

CASE STUDY (2019) Wimmera Primary Care Partnership – Rural Victoria Mental Health Initiative

Background: At a regional forum in 2015, concerns were voiced about the impact of factors upon the provision and delivery of mental health services including changes in funding, scope of service provision, the layering of philanthropic, state and commonwealth programs; coupled with the impacts of climatic conditions, political change and economic constraints. Mental health, specifically the capacity to respond to those who are in psychological distress and/or the emerging signs of mental-ill health was identified as a significant area of concern by councils across the Wimmera and Southern Mallee. It was then agreed to pool 'drought funds' to enable local people from each Local Government Area undergo instructor training for the delivery of Mental Health First Aid within the Wimmera PCP catchment. The intended outcome of the initiative was to create community champions in identifying the signs and symptoms of mental ill-health so that appropriate and professional help could be sought before a crisis ensued.

Partners: Eleven agencies were signatories on the initial proposal including Wimmera PCP, the local councils of Horsham Rural City Council, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack Shires, the local health services of Edenhope & District Memorial Hospital, Wimmera Health Care Group, Rural North West Health and West Wimmera Health Service as well as the two Bush Nursing Centres in Harrow and Woomelang.

Method: Wimmera PCP led the initiative and coordinated eleven people across the region in January of 2016 to complete a 5-day workshop for delivery of an accredited 2-day Youth Mental Health First Aid course. All partners were involved in nominating someone local to ensure equitable distribution across the LGAs.

Outcomes: The intended outcomes of the initiative have been achieved with approximately 3% (1,111) of the population of the Wimmera and Southern Mallee now trained in Mental Health First Aid across 70 sessions since 2016. This is arguably higher given the population numbers include all ages and the target audience for most (80%) of the Mental Health First Aid sessions is for adult participants.

The unintended outcomes for the initiative is the uptake in the Horsham Rural City boundaries whereby each session results in a waiting list to attend and groups regularly request bespoke sessions such as Workplace Mental Health First Aid or shorter sessions to raise awareness of mental health issues. Smaller towns across the LGAs support local delivery and are grateful of WPCP's responsiveness to be able to deliver sessions in a timely manner. Specifically, towns with recent suicide events will engage with WPCP and arrange delivery at a time and day that is safe for all. Participants and their employers report the benefits of local delivery by local instructors with enormous cost-savings. Sessions delivered in Melbourne or Ballarat attract a fee up to \$250 per person and the cost of travel with a one to two-night stay can make the training inaccessible to many.

WPCPs focus on enabling anyone to attend this training for free has filled an education and awareness gap whereby additional skills and instructors have been allocated. The WPCP now coordinates the following instructors and programs between Ararat and the South Australian border, well beyond the WPCP catchment. The biggest challenge has been being able to meet demand.

- 8 Instructors in pool
- Youth Mental Health First Aid – 14 hours – 5 Instructors
- Standard Mental Health First Aid – 12 hours – 2 Instructors
- Teen Mental Health First Aid – 4 hours – 3 Instructors
- Mental Health First Aid for the Suicidal Person – 4 hours – 4 Instructors

- Mental Health First Aid for Non-Suicidal Self Injury – 4 hours – 4 Instructors
- **Delivering across 6 LGAs – 70 sessions to 1, 111 participants, 718 contact hours**
 - West Wimmera Shire (Edenhope, Goroke, Kaniva, Harrow) - 178 participants
 - Yarriambiack Shire (Warracknabeal, Hopetoun, Murtoa, Woomelang) - 320 participants
 - Hindmarsh Shire (Nhill, Rainbow, Dimboola) – 219 participants
 - Horsham Rural City Council (Horsham) – 365 participants
 - Buloke Shire (Wycheproof) – 15 participants
 - Northern Grampians Shire (St Arnaud) – 14 participants

7 schools – 315 students

- Dimboola
- Murtoa
- Goroke
- Hopetoun
- Warracknabeal
- Rainbow
- Nhill

“After delivering TMHFA we have seen students have a greater capacity to not only managed their own personal situations but also know how to support their friends. Some of the greatest knowledge gained was simply knowing how to refer friends to the proper help rather than take on their problems for yourself. This has come as a great relief to many. The booklets are also a fantastic resource for students to work through and take home. The facilitator Lissy did an amazing job of connecting with our students and leading them through the resources. I highly recommend all schools partake in these workshops.”

Naomi Malcolm
Leading Teacher for Student Engagement
Warracknabeal Secondary College

“Wimmera PCP has travelled extensively to deliver Teen Mental Health First Aid education to secondary students in rural towns. This directly meets the needs of these communities, who are statistically at higher risk of anxiety, depression and suicide but with limited access to mental health professionals and public transport. The TMHFA program has filled an essential gap in local service delivery, only achievable in partnership with the resources of Wimmera PCP and the TMHFA has been one of Uniting Wimmera’s SFYS most successful interventions.”

Jaimie Clarkson
School Focussed Youth Services
Uniting Wimmera

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