

New Support For Australian Farmer's Mental Health Developed in Victoria's Great South Coast

Australian farming communities will benefit from two ground-breaking initiatives from the Farmer Health Suicide Prevention Project; a framework to train farming communities in mental health support and a self-managed mental health action plan.



Hamilton, Victoria May 15, 2022 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Farming communities across Australia will benefit from two ground-breaking initiatives in suicide prevention developed on Victoria's Great South Coast.

Deakin University's National Centre For Farmer Health has recently completed a two-year project to improve access to appropriate and effective mental health support in rural farming communities.

The project was part of the **Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place-Based Trial** (GSCSPBT), a joint commitment between the Western Victoria Primary Health Network (PHN) and the Australian Government recognising the benefits of collaborative, community-based approaches to suicide prevention.

Key initiatives of the Farmer Health Suicide Prevention Project include the development of a framework to train and support farming community members to provide mental health support to each other, as well as **Steering Straight**, a self-managed mental health action plan.

While the framework will underpin ongoing work in community-based suicide prevention, *Steering Straight* is already being utilised by farmers across Australia. It has also attracted international attention, with farmers in New Zealand and Canada requesting access to the plan.

Both initiatives are designed to provide crucial support in farming communities where access to face-to-face mental health support is limited and does not always meet the needs of farming populations.

According to national coronial data, an Australian farmer dies by suicide every 10 days - almost 60% more frequently than non-farmers. While there is no clear evidence of higher rates of diagnosed mental illness in farming communities, farmers face a wide range of situational factors that can increase their risk of experiencing poor mental health and suicidal thinking. These factors include geographic and social isolation, extreme climatic events, and an unpredictable and uncertain future.

Steering Straight was co-designed with farming community members and uses practical strategies to empower individuals to take responsibility for their own wellbeing. The personalised action plan helps to build resilience and also reduces the chance of experiencing a challenging situation as a crisis event.

Steering Straight has been incorporated into the National Centre For Farmer Health's ***Managing Stress On The Farm*** book, and has been accessed over 1,000 times in digital format. *Managing Stress On The Farm* is also available in printed format.

Alison Kennedy, Director - National Centre for Farmer Health, Associate Professor - Deakin University said, "It's been exciting to involve the farming community so closely in the design and development of *Steering Straight* —knowing that the resource is meaningful and helpful for those who use it. It's also great that we've been able to include it as part of the *Managing Stress on the Farm* book, which has strong existing interest from farmers around Australia and internationally. We've already had requests for *Steering Straight* from as far away as New Zealand and Canada".

Steering Straight was developed in conjunction with community members who understand the unique challenges of farming life.

Kelly Barnes said "Being part of the co-design process for *Steering Straight* was very rewarding. Having experience of life on the farm and of poor mental health whilst living and working remotely enabled me to contribute ideas and allowed us to design a plan that worked. It allowed me to draw on my own experiences to create something relatable and practical to help others. I have also used it myself to keep on track during these challenging times".

Rowena Clift, Chief Executive Officer at Western Victoria Primary Health Network said "The development of *Steering Straight* is a great example of a collaborative, community-specific approach to suicide prevention. It is heartening to see that the resource is being used by farming communities in the Great South Coast, as well as across Australia".

Steering Straight is accessible via the *Managing Stress on the Farm* Booklet - <https://farmerhealth.org.au/managing-stress-book>

Free hard copies are also available by contacting National Centre For Farmer Health on 03) 5551 8533

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Photography: Courtesy of National Centre For Farmer Health - [Click here to download](#).

Campaign Materials: [Click here to download](#)

Project Background Information: [Click here to access](#)

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Further Information On The Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place-Based Trial:

The Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place-Based Trial is an initiative aimed at delivering activities to reduce the suicide rate in the shires of Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne, and Southern Grampians and the City of Warrnambool.

Coordinated by Western Victoria Primary Health Network (WVPHN) in partnership with the Federal Government and a range of health care service providers, the trial offers a coordinated approach to reducing the suicide rate on the Great South Coast with a range of community network support activities.

WVPHN Chief Executive Officer Rowena Clift said: “Many families across the Great South Coast are struggling to understand why their loved ones have taken their own lives. From teenagers to adults and both males and females; the suicide rate on Great South Coast is unacceptably high. We want to ensure that every single person who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide or has attempted suicide has support networks available to help them when and where they need it. These activities will help us achieve this by filling identified service gaps and giving the community the support it requires.”

Information on the all of the individual activities in the trial can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3xCi9LL>



A healthy farm starts with a healthy farmer.

Self-help for managing stress on the farm is available.

Begin your plan to keep on track

Steering Straight, the Farmer Health action plan, empowers you to take responsibility for your own wellbeing and supports you to have a more resilient response when faced with a challenging situation. This protects your farm, your family and relationships, and your health.

- Recognise how to keep positive**
- Achieve future goals**
- Know who you can call on**

GET YOUR FREE STEERING STRAIGHT PLAN ONLINE NOW!
VISIT www.farmerhealth.org.au/managing-stress-book

This initiative has been developed from a partnership between the Australian Department of Health, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western Victoria Primary Health Network, and Great South Coast Australian/Aboriginal Rural Health Unit.



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Source : Western Victoria Primary Health Network

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