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## Grass-roots Community Grants support bushfire affected communities in Blue Mountains

As part of the Federal Government's \$76 million 'Supporting the Mental Health of Australians Affected by the 2019/20 Bushfires' package, Primary Health Networks were provided with funding to support the mental health, wellbeing, resilience and recovery of communities in impacted areas through initiatives such as community grants.

Wentworth Healthcare, the provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, launched the first phase of their 'Community Wellbeing Grants' last year and have now provided funding to 40 individuals to conduct small grass-roots, community connection activities across the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Lithgow areas.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, acknowledged the challenges many communities within the region have faced over the past 18 months and emphasised the important role that these Community Wellbeing Grants play in aiding community recovery.

"We know that community connection and cohesion is vital for community recovery during and after times of adversity," said Ms Reay.

"Our communities know their people and are best placed to know what they need in terms of support. The first phase of our Grants have focussed on small community-led initiatives that bring people together and allow them to choose their own way to respond to the loss, anxiety and distress they have experienced," she said.

Some of the activities funded so far include local craft events, mindfulness workshops, dance lessons, picnics, live music and more. A full list of funded activities is available on Wentworth Healthcare's website.

Grant Recipient, Caroline Nelson, held the inaugural 'Megalong Makers event' in April and said it was a huge success. The event showcased 17 local stall holders who offered arts, crafts, produce and information for the community to enjoy.

"Having had major flooding events in the weeks prior to the event, the only access road was closed due to being washed out. This made us even more determined to ensure there was something for the community to look forward to," said Ms Nelson.

Community members acknowledged that the event really brought everyone together, with one resident commenting that they had met their neighbour for the first time in four years.

"Thank you so much for making this possible. The benefits were even greater than initially hoped for and are still being talked about. New friendships and connections have been formed," said Ms Nelson.

Senator Marise Payne said the government was continuing to support the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains on the road to recovery.

“While these projects are small in scale, they have a large and important impact on residents still grappling with impact of the bushfires,” Senator Payne said.

“I commend the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network and the grantees for their ongoing work which is having a real difference on the ground.”

Wentworth Healthcare is still accepting applications for their ‘micro-grants’ of up to \$1,000 which will remain open **until funding is exhausted**. The second phase of their Community Wellbeing Grants which included larger grants of up to \$10,000 closed in mid-May and are currently being assessed. The outcome of these Grants will be announced in the coming months.

For more information on the ‘up to \$1,000’ grants, including how to apply, visit [www.nbmphn.com.au/communitygrants](http://www.nbmphn.com.au/communitygrants)

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