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MEDIA RELEASE

Life after Larry

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Cyclone Larry has left a physical and economic hole in North Queensland but more damage could be on its way, according to public health and psychiatry experts.

Controlling dengue fever and providing emotional support to people who've lost their homes and livelihoods will be vital in coming weeks, say Professor Richard Taylor and Professor Sandy McFarlane.

[University of Queensland Professor of International Health Richard Taylor](#) said garbage and stagnant water made good mosquito breeding sites.

"There's plenty of mosquitoes around there at the moment but there will probably be even more because of the availability of breeding sites," Professor Taylor said.

"The winds tend to blow the mosquitoes away in the short term but it can be an issue which will build up over the next few weeks.

"There is some dengue activity in North Queensland as there always is. There isn't any in Innisfail, but there may be people coming in with it who are trying to help. Dengue is a human disease so you've got to have humans who are infected."

Professor Taylor said other health priorities should be preventing injuries and outbreaks during the clean up, having clean water and stopping food contamination.

"There's no sewerage or water in Innisfail so having a safe source of drinking water is important and they have to be careful of where they dispose of their excrement too.

"If these things are not looked after you're going to have outbreaks of gastro-intestinal infections.

"The other problem is food contamination because the electricity is cut and some of the food in fridges is going off."

Professor Sandy McFarlane, an Adelaide psychiatrist and post-traumatic stress expert specialising in the mental health of communities living with disasters, is the Director of the Adelaide node of the [Centre for Military and Veterans' Health \(CMVH\)](#).

The CMVH is a UQ led consortia with the University of Adelaide and Charles Darwin University which focuses on the health of Australian Defence Force members during and after service.

Professor McFarlane said it was important that authorities made people feel safe, organised relief and resources quickly and had civil control to protect scattered possessions from homes.

"Hurricane Katrina was a wonderful example of how not to do it," Professor McFarlane said.

"People need to know that the relief is coming and their basic requirements of food and shelter and safety are going to be quickly secured."

He said the practicalities of survival would keep residents busy for a while but any psychological wounds would not show until weeks after.

"There's often what's called a honeymoon phase after a disaster where people pull together and everyone looks after each other."

Sometimes there could be second shockwave after the disaster as some people suffered more than others, assistance was delayed or not reaching the right people and groups sought to blame for the disaster.

"The mental health issues really only emerge sort of three to six months, even a year down the track and the problems is that by that stage everyone has packed up and gone home and forgotten about it ."

He said healthcare workers such as local GPs and emergency service workers should be given information and training to support and counsel their community, as well as help for their own families.

He said it was important that leaders anticipated community reaction and that Governments honoured the needs of farmers and promises of support made to them.

Residents who had been through previous disasters were more at risk of emotional and psychological problems.

"Farming is essentially managing things from one disaster to the next. But these major events do often have very negative impacts on these communities."

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