

MEDIA RELEASE

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INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDING GREATER SUPPORT AND CONNECTIVITY FOR OUTBACK COMMUNITIES

LATEST DATA: More rural and remote residents turning to new local services, including their GP, for help with stress, anxiety and depression.

The Central West has experienced a surge in the number of residents seeking mental health support services to help them cope with the ongoing stresses associated with the drought and other climate catastrophes.

The Western Queensland Primary Health Network (WQPHN) will reveal to this week's (28/08/19) Mental Health Roundtable in Longreach, that the region's leading mental health service providers have seen their service rates more than double in the past year.

"Unfortunately with the effects of the drought and recent flooding event still being keenly felt, we would expect to see an increase in the number of people seeking help to manage the added pressure and strain being experienced and impacting on mental wellbeing," WQPHN CEO Stuart Gordon said.

"But what we can also confidently say is that there is now a greater awareness of the new services that have been introduced to the region, and that access to care has improved dramatically since we began our work in this space just a few years ago," Mr Gordon said.

The WQPHN's health intelligence data reveals an 82% rise in the number of clients being seen by PHN funded mental health support services in the Central West in the past year, a rise to more than 700 people in 2018/19.

There's also been a significant increase in the role local GPs are playing in treating mental health patients, with a 40% rise in the uptake of Mental Health Treatment Plans, a process where care is planned and managed.

"It does suggest people are now more aware and that local general practices are responding well to this increased demand, better equipped with knowledge, and better connected to the right services to provide the right care at the right time for those experiencing mental health issues." Mr Gordon said.

"These are important indications that people are accessing care and it hasn't happened by accident," he said.

"There has been a combined approach, working as a team across agencies and ensuring new services on the ground are hardwired to integrate and support one another, keeping each other informed and ensuring the community is aware of all options."

“What’s also been critical is the leadership and strong advocacy of our Councils, many of whom are leading the way in changing attitudes across providers and community.”

Stuart Gordon said it’s also important to recognise the inherent strength of remote communities, and the willingness of locals to help themselves and build on their own capacity to recover.

“In most instances, anxiety and depression are not lifelong conditions and it is very important to access care early and get support so things can be managed correctly,” he said.

“That’s why we see it as important to strengthen partnerships and ensure there are a range of well connected service options available to communities, including non-clinical low intensity services that help to keep conversations going, but have direct linkage to clinical supports if these are necessary.”

“While we’re now seeing genuine improvement on the ground with mental health care delivery and awareness, unfortunately the drought is the unwelcome constant across this whole period, so the job of commissioning the right services across the region, sustainably and innovatively, goes on,” Mr Gordon said.

The Central West Mental Health Roundtable will bring together stakeholders from Local Government Authorities, Rural Financial Counselling Services, WQPHN Commissioned Service Providers and State Government Mental Health Services.

The Roundtable is jointly organised by the WQPHN and the Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), which encompasses seven shires in the Central West and co-ordinates financial counselling in the region.

“We’re very keen to build on the momentum started at last year’s Roundtable,” RAPAD CEO David Arnold said.

“The need for a collaborative, region-wide approach to the delivery of mental health services is absolutely critical for the well-being of not only the clients of Rural Financial Counselling Service North Qld, but the wider community in general, as the effects of the drought continue to bite,” he said.

Western Qld Primary Health Network (WQPHN) quick facts:

- commissions health services in Western Queensland
- covers almost one million square kilometres of Queensland, 55% of the state’s total land area
- aligns health investment with demonstrated population health needs
- uses health intelligence data to orientate health services efficiently and effectively
- ensures the right primary health care is delivered, at the right time by the right provider
- advised by GPs and other health professionals and consumers
- one of 31 PHNs across Australia established and funded by the Commonwealth Government

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