

Sustaining community wellbeing in drought

Overview of case studies



Case Study Summaries

These case studies aim at sharing positive ideas and experience from the State Government's *Sustaining community wellbeing in drought* program funded in the 2007–2008 financial year. The program, involving 19 Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) in 47 rural and regional local government areas, was part of broader Department of Human Services drought response.

1. Adaptive Practice: Benalla Drought Outreach Service

A key feature of the Benalla Drought Outreach Service was the use of an 'adaptive practice' approach in which a drought outreach worker acted as a 'friendly conduit' between farmers and the health services that they might not otherwise access. The drought outreach worker looked, acted and spoke like a farmer.

The primary achievement of the service has been improved access to health services for farmers.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the drought outreach worker position and other services provided have reduced negative life impacts and the number of drought-related suicides.

2. Wimmera PCP: Building community resilience

The Wimmera Primary Care Partnership implemented an effective integrated program. Initiatives included:

- Mental Health First Aid training
- a series of locally-tailored health information sessions held at sporting venues, picnics, breakfasts and community events.

This integrated approach, supported by marketing and promotion through the local media, led to an increase in the number of people accessing health and counselling services and a strengthening of the capacity of small communities to cope with the negative impacts of drought and climate change.

3. Campaspe Farm Gate: Assertive outreach

The Shire of Campaspe worked with the attitude of 'drought planning and service delivery do not belong to one organisation alone'.

An important part of their response was an assertive outreach program—the Campaspe Farm Gate project. This involved pairs of drought workers cold-calling on local farmers in order to identify needs and connect them to relevant services and supports.

The Campaspe area also complemented the Farm Gate model by developing 'No Bull Support' workshops with the Bouverie Centre, Victoria's Family Institute within La Trobe University's Faculty of Health Sciences. These workshops aimed to encourage people to engage farmers and 'normalise

stress in the face of drought and other challenges'.¹

Together, the Farm Gate and No Bull Support initiatives have promoted engagement between local drought-affected farmers, their communities and relevant drought support services. They have helped build local community capacity and resilience to minimise the social impact of drought.

4. Southern Grampians and Glenelg: Climate change adaptation framework

The Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership developed interventions including drought counselling and Mental Health First Aid training and coordinated a range of drought-related initiatives.

One key development was creating the Drought Postcard Initiative which connected local school children and farmers with mental health promotion messages. Students from nine local primary schools sent personalised postcards to 1,000 farmers near Balmoral, Casterton, Coleraine, Hamilton and Dunkeld. As well as providing simple, helpful, supportive mental health messages and information, the postcards contained students' personal messages of hope which encouraged farmers with a sense of local community support. The initiative was so successful that this region helped others to follow suit.

5. Northern Mallee PCP: Sustainable approach

Local drought planning and coordination for the Northern Mallee area has been overseen by the Drought Social Recovery Reference Group (DSRRG) made up of a large number of local organisations.

The interventions developed have focussed on social capital—people—to build capacity, resilience and empowerment.

They have adapted programs for the needs of their local community. For example instead of hosting a one-off Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) course in the area, the Northern Mallee Primary Care Partnership sent four local practitioners to Melbourne to attend the MHFA train-the-trainer program to build the local workforce capacity. These four trainers are still employed locally and continue to provide MHFA sessions which are well attended, by agency staff and some community members.

Local provision of the MHFA course over a two-year period has raised the awareness of mental health issues with hundreds of people. The MHFA course is now being adapted for delivery to the community through e-learning, with the first two-day workshop to commence in mid 2009.

6. Loddon Mallee: Sustainable development network

The Loddon Mallee Region Sustainable Development Network, convened in 2007, aimed to improve communication and coordination between state government, local government, agencies and corporations involved in initiatives related to drought, renewable energy and climate change.

The network used drought coordinators to link senior managers from multiple government departments with drought initiative service providers and local communities.

The approach succeeded in providing local workers with up-to-date information and expertise through forums and workshops and enhanced the communication between agencies, local communities and government funding bodies.

The network also developed a strategic framework for a coordinated regional response to long-term climate change projections. The framework outlines key strategies to mitigate, adapt, adjust to and manage risk and identify new opportunities such as renewable energy, over the next 30 years.