

Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities

The Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative (the Initiative) is providing \$15.3 million over three years (2007-2010) to build the capacity of rural and remote drought affected communities to respond to the psychological impact of drought.

The key objectives of the initiative are to:

- Provide community outreach and crisis counselling for distressed individuals and communities in drought affected rural and remote areas
- Raise community awareness; and
- Provide education and training to enable health workers and community leaders to recognise and respond to the early warnings of emotional stress.

The Initiative is being led by appropriate and experienced local health workers, referred to as Community Support Workers (CSWs).

The Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative is helping families, health professionals and community leaders across drought affected communities.

The existing Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas Initiative will also be expanded. It will fund additional mental health services provided by allied health professionals including social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, mental health nurses, and Aboriginal health workers.

Divisions of General Practice – a role in Drought assistance

The majority of the \$15.3 million funding has been allocated to 45 eligible rural and remote divisions of General Practice across Australia. Of the 45 eligible Divisions, 43 are participating in the initiative. Those divisions are as follows:

NSW

Barrier DGP
Barwon DGP
Dubbo Plains DGP
Murrumbidgee DGP
New England DGP
North West Slopes (NSW) DGP
Northern Rivers General Practice Network
NSW Central West DGP
NSW Outback DGP
Riverina DGP

Queensland

Capricornia
Central Qld Rural DGP
GP Connections
Mackay DGP
North & West Qld Primary Health Care
Southern Qld Rural DGP
Sunshine Coast DGP
Wide Bay DGP

South Australia

Adelaide Hills DGP
 Barossa DGP
 Eyre Peninsula DGP
 Flinders & Far North DGP
 Limestone Coast DGP
 Mid North DGP
 Murray Mallee DGP
 Riverland DGP
 Southern DGP
 Yorke Peninsula DGP

Victoria

Albury Wodonga Regional GP Network
 Ballarat and District DGP
 Bendigo and District DGP
 Central Highlands DGP
 Central West Gippsland DGP
 East Gippsland DGP
 General Practice Alliance Sth Gippsland
 Goulburn Valley DGP
 Mallee DGP
 Murray Plains DGP
 North East Victorian DGP
 Otway DGP
 West Vic DGP

Divisions are supported by a National Coordinator based at AGPN. The role of the coordinator is to support implementation of the initiative and promote its linkages and integration with other relevant primary mental health initiatives, as well as provide some education and training activities. Community Support Workers (CSWs) were supported during the initial phase of the Initiative with:

- a One-day Orientation Workshop, and
- a Two-day Intensive Training Workshop

A dedicated web page on the AGPN website will also allow for the sharing of information between CSWs as well as access to resources and training/education material.

***beyondblue* – Partnering**

The Department of Health and Ageing is also providing funding to *beyondblue* to assist in the delivery of the Initiative. *beyondblue* is working with AGPN to deliver in 4 key areas, including:

- Communications and Awareness – to promote key messages on depression, anxiety and related disorders through targeted advertising and media campaigns in drought affected areas. This includes the development of a Drought Media Kit to be used by communities.
- Community Development – provide a drought kit to communities. The kit has information about how to recognise and manage depression and other mental health issues
- Rural and Remote access – develop the existing Drought Assistance map, which is a directory of relevant services in the bush. The map will be expanded to include relevant information about local services and activities within boundaries of each of the participating Divisions.
- Rural Frontline Training – offer two sessions of Rural Frontline Training to each Division. The training is for health workers and key community and business leaders, with a focus on how to recognise depression and how to assist a customer / client who may be experiencing depression to get the help they need.

The NSW Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (NSW CRRMH) was contracted to provide support to the Initiative through the provision of speakers and development of workshop materials to assist in the education and training of the CSWs.

For further information go to the AGPN website: www.primarymentalhealth.com.au

