

MEDIA RELEASE

Look after yourself, friends and family on flood anniversary

The one-year anniversary of ex-Cyclone Debbie and the floods could be particularly stressful for many in the community.

The University Centre for Rural Health has released its initial findings of the After the Flood survey, showing the impact of the flood on people's mental health and wellbeing.

Co-ordinator of the survey, Veronica Matthews, said 2500 people across the Northern Rivers region responded to the survey, and the findings did show increased risk of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress for those affected by the flood.

"The risk to people's mental health was higher for those who experienced flooding in a number of sites, such as their suburb, their home, a friend's home, a business.

"The survey also found that the longer someone was displaced from their home, the greater their risk of experiencing post-traumatic stress.

"And four per cent of those who responded to the survey were still displaced six months after the flood," Dr Matthews said.

Professor James Bennett-Levy, Professor of Mental Health and Psychological Wellbeing at UCRH, said for some people an event like an anniversary or another extreme weather event in the news can restimulate their trauma.

"Keeping connected, contacting friends, going to community barbecues and events is really important because otherwise it's easy to become isolated.

"When we've had a trauma it's a natural reaction to avoid talking about it and to shut it out. But the problem is that by trying to shut it out, we don't get to process it and our anxiety tends to remain in place.

"So when there are anniversaries or when there are heavy rains we may not understand our strong reactions. But the impact can be very real, and we might find ourselves doing things that aren't helpful like drinking too much or taking drugs.

"It is important first of all to recognise that anniversaries can restimulate anxious feelings. Recognising that, it's then important to be kind to yourself. Treat yourself as you would treat your best friend. Do things that give you pleasure and have a calming effect on you.

"And if you really think that life is not going at all well right now, it is important to recognise that and seek help. See your GP or call Lifeline and take action."

Lifeline 131114