

Rates of suicide and suicide attempts are higher in rural and remote populations of Australia, with very remote regions having suicide rates more than double that of major capital cities.

Males who live in rural and remote communities are particularly at risk with their suicide rates being 1.7-2.6 times higher than their urban counterparts. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).



This fact sheet provides information about the unique issues related to suicide in rural and remote areas and highlights some strategies and programs that are helping to reduce the rate of death by suicide of people in these communities.

### Issues relating to suicide in regional and remote communities

- Access to appropriate health care and mental health services in many regional and remote communities is limited, meaning that many conditions go undiagnosed and untreated. In many cases, the local GP is the sole provider of health care in a community. This means that there is a lot of pressure on them to have the knowledge and skills to identify signs of mental illness or suicidal tendency and then provide the appropriate treatment.
- 91% of Australia's psychiatrists have their main practice in metropolitan areas, requiring people from regional and remote communities to travel long distances for treatment or 'do without' (National Rural Health Alliance, 2009).
- A shortage of workers in the rural health sector often means that people are not able to be provided with the follow-up or out-patient care that they require.
- Farmers and local business owners often feel an obligation to the community as the success of their business often has a significant impact on the economic state of the community (through employment, spending etc). This may result in them experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety, but also having reluctance to seek help for these feelings.
- Natural disasters such as drought, cyclones, floods, bushfires and pest infestations also contribute to stress and mental illness and have a very direct impact on income and wellbeing for rural Australians (National Rural Health Alliance, 2009).
- The seasonal employment nature of many regional and remote communities adds to the financial stress and social isolation felt by many people who live in these areas.
- The existence of factors such as 'suicide clusters' found in many Indigenous communities also adds to the increased rate of suicide in regional and remote Australia.
- Access to violent and immediate means of death (e.g. firearms) raises the completion rates of suicide in regional and remote Australia.
- 'Gatekeepers' in regional and remote communities include community health nurses, teachers, local government personnel, sports coaches, and small business owners, many of whom have not had any training in suicide prevention or suicide bereavement support.

## What is being done?

The National Suicide and Prevention Strategy (NSPS) funds programs that specifically focus on suicide prevention and bereavement support for this particular 'at-risk' group:

**Farm-Link**, run by the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (University of Newcastle), provides Mental Health First Aid to front-line Agricultural workers to assist them to identify and refer farmers who express mental health problems. Farm-Link staff act as brokers for farmers seeking assistance with mental health issues. Farm-Link operates in the Northern New England region of NSW at Narrabri, Moree, Inverell and Armidale.

**Rural Alive & Well**, run by the Southern Midland Council, operates in Tasmania and aims to build the resilience and capacity of men, their families and the community to react to challenging life experiences with a specific focus on suicide. It also provides support and assistance to communities to assist them to respond to crises and to cope or recover after adversity.

Some other organisations that are focussed on providing support in this area include:

- The National Rural Health Alliance Inc.
- Centre for Rural and Remote Health
- Australian Rural Health Education Network
- Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)
- Take Care Outback There
- Mental Health Association of Central Australia
- Far North Queensland Suicide Prevention Taskforce
- Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health



## Useful resources and websites

- [www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Links](http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Links)
- <http://www.theshedonline.org.au/>
- <http://www.crana.org.au/1-home.html>
- [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac\\_ctte/suicide/report/report.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/suicide/report/report.pdf)
- <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/factsheets/fact-sheet-14-suicide.pdf>
- [www.mhca.org.au/documents/MH%20Report%20&%20Inquiry%20Recommendations.pdf](http://www.mhca.org.au/documents/MH%20Report%20&%20Inquiry%20Recommendations.pdf)

## Contact Us:

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