



MEDIA RELEASE

Good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.

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The state of mental health in the Bush

Mental health challenges in rural and remote Australia are widespread and serious, but it's not all bad news. The latest National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) Fact Sheet describes some of both the good news and the bad, and there is also a *Rural Mental Health Help Sheet* with valuable information on where to find advice and support.

Tragically, a higher proportion of people in rural and remote areas pay the ultimate price of mental illness and related concerns. Suicide occurs there at one-and-a-half times the rate in the major cities. Self-harm is particularly prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For young men aged between 15 and 29 years and men aged 85 years and over in more remote areas, suicide rates are twice that of comparable groups living in major cities. Farmers are 2.2 times more likely to die by suicide than the generally employed public.

A sense of pessimism about future prospects, unemployment, isolation and the greater availability of lethal means of self-harm are all factors contributing to these higher rates. Financial uncertainty and pressure, socio-economic disadvantage and the challenges of living with chronic conditions also negatively affect the mental health and wellbeing of people in rural areas.

Access to primary care services, such as GPs and specialised mental health care, is essential for the early diagnosis, treatment and ongoing management of mental illnesses. However, people in rural and remote areas have less access to such essential services. For instance Medicare expenditure per person on mental health services in inner regional and very remote areas is 74 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, of what it is in major cities.

“There are many positive aspects to rural and remote living. People in rural areas report higher levels of civic participation, social cohesion and social capital. These help build a strong sense of belonging and interconnectedness between neighbours, friends and the community which is valuable for good mental health,” said Gordon Gregory, CEO of the NRHA.

“These are great aspects of country living. But they should not be seen as a substitute for professional mental health services,” he said.

The new Fact Sheets can be accessed at www.ruralhealth.org/factsheets.

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The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia's peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health. Its vision is good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.