



The Hon Mark Coulton MP
Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications
and Local Government
Federal Member for Parkes

Katherine Isbister
CRANApplus CEO

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mental health support available for rural frontline nurses

Health professionals in drought and bushfire-affected rural communities have access to extra resources to help them deal with the mental health fallout from these events.

CRANApplus, the peak professional body for Australia's remote and isolated health workforce, has received Commonwealth funding to provide a suite of webinars, podcasts, and tailor-made workshops for those working on the frontline, to keep themselves and their communities resilient.

Federal Regional Health Minister, Mark Coulton said nurses are the lifeblood of rural areas, responding to complex health needs away from major hospitals and needed support to carry out this vital role.

"We cannot overstate the important role our remote nursing workforce has in helping their local communities get through these tough times," Minister Coulton said.

"The CRANApplus mental health training workshops are unique and tailored to the specific needs of clinicians in a particular community to help build long-term resilience in our rural and remote health workforce.

"With the summer months fast approaching, it is important to prepare for the upcoming bushfire season by ensuring our health professionals are well supported to respond and help rural communities who might face additional challenges in the months ahead."

Minister Coulton said *Nursing in the Community Week* (14-20 September) provided an opportunity to thank all rural and remote nurses who continuously put their heart and soul into caring for communities, especially this year as we face the additional challenge of managing COVID-19.

"I want to thank all the nurses who often go above and beyond the call of duty to care for rural and remote communities, this year has already been particularly challenging for rural Australia," Minister Coulton said.

CRANApplus CEO, Katherine Isbister said many rural communities have dealt with years of drought, compounded by last summer's devastating bushfires and now COVID-19.

"Our primary health clinicians are starting to see an increase in complex, trauma-related mental health presentations linked to these events, and we need to support them to continue caring for their communities," Ms Isbister said.

"In many cases, our rural and remote health professionals have been through the same traumas and challenges as their patients and they haven't had a break to be able to look after their own wellbeing"

CRANApplus Psychologist, Cath Walker said the free resources were developed in conjunction with experts in the field of disaster recovery and mental health, and can be accessed via the CRANApplus website.

Ms Walker said consultations with clinicians in remote and rural communities have led to training content being developed across four key areas:

- Effects of disaster, long term stress, common reactions and helpful responses.
- Potential for secondary trauma and burnout in health professionals and other carers.
- Resilience and self-care strategies to reduce the potential long-term effect on personal health and wellbeing.
- Increasing confidence with conversation about mental health using basic listening, counselling and communication skills.

“The prolonged disaster-related stress being experienced by some of our rural and remote communities is placing significant pressure on isolated clinicians, who may not have had mental health training, particularly when community members are unable to travel to access specialist mental health care, so it’s vital to provide tools to help the helpers,” Ms Walker said.

Minister Coulton said the Federal Government’s investment totalled more than \$13 million over three years to CRANaplus to provide remote health professionals, including community nurses, with access to training, professional services and mental health support.

This builds on existing support available to provide trauma-informed care and mental health first aid training to frontline healthcare and emergency workers, under the Australian Government’s \$76 million *Supporting the Mental Health of Australians Affected by Bushfires* package.

Health professionals in areas affected by drought and/or bushfires interested in having a local mental health training workshop can contact National Project Manager Kristy Hill at kristy@crana.org.au or visit crana.org.au to access the free resources.

“This initiative complements our existing CRANaplus Bush Support Services 24/7 toll-free support line, 1800 805 391, for rural and remote health professionals and their families,” Ms Isbister said.

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