

COVID-19

RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

Media release

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Don't sit on your hands: Keep an eye on your mental health as COVID continues

Australia's peak rural medical bodies have urged rural Australians to ensure they are looking out for their mental health as the COVID-19 pandemic continues and heightened restrictions return in some states.

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) said those concerned about their own mental health, or that of their family or friends, should ensure they get help as soon as possible, rather than holding off.

Help is available through GPs and other mental health professionals via telehealth or face-to-face consultations, as well as from organisations like Lifeline and Beyond Blue.

The Federal Government has announced it will provide 10 additional Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions for people subjected to further restrictions in areas impacted by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for those required to isolate or quarantine under public health orders.

The additional sessions will enable them to continue to receive mental healthcare from their psychologist, psychiatrist, GP or other eligible allied health worker.

"This is an incredibly trying and stressful time for many Australians – whether you are young or old, and living in the city or in a rural community" **Clinical Lead for RDAA and ACRRM's COVID-19 Rural and Remote Response, Dr Adam Coltzau, said.**

"There is not only the stress about how this pandemic will play out, but also the stress of not seeing family or friends, and concern about you or your family contracting the disease.

"There could also be feelings of isolation and loneliness, particularly for those who are confined to home.

"And for many, there will be the enormous stress about losing their jobs or business, and their income.

"Given these pressures, it is crucial that you actively seek assistance if you notice you are struggling with your mental health, including feeling down or depressed.

"Please do not hold back and wait – get onto any mental health concerns early, particularly given our path through the pandemic is very likely going to be months rather than a few short weeks."

Dr Coltzau also urged rural health professionals who are feeling overwhelmed or anxious to seek immediate assistance from mental health services provided for the health profession.

"If I have one take home message for my colleagues, it is this - please do not just try to soldier on" he said.

"This is an immensely stressful time, and it could well be the most stressful period of your entire career.

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“Many rural health professionals are highly concerned about COVID-19 taking hold in their community and overwhelming local health services.

“And given health professionals are becoming critically ill from COVID-19 and even dying, it is very understandable that you may be concerned for your own safety and that of your family.

“Given these significant pressures, now is not the time to sit on your hands and hope your feelings of anxiety or depression will just pass.

“Now is the time to reach out and get help.

“And there are many people and organisations who want to provide you with just that.”

Information for the general public on accessing mental health help can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/31f7CV9>

The Federal Government’s announcement about subsidised mental health sessions can be found here: <https://bit.ly/30qApa4>

RDAA and ACRRM are both offering access to counselling services for their members, as are many other professional organisations and employers of health professionals.

A high resolution photo of Dr Adam Coltzau is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/712>

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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