

North West Qld Flood Recovery

MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT | 20 NOVEMBER 2019 – CLONCURRY

Summit Narratives and Report



“I know it’s very hard to tell how people are going, it’s the Aussie way to say we’re all going good, but sometimes you’re not really. So, to mental health services in the North West, I say – keep coming, keep talking.”

Rodger Jefferis
ELROSE STATION OWNER



The mental health and wellbeing-focused North West Queensland Flood Recovery Summit held 20 November 2019 in Cloncurry brought together a diverse cross section of key partners in health and other sectors, including the North Queensland Livestock Industry Agency (NQLIRA).



Some nine months after the devastating North West flood event, the Summit provided a valuable opportunity to gauge how things were and are now on the ground, gain feedback from community representatives and visiting mental health partners about what is working well, and what are the important things that need to be maintained or enhanced as we approach the first anniversary of this significant event in the North West (NW).

The purpose of the North West Queensland Flood Recovery Summit was to:

- Acknowledge the alliance between the Western Queensland Primary Health Network (WQPHN) and the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and demonstrate our ongoing commitment to continue a dialogue with flood event effected NW communities.
- Highlight the role of Local Governments in the region; their leadership, confidence and determination to guide their constituents through recovery by being a crucial community touch point and source of information and support, reflected in Cloncurry Shire Mayor Greg Campbell's inspiring opening address to the Summit.
- Take stock of the progress made in supporting the impacted communities.

- Strengthen relationships and partnerships between health service providers and other agencies working in the region.
- Identify the key things that inform and guide our partners who lead the responses to the flood event, are designing services that work, are accessible and support the community through the coming 18 months and beyond.
- Support mental health and wellbeing service providers to consider the outcomes of the Summit and discuss ways to strengthen their approach to delivering high quality and coordinated regional services.

It was a privilege to be part of these discussions, and to meet and work with such passionate and dedicated community and clinical partners over the course of deliberations at the Summit and the following Mental Health Provider Workshop. As peak organisations working to support partnerships, tailor approaches and service design and configuration, we need to have a finger on the pulse of uptake of mental health and wellbeing services and how this translates to recovery and resilience, individually and across the community. It is important to acknowledge the considerable courage, leadership and enabling work of our regions' local government authorities and their leadership teams, and this has and continues to be a strength in our collective work across the primary health and social care domains.

The contribution of the Hon. Shane Stone and the broader NQLIRA team positively added to discussions, highlighting the very important role economic and social determinants have on our mental health and wellbeing. Being in a position to consider both these dynamics at one sitting added real value to discussions and will secure an important collaboration going forward.

The Summit has confirmed a direction of travel, a commitment to keep conversations going, and to be jointly accountable for maintaining support in a way that matters to individuals and communities of the North West. We hope this record of our Summit discussion helps to keep a focus on the importance of collaboration, supporting one another and helping not only those impacted by the trauma of this event but also help the preparedness for whatever lies ahead.

Stuart Gordon

CEO - Western Qld Primary Health Network

Meredith Staib

CEO - Royal Flying Doctor Service (Qld Section)

Outcomes focused on recovery

“The number one thing is to make sure that the people who need services are understood, and the people delivering those services have got a very clear way to move forward.”

Greg Campbell

CLONCURRY SHIRE MAYOR



There were outcomes from the Summit that are very beneficial to community resilience and recovery across the North West, including:

- 1 Acknowledgement and validation by Summit participants of the strength and success of the community recovery process to date. Recovery efforts and health services have provided a strong response to date.
- 2 Confirmation of an appetite for greater collaboration and coordination of services across the sector.
- 3 Strengthening of connections and relationships between services and other key partners.
- 4 Acknowledging the power of connected communities and the opportunities this presents for service delivery and tailored care.
- 5 Consultation and feedback by participants to the North Queensland Livestock Industry Recovery Agency (NQLIRA) on its Resilience Framework, and an opportunity to exercise this region's 'community voice' in the shaping of the framework.
- 6 Sharing by participants of their experience of the flood event (and of recovery efforts since) with Hon Shane Stone (NQLIRA) as a senior and influential representative of the Australian Government. Shane and his team were able to absorb the experience of the communities, and to establish and strengthen their relationship and connection with those participating.
- 7 Identification by participants of agreed key priority areas to work on and improve, for the benefit of the local community members and organisations facing an ongoing and lengthy recovery process as a result of the flood event.
- 8 Validation of the WQPHN (implicitly and explicitly) as a trusted broker for connecting the sector and other stakeholders – including but not limited to the services they commission.

Key themes



There was agreement about a number of important themes which emerged repeatedly during the Summit. This in itself is a major achievement and important to acknowledge that, while identified by those present, these themes are also supported by evidence from other communities who have experienced catastrophic events across Australia, and also reflected in current national and international research and literature.

Creating a wellbeing narrative

The work of the mental health services sector (and also of other sectors) should be talked about and placed in a 'wellbeing' context rather than services always being 'badged' only as mental health services. The focus should be on wellbeing and recovery (inclusive of, but not limited to mental health) which encourages service providers to consider and incorporate issues and challenges that people face in various aspects of their lives. These 'everyday' challenges can involve family and social relationships, money issues and other life stresses.

In this way services are able to respond to the various factors that face community members following an emergency event such as addressing economic and financial struggles, intimate or domestic relationship issues, family and other relationship problems, educational attendance and achievement for children, youth dis-engagement, and problematic alcohol and drug use. By considering the 'whole person', service providers will aim to provide psycho-social responses that are not

isolated from other important supports that may be available, and aim to assist in the most important stressors for their client at any particular time.

This approach has significant mental and other health benefits for community members and will require informal partnerships and collaboration between health and non-health supports to be strengthened.

Local capacity and coordination

The support offered to the North West needs to be focused on the local community context. Primary and mental health services providers and community stakeholders are committed to acting collaboratively and in a coordinated way to support individuals and families.

The importance of providing services and support to clients using integrated and coordinated service delivery models can't be understated. This will require services to cross-refer clients to other services that focus on the specific need facing the client at any particular time. It will also require service providers to increase the intensity of support with to match the increasing complexity of the health challenge in question, and this will require some services to broaden their scope and networks to respond to these needs. Offering a coordinated and collaborative approach to service provision minimises clients having to 'tell their story' repeatedly, re-experiencing the trauma and often experiencing increasing frustration.

Shared approach to plan for community recovery

There was an expressed desire at the Summit to continue to work together and plan for:

- Both recovery from the impacts of the flood event and preparedness for the future.
- Mechanisms to keep stakeholders informed of any new, or changes to existing services.
- Measurability of the effectiveness of services to inform everyone of what is working well, to confirm people are accessing care, and that support is being effective and meaningful to individuals, families and the wider community.

There was a clear view that the system that is designed to support communities after catastrophic events sometimes makes the process more difficult for some communities. Summit attendees highlighted the importance of keeping communication channels open across wider networks so additional supports can be provided when needed. Increasing psycho-social vulnerability that arises when people are struggling to cope due to factors such as access to finance, strained relationships, grief and loss, trauma, or increasing isolation, need deliberate strategies to ensure services are able to provide timely and proactive support.



Connecting communities through shared experiences

The importance of North West communities being connected through the strong, but often discreet social linkages that exist in rural and remote Queensland was highlighted as an opportunity to deliver services in a tailored, appropriate way. The Summit heard of experiences from providers who've used informal events or gatherings to build trust and gain access to those in need, and build awareness about what's available to affected residents. Consequently, there was acknowledgement of the importance of sustaining community events and maintaining social connections, particularly as it becomes more difficult to identify mental health issues among individuals who are slowly confronting the reality of their financial and emotional status.

Developing a new narrative about the event

There was a consensus that there needs to be **a new narrative** about the flood event and its consequences, and to focus on the recovery process currently underway in the North West. It is beneficial to spend time consciously revising the narrative at regular points in any recovery process, and then sharing that narrative across sectors and the community. The stories we tell ourselves and each another about our lived experience do have a strong reinforcing effect and can support the creation of a new 'truth' and a positive, stronger recovery.

Ensuring we help those who are helping others

We need to strengthen community capacity to do more of what is known to be effective when supporting others in the community, including; community access to the building of evidence-based knowledge and skills (through Mental Health First Aid training, Psychological First Aid training or other similar resources), and to include succession planning for community and service sector leaders. Community leaders, community advocates and individual service providers may suffer from 'burn out' at some point in the recovery process. It is important we continue to raise everyone's awareness of the signs of stress and declining mental health or wellbeing, and proactively 'support the supporters'.

Keep the conversations going

The importance of continuing to innovate in ways that encourage access to the right level of support, in the right place, and in the right way and right time is critical. This includes providing services in ways that small, highly interconnected North West communities want, and that address understandable prevailing concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and that are sensitive to current prevailing attitudes and stigma regarding mental health and/or help seeking.

"It's important to pull together all the threads of those who have been working in the field, because now's the time to ensure we're not missing people and they're not falling through the gaps."

Shane Stone

**CEO – NORTH QLD LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY
RECOVERY AGENCY**

Innovation also encompasses increasing choice and options by using evidence-based technology, and using this in ways that best suits the needs of the community. For example, framing some supports as 'strengths-based conversations' delivered or guided by trained, non-health services workers in non-clinical settings using proven digital technologies such as Weathering Well (www.weatheringwell.com).

Key also is leverage from existing community events and farm industry gatherings where opportunistic interventions or 'conversations' can be provided, and the consideration of new 'coaching support' and 'trusted conversations' that increase awareness of risk factors and also knowledge of all the entry points to care and the range of options available to community members.

A way forward

There have been a number of new services, personnel and investments that have commenced in response to the flood event.

- The Western Alliance of Mental Health Providers (WAMH) continues to meet each month and provides monthly updates on any new mental health personnel, planned events, service contact details and other developments.
- New services now operating in the region include additional psychology services, new visiting child and family allied health and psychological services, and additional Tackling Regional Adversity through Integrated Care (TRAIC) workers.
- More Mental Health First Aid and Psychological First Aid trainings will be undertaken in early 2020.
- Strong partnerships are being formed across the mental health provider networks and new Industry officers and rural financial counsellors.
- Sisters of the North is providing an important linkage across health provider networks and farming families, and assisting with coordination and co-funding on-farm and community events, to ensure community connectedness is maintained and at-risk individuals are identified early.
- On-farm mental health and wellbeing support is being provided at field days, farm gatherings and for School of the Air families



- The new, low intensity Weathering Well digital wellbeing tool is being systematically introduced into the mix of mental health and wellbeing service supports, improving knowledge, prevention and recovery.

Expectations have been raised that 'collaboration and coordination' will be strengthened and reinforced and this has been emphasised at the service provider workshop convened on the day following the Summit. It is important to put in place a mechanism to continue to regularly bring key partners together and continue to proactively share information about what is happening on the ground.

The Summit demonstrated that there are already excellent relationships and good communication channels in place, and it will be important to continue to tactically nurture these bonds to support integrated and coordinated service delivery.

People are busy so rather than introduce new structures, we will build on what is already in place and strengthen these links to enhance communication and uncover opportunities for wider engagement with communities and key partners.

To keep track of how things are progressing, we will convene a key partner workshop every three months to share intelligence about programs, new events, and changing priorities.

In twelve months we will convene another Summit and once again provide the opportunity to gauge how things are tracking, what more needs to be done and to share information about how mental health and wellbeing services are performing at a population level.

-  [Video montage of interviews with North West Qld residents about the flood recovery \(20 minutes\)](#)
-  [Facilitator Dr Margaret Moreton's Report on the Summit and Workshop](#)