

January 2019

The entire state of NSW is in drought, with many areas severe. The social and emotional impact of this environmental disaster in rural and remote communities, that were already under siege as a result of economic decline, is only beginning to be understood. The most apparent social effects of the drought include the impact on income, resulting in poverty, increased physical workloads, physical and mental health issues and access to appropriate services. Health workers are the cornerstone of support in any community. It is no surprise that health workers in rural and remote New South Wales are experiencing overload in demand for services. They are also having to deal with their own personal responses to the situation, in the communities in which they live.

CRANAplus Bush Support Services (BSS) is in a unique position to support health workers in drought-affected areas. The unique service itself is the only one of its kind in Australia. It is primarily a telephone and internet-based service providing psychological support and intervention to rural and remote area health workers and their families.

A range of face-to-face mental health interventions, including roadshows and workshops, promoting positive mental health and resilience have been developed to support and restore these practitioners. Effective ways of coping through best-practice, evidence-based Positive Psychology and Mindfulness are highlighted. The 1800 support line means that ongoing, 24/7 support is available.

The project ***CRANAplus Bush Support Services 'Supporting the Carers' - Response to the New South Wales Drought*** aims to access health workers in drought affected New South Wales via a roadshow. It will be delivered by experienced BSS Clinical Psychologists during March to May 2019.

The mini workshops will take a best practice/mindful/strengths-based approach to raise professional and personal self-awareness, in order to increase skills in resilience-building, to help cope with the stress and burn-out associated with working in drought affected rural and remote health contexts.

In particular, workshops will focus on:

- The importance of prioritising self-care and strategies to achieve resilience.
- The secondary traumatization experienced by health workers experiencing exposure to higher levels of depression, suicide, domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues and relationships and family breakdown in their patients and clients associated with drought.
- Discuss strategies that health professionals might use to have “difficult conversations” with their clients and to encourage access psychological support.
- Provide information to participants about the ongoing support available through Bush Support Services and other relevant mental health services.

Target audiences:

- All health, allied health and associated workers working in drought-affected areas in NSW.
- In particular, health workers supporting farmers, farm families, small business and rural and remote communities in drought-affected NSW.

Outcomes:

- Experience new ways of raising professional and personal awareness in terms of resilience building.
- Understand the impact of stress and burn-out and develop self-care strategies.
- Explore how to stay emotionally safe in a challenging work environment.
- Community resilience building by looking at ways health service providers might educate community members about the value of accessing psychological services during periods of natural disaster.