



## Project Information

# Farmer Health & Wellbeing

2 May, 2022



GREAT SOUTH COAST  
Suicide Prevention  
Place Based Trial



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR  
FARMER  
HEALTH

**phn**  
WESTERN VICTORIA  
An Australian Government Initiative



**Australian Government**

## PROJECT SUMMARY

This project provided the foundation for improving access to appropriate and effective mental health support in rural farming communities.

The work completed in this project will underpin ongoing work towards the development of a program that will:

1. Train and support farming community members to lead the one-on-one delivery of an evidence-based mental health program to their peers.
2. Use practical strategies to monitor mood and schedule activities that are enjoyable and bring a sense of achievement.

This project was completed between 2020-2022 by Deakin University's National Centre For Farmer Health in Victoria's Great South Coast. Its findings and outcomes will be applicable for farming communities across Australia.

## THE BACKGROUND

A farmer dies by suicide every 10 days according to an Australian-first study of farmer suicide rates based on 10 years of national coronial data.

Alarmingly, the average suicide rate in farmers was almost 60 per cent higher than non-farmers, according to the coronial data. (ABC Rural / By Michael Condon / 7 Dec 2021)

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.

There is **evidence that farmers are generous at providing help to others but are reluctant to ask for help themselves.**

Most farmers live in communities in which access to evidence-based face-to-face **mental health support is limited**

Where support is available, **providers may have poor understanding** of the realities of life and work in the farming environment

**Background research:** <https://farmerhealth.org.au/2020/08/12/suicide-in-rural-australia-are-farming-related-suicides-different>



## PROJECT ACTIVITY 1: PEER SUPPORTED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Deakin's National Centre for Farmer Health and partner institutions co-designed, with farming community members and community stakeholders, a model for delivering peer-supported evidenced-based psychological therapy (Behavioural Activation) to farming community members experiencing depression, subthreshold depression or psychological/situational distress.

### Behavioural Activation

Behavioural Activation is a brief psychological therapy focused on increasing behaviours that people enjoy and reducing avoidance behaviours, like sitting alone and ruminating. There is a growing body of evidence to support the use of Behavioural Activation in supporting people with anxiety and depression, both predictors of suicide. This includes a randomised controlled trial involving 4440 people indicating that Behavioural Activation is as effective as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in treating depression and, most importantly, could be effectively delivered by non-clinical workers.

### Unlike CBT, non-health workers can learn to deliver Behavioural Activation with four days training.

Consequently, Behavioural Activation can be delivered to large numbers of people living with common mental disorders in communities where access to mental health services is limited, such as rural Australia.

### There is growing evidence of peer-delivered services in mental health care reducing relapse and rehospitalisation as well as improving empowerment, hope, self-efficacy, engagement and recovery.

Working with farmers to deliver Behavioural Activation to their peers—enabling the context and cultural competence to 'walk in their shoes'—has the potential to overcome many well-established barriers to mental health help-seeking and improve outcomes for this at-risk group.

## PROJECT ACTIVITY 2: PERSONALISED SAFETY PLAN - 'STEERING STRAIGHT'

Activity 2 aimed to empower members of the rural farming community to take responsibility for their wellbeing through co-designing and pilot testing a personalised plan for identifying risks and preventing crisis.

Deakin's National Centre for Farmer Health team co-designed, with farming community members and community stakeholders, 'Steering Straight' - a crisis prevention planning template for:

- (a) inclusion into peer-supported mental health support programs, and
- (b) as a stand-alone resource that individuals can complete independently (prior to any onset of crisis) in anticipation of future challenges.

Steering Straight empowers individuals to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and supports a more resilient response when a challenging situation does occur. It also reduces the chance of experiencing a future challenging situation as a crisis event.

**Steering Straight** has been embedded in the well-used Managing Stress on the Farm Booklet - <https://farmerhealth.org.au/managing-stress-book>



## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Additional mental health resources/support (in addition those developed as part of this project) that are tailored to the needs of farming communities:

- Managing Stress On The Farm booklet
- Online psychology service (including access to psychologists who have completed farmer health training) <https://farmerhealth.org.au/access-a-psychologist-online>
- Farmer Health Support Page - <https://farmerhealth.org.au/support>
- Farmer Health fact sheets - <https://farmerhealth.org.au/page/health-wellbeing-safety-fact-sheets>

## MORE INFORMATION ON THE GSCSPPBT TRIAL

Visit [bit.ly/GSCSPPBTbackgrounders](https://bit.ly/GSCSPPBTbackgrounders)

