

COVID-19

RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

Media release

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Rural Australians urged to seek supports to combat stress

Uncertainty and fear about what lies ahead with COVID-19 is not only impacting rural and remote Australians, but their health practitioners too, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine and Rural Doctors Association of Australia said today.

The peak rural medical bodies said it is vital patients and their doctors take advantage of the increase in mental health and wellness services available during this time.



ACRRM President Dr Ewen McPhee said that anxiety around people's jobs and economic circumstances, combined with the evolving social isolation policies and travel restrictions, have resulted in significant stress or mental health issues for some people, right across Australia.

"People have been forced to alter their routines and address new and emerging concerns over many months. It's important to acknowledge that in our regions, this pandemic follows on the heels of drought, fire and even flood. People are feeling heightened levels of stress and pressure.

"Many people in rural and remote communities are facing an uncertain future, with unemployment or small business losses either already impacting or looming over them," Dr McPhee said.

"The impact of social isolation itself can be anxiety inducing, particularly for families who have been unable to visit, or those who have been unable to attend funerals, weddings, or other significant gatherings.

"During the GFC, which was only just over 10 years ago, there was a significant rise in suicides, with job loss, home repossession and debt being key risk factors leading to suicide during economic downturns.

"Alcohol usage and an increase in domestic violence can also be outcomes of both the economic downturn and the social isolation strategies.

"It is vital people take advantage of the supports that are available to them," Dr McPhee said.

"Rural General Practitioners can provide mental health care, either face-to-face or via telehealth, and the Federal Government's \$74 million COVID-19 health package for phone and online mental health resources is in place to ensure access for all Australians."

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RDAA President Dr John Hall said it's equally important that rural health professionals are mindful of their own mental health and wellbeing.

"I welcome Minister for Health Greg Hunt's announcement of a new \$3million mental health support program for health workers through the Black Dog Institute.

"Our rural and remote doctors are at the frontline, preparing their health services and supporting their communities through this unique time," Dr Hall said.

"They are doing an incredible job addressing potential issues in what is largely uncharted territory.

"As integral members of their communities and often community leaders, these issues have personal as well as professional implications. They do not want to let their communities, colleagues, staff or families down.

"We know that we will need to live with COVID-19 and the ongoing risks that it presents.

"It is vitally important that doctors have the supports they need to continue to serve their patients, while maintaining their physical and emotional wellbeing."



Find more information on how to protect yourself, your family and community from COVID-19 at www.health.gov.au.

A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here:
<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here:
<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

Available for interview:

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