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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Wildfires bring mental health services to forefront

SAN DIEGO—As a community, we have suffered terrible devastation and loss in the recent firestorms. Yet while we can easily see the burned houses and the scorched land, some of the most profound injury is invisible to the eye.

Trauma often expresses itself in the form of stress and with stress comes emotions that gnaw at the psyche. No one who sees a disaster is unaffected by it. In fact, it is actually natural to feel anxiety about your safety and that of your loved ones. Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event. Yet it is also important to remember that we each have different needs and different ways of coping. And accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) San Diego is a non-profit organization that provides education, support services and advocacy to improve the lives of everyone affected by mental illnesses. They offer assistance through their free support groups, classes and the NAMI Helpline. By simply calling 619-543-1434 or 1-800-523-5933, you can get vital information on NAMI services and other programs and resources in San Diego that promote mental health.

The Access & Crisis Line is another valuable resource that enables callers to receive 24-hour/7-days-a-week crisis counseling services. Their number is (800) 479-3339.

Be sure to check in with yourself and your loved ones during the weeks, months and years following the fires or any trauma. Look for these signs that show the need for stress management assistance:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts, sleeping and maintaining balance
- Easily frustrated
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Limited attention span
- Poor work performance
- Headaches/stomach problems
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Colds or flu-like symptoms
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reluctance to leave home
- Depression, sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Mood-swings
- Crying easily
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone

Just as it takes time to rebuild damaged structures, it takes time to grieve and rebuild our lives. Asking for help as we go through this tragedy is nothing to be ashamed of. Please utilize the helpful mental health services we have available in our community and, together, we will rise from the ashes.

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