic-is-not-occurring-in-a-vacuum-the-impact-of-covid19-and-other-disasters-on-workforce-mental-health-in-australia/95A695C3265D66F7AD4116480EC9393E> - This study highlights the increased psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with a lived experience of mental illness and those who have experienced additional stressors, emphasizing the need for appropriate responses to lessen psychological distress, especially in the context of multiple disasters.
5. <https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/climate-related-disasters-leave-behind-trauma-and-worse-mental-health-housing-uncertainty-is-a-major-reason-why/> - This article discusses research from the University of Melbourne, indicating that exposure to home damage from climate-related disasters had significant negative effects on people's health and well-being, with these effects being more severe for individuals who had housing affordability stress or were living in poor-quality housing before the disaster.
6. <https://www.miragenews.com/climate-disasters-worsen-mental-health-due-to-1020786/> - This article highlights research from the University of Melbourne, showing that individuals whose homes were damaged by climate-related disasters experienced worse health and well-being compared to those unaffected, with negative mental health effects observed up to two years after the disaster.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMivgFBVV95cUxPZnpOeXQwU3I5c3B3N21mQ2FQb3FjeGlyMGV5clprTkdiR1JWSVRseS1tZE84T3VLX1RQZV9LZ3ZiTG5FMFdCRndsTGVkdl9tUjM2eXJYT01qUkY3QWExa3VxYk04VDd2SXBzeEVwOFhJajRJNmhSNHMweGJIMjhVM3l4bWZJN2dSQ045MjRNeG5uR080UUJDZ1k4M0cwMERaVENwek1YVGtCZm5XQ3B1VkxscUc5XzRoUWsxSzhn?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data