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## Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health

The Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health aims to improve the mental health of rural and remote communities through academic leadership, collaboration and achievements in research, education, service development and information services. Based in Orange, CRRMH is a major collaboration between the University of Newcastle and NSW Health.

This report describes the current research work undertaken by CRRMH and also includes projects which are predominantly education and service development initiatives, since research activity is often an important secondary component of each project conducted in these areas.

## RESEARCH

CRRMH is taking a lead role in conducting mental health research with rural and remote communities. The research focus is on:

- The mental health and wellbeing of rural Australia, and
- Mental illness and health services and health outcomes for rural people with mental illness.

A critical component of CRRMH research is community engagement for the purpose of developing research questions and methods, gaining community participation in projects, and evaluating the overall research direction. The Centre affords many opportunities for student research at all levels and assists with developing research skills for new researchers and clinicians based across rural NSW. Results from the Centre's research are made available through conferences, publications and community feedback forums.

### Aim

To provide academic leadership in rural mental health research for the purpose of gathering empirical evidence to guide mental health service delivery for rural and remote NSW.



## **Key Achievements**

- Established a formal partnership with the Australian Rural Health Research Collaboration. The Collaboration received a major Research Capacity Building Infrastructure Grant (NSW Department of Health)
- Developed a program of research aimed to build mental health awareness and service networks in rural Australian communities
- Commenced implementation of two major National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funded research projects, including the *Australian Rural Mental Health Survey*, which is being led by the CRRMH
- Two doctoral and one masters research students were successful in achieving NSW Institute of Psychiatry Research Fellowships
- Formally linked as a participating Centre within the University of Newcastle's newly funded Priority Research Centre: The Centre for Brain and Mental Health Research

## **Research Projects**

### **Australian Rural Mental Health Study (ARMHS)**

The *Australian Rural Mental Health Study* is funded by the NHMRC and will study 3600 households across rural and remote NSW, focusing on determinants and outcomes of mental health as influenced by individual, family and community factors. The project commenced in 2006 and is conducted from four sites - Orange, Broken Hill, Lismore and Moree. Led by the CRRMH, *ARMHS* is a collaboration with the University of Sydney's Departments of Rural Health in Lismore and Broken Hill, and the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety. Consultation commenced with Aboriginal organisations to address implementation in remote areas. A mail out pilot survey of over 400 rural residents was conducted in 2006 and addressed physical health, mental health and well-being.

### **Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank**

The *Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank* is a national collaboration to develop a research bank with comprehensive cross referenced data from a large sample of volunteers with schizophrenia and individuals without psychiatric illness. The CRRMH is a collaborating site for recruitment and assessment. Work on the Research Bank began in 2006 and it will provide researchers access to data linking genetic, neuroanatomical, cognitive and clinical information in a large cohort.

### **A Field Trial of Neuropsychological Assessment by Videoconference**

Funded by a University of Newcastle New Staff Grant, the project aims to assess the reliability and feasibility of administering neuropsychological assessments by videoconference in rural and remote areas. The project commenced in October 2006 and will be completed in 2007, with results expected to inform both research methodology and clinical service provision to more isolated areas.

### **Building Mental Health Service Networks: A Service Collaboration Model**

This study was developed during 2006 from prior CRRMH research on the effects of the drought on mental health and is being conducted in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Agriculture and Safety (Associate Prof. Lyn Fragar, University of Sydney), the University of Sydney, Department of Rural Health, Lismore (Associate Prof. Jeff Fuller) and the rural Area Mental Health Services. This research will evaluate the effectiveness of an innovative model to foster networks between agricultural support and health workers, with the aim of improving the services available to meet the mental health care needs of farmers and farming communities in NSW.

### **Depression & Alcohol Integrated & Single Focused Interventions (DAISI)**

*DAISI* is a research project studying depression in people who drink alcohol as a way to cope with their symptoms. The CRRMH-based arm of this project was completed in 2006.

### **Farm Safety Studies**

The CRRMH provided a contribution to the *Farm Safety Studies* in 2006, a project of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety and the Australian Rural Health Research Collaboration. The *Farm Safety Studies* are a longitudinal study of health and safety among people in farming areas across NSW. The CRRMH is collaborating on the mental health aspects of this study.

### **The Impact of Drought on Mental Health in Rural Communities**

This study launched CRRMH activity in relation to the mental health impact of the drought. Focus groups and individual interviews with farmers, farm businesses and service providers were conducted in a rural community and followed up. Results were presented at conferences and the study will be finalised in 2007 as results are published. The findings from this project have informed a service development project (see *Strategies that Build Mental Health Awareness & Networks*). A specific interest in child and adolescent mental health has resulted in one study of the impact of drought on children and adolescents being completed and published in 2006 and an intervention study being developed for 2007.

### **Randomised Controlled Trial of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to Prevent Psychosis Among Young People With At-risk Mental States**

The *Detection, Evaluation and Psychological Therapy (DEPT<sub>H</sub>)* project is a multi-site randomised control trial, comparing the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Person Centred Therapy in delaying or preventing the transition to psychosis among young people at high risk of psychosis. The *DEPT<sub>H</sub>* project commenced in 2006 and has been adapted for rural service delivery. It also incorporates motivational interviewing to address the high incidence of cannabis problems for at-risk youth. In October 2006 Helen Stain was an invited speaker at a symposium of the International Early Psychosis Association Conference in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

## **Rehabilitation Program Evaluation**

The *Rehabilitation Program Evaluation* study is a clinical research program which assesses the mental health of approximately 50 male and 30 female inpatients at the Manara/Turon units of Bloomfield Hospital. In 2006, the CRRMH completed an evaluation of two tertiary referral inpatient psychiatric rehabilitation units in Greater Western Area Health Service.

## **Rural Community Database of Mental Health and Related Measures**

In 2006, the CRRMH continued the development of a rural mental health database. This database aims to provide comprehensive, up-to-date information on demographic, economic, geographical, health, mental health and health services factors for 173 Local Government Areas across New South Wales. The database provides background sampling and demographic data for research projects and in the future will be used to analyse trends in mental health outcomes and determinants in rural and remote areas.

## **PhD and Postgraduate Research Candidates**

PhD candidates, Leigh Underwood and Maree Earle and Master student Rowena Micha, were awarded Research Fellowships by the NSW Institute of Psychiatry. The topics of their research are as follows:

- Maree Earle – *Rural psychiatry workforce*
- Leigh Underwood – *Depression and Diabetes Type II intervention in rural areas*
- Rowena Micha – *Rural pathways to care and clinical outcomes for early psychosis*

## **Aboriginal Men's Mental Health**

A research program exploring the mental health needs of Aboriginal men continues to be developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council.

## **Australian Rural Health Research Collaboration**

The Collaboration is a joint venture partnership between four rural research centres and their associated health services. It has been established for the purpose of undertaking an innovative and robust program of research and development leading to sustained improvements in the health of rural communities. The CRRMH provides continued support and effort in leading the mental health stream of the Collaboration.

## **Suicide and Attempted Suicide in Young People in NSW**

The study aims to calculate the risk factors and population characteristics of both suicide and attempted suicide in young people aged 18-34 years from urban and rural New South Wales. It will also examine predictors for completed suicide compared to those who attempt suicide. The CRRMH will collect data in the Greater Western Area Health Service for the rural arm of this NHMRC funded study led by University of NSW and Queensland University.

## EDUCATION

The CRRMH is involved in developing, implementing and evaluating education programs across three broad dimensions including:

- Academic programs
- Professional development and continuing education
- Community education and mental health promotion programs

Overall, the CRRMH aims to develop educational programs using emerging technologies and evidence-based practice and to provide new opportunities in continuing education for diverse groups of rural practitioners (doctors, nurses, allied health, consumers, carers and other community organisations).

The development of all education programs at the CRRMH is informed by current research and service development activities at the Centre and by the partnerships established with a range of stakeholders in rural and remote mental health. This enhances the Centre's capacity to develop sustainable systems of education and training, and support rural and remote services in identifying educational priorities.

### Aim

To initiate and lead the development, implementation and evaluation of education programs that build the skills and capacity of health professionals, academic institutions and communities to promote the mental health and emotional wellbeing of people living and working in rural and remote communities in NSW.

### Key Achievements

- Completed external review of the *Djirruwang* program in collaboration with Charles Sturt University and the NSW Institute of Psychiatry
- Completed development of the *Mental Health Emergency Care* course and conducted the pilot across NSW in 2007
- Completed the development of an *Introduction to Rural Mental Health Practice* which has been piloted and will commence more extensive implementation
- Recruitment of an IT support officer to assist with development of education programs
- Awarded the Professional Development Prize for the 'Tele-West' poster at the 11<sup>th</sup> NSW Rural Mental Health Conference, 29 November – 1 December, 2006

## **Education Projects**

### **Bachelor of Medicine: Health Equity Rural Mental Health Placements**

The CRRMH supports rural mental health placements for 5th year medical students.

### **Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) 'Djirruwang' Program**

Charles Sturt University contracted the CRRMH to conduct a comprehensive external evaluation of the *Djirruwang Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Program* and course. This evaluation was completed during 2006 and recommendations were made in relation to the future sustainability of the course.

### **Introduction to Rural Health (scoping)**

CRRMH was provided with funding from the NSW Institute of Clinical Services and Teaching to help determine the feasibility of developing a Rural and Remote Clinicians Program to assist clinicians who are new workers to rural and remote health practice. This program will have an inter-professional focus and its scoping has involved extensive consultation with stakeholders from all rural area health services across NSW.

### **Introduction to Working in Rural Mental Health Practice**

During 2006 the Centre conducted a pilot of this course in collaboration with North Coast Area Health Service. The Centre is currently reviewing the course in light of feedback received and a wider implementation and evaluation of this program is being undertaken during 2007 and 2008.

### **Mental Health Emergency Care Learning & Development Program (MHEC)**

During 2006 the Centre developed the *MHEC program* in collaboration with NSW Health. This program is designed to enhance care for people experiencing mental health issues in Emergency Departments. Extensive consultation was undertaken with Area Health Services in the development of the course and the program has been piloted across NSW in 2007.

### **Mental Health First Aid Training**

This is a 12 hour, 2-day course developed by Betty Kitchener and Professor Tony Jorm to address common mental health problems including depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and substance use. In 2006 the course was offered five times as part of the *Strategies that build mental health awareness & networks project (see Service Development report)* in towns such as Parkes, Inverell, Narrabri, Scone and Bourke and also a diverse group of human services organisations and for Charles Sturt University Faculty of Health Heads of School. A further twelve courses were run for NSW Farmers Association in late 2006/early 2007, three for the Department of Health and Ageing mid 2007 and fifty courses run as part of the Drought Mental Health Assistance Package from January to August 2007.

### **NSW Institute of Psychiatry: Rural Mental Health Elective (GPs)**

During 2006, the Centre began work on the development of an elective on rural mental health that will form part of the Graduate Diploma in Mental Health offered by the NSW Institute of Psychiatry. This elective will commence in 2008 and may also articulate into the Institute's Master in Mental Health for General Practitioners.

### **Resourceful Adolescent Program Training (RAP)**

During 2006 the Centre was involved in the provision of training in the *Resourceful Adolescent Program*, in collaboration with the Queensland University of Technology. As part of its focus on community information and education, the Centre offers *RAP* training to teachers, school counsellors, youth and mental health workers on an ongoing basis. The *Resourceful Adolescent Program* is designed to enhance the emotional wellbeing of 12-16 year olds and research shows it is effective at preventing adolescent depression in the short to medium term.

### **Support Scheme for Rural Specialists: Co-morbidity - Indigenous Mental Health and Substance Use Issues, Round 5**

During 2006, the Centre conducted a series of interactive forums with rural psychiatrists from across Australia and utilised a panel of four rural health specialists to convene case based discussions as a learning tool. The issues addressed were Indigenous mental health and co-morbidity and the forums provided the opportunity for participants and the specialist panel to network, collaborate and share their views and innovations.

### **Support Scheme for Rural Specialists: Managing the Pressures of Rural Psychiatry, Clinical Leadership, Round 6**

Two video-conference forums were conducted that targeted psychiatrists working in rural and remote locations across Australia. These forums addressed the issue of clinical leadership in the context of farmers' mental health and wellbeing. A final report on this project has been completed in 2007 and submitted to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) and the Support Scheme for Rural Specialists.

## **SERVICE DEVELOPMENT**

The Centre has a very important role in working with the health services in rural areas to conduct a range of projects that aim to support improved models of mental health services and to support the development of rural mental health policy.

The Centre has been undertaking a number of projects related to the development and evaluation of mental health services in rural and remote areas. This includes a project to review models of telephone based mental health intake and access and a review of needs for drug and alcohol and mental health services. The Centre also has a number of drought programs which provide an opportunity to develop models for local services to work better with rural community organisations to meet the needs of people in farming.

## **Aim**

To provide leadership in state-wide consultation and collaboration on rural mental health service and policy initiatives, develop appropriate and cost effective service models for mental health care of dispersed populations and assist the recruitment and retention of an appropriately skilled workforce.

## **Key Achievements**

- Completed an evaluation of Greater Southern Area Health Service Mental Health Intake Services
- A lead role in the implementation of the NSW Premier's Drought Mental Health Assistance Package
- Awarded a major grant through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (\$915,000) to support the development and evaluation of a "Farm-Link" program
- Co-hosting the Annual NSW Rural Mental Health Conferences
- Held eight Mental Health First Aid courses for frontline service providers of farmers and farming families were organised and evaluated for the NSW Farmer's Association, in collaboration with NSW Health and the NSW Farmer's Mental Health Network.
- The Transcultural *Rural & Remote Outreach Project's* planning phase concluded with the endorsement of the Strategic Plan by its Project Advisory Group. Implementation of the project's key strategies is now underway in this multi-dimensional, multi-site initiative.

## **Service Development Projects**

### **Aboriginal Mental Health Workers Forum**

The CRRMH in collaboration with NSW Centre for Mental Health and the Greater Western Area Health Service hosted the Aboriginal Mental Health Workers Forum in Orange on 22-24 May 2006. The Forum's theme was 'Care for self and others' and covered topics such as the Aboriginal mental health workforce, professional development, responding to needs, indigenous suicide prevention and tributes to community members. The Forum is the only Aboriginal mental health forum held in NSW and was attended by over 100 delegates.

### **Drought Mental Health Assistance Package**

The Drought Mental Health Assistance Package was announced by the Premier, The Hon Morris Iemma, in October, 2006. The Package is funded by NSW Health and coordinated by the CRRMH. A vital component of the package is working with key partners and stakeholders who are involved in agriculture, mental health or rural communities. These key organisations were invited to a consultative conference at the Centre in November 2006 to look at the package and explore optimum delivery strategies. As a result of this conference, a Steering Committee and four working groups were established to allow for the widest possible input from the stakeholders. The delivery of fifty Mental Health First Aid Workshops, fifteen Farmers Mental Health Gatherings, and fifteen Service Network Meetings is nearing completion. A resource package for service providers is being developed.



## **Evaluation of Greater Southern Area Mental Health Service Intake Services**

During 2006, the CRRMH conducted an external evaluation of the Greater Southern Area's two existing telephone based *Mental Health Intake Services (MHIS)*, Accessline (McKesson Asia-Pacific Pty Ltd) and Mental Health Triage-Goulburn (MHT-G). This evaluation provided some guidance in identifying and addressing the complex interactions between a *MHIS* and its' stakeholders. It outlined a range of service components, key performance indicators and recommendations for the development and operation of a future rural Mental Health Intake Service for the Area.

## **Farm-link**

CRRMH was awarded a grant under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy for the Farm-Link project: Improving the mental health and wellbeing of people on NSW farms. This project involves developing a service model to better address the mental health needs of farming communities. The program commenced in 2007 and an evaluation of the project will be conducted in early 2009.

## **NSW Rural Mental Health Conference**

The CRRMH is a major sponsor of annual NSW Rural Mental Health Conference. In 2006, the Conference was held in Orange 29 November - 1 December 2006 with the theme '*Help, Hope and Hype: Recreating Mental Health for the New Century*' and in 2007 the Conference is to be held in Bateman's Bay with the theme '*Mental Health – who cares?*' These conferences provide a forum for showcasing rural mental health initiatives, reporting on projects, and responding to mental health challenges in rural settings.

## **Rural Area Directors of Mental Health Services Forums**

The CRRMH maintains a regular forum with Directors of Rural Area Mental Health Services to collaborate on rural mental health projects. The aim of these meetings is to review the Centre's projects and progress, to advise strategic direction, and to identify areas of need or opportunities for the CRRMH to provide support to the Area Mental Health Services.

## **Rural Mental Health Access Plan**

The *Rural Mental Health Access Plan* was endorsed by the Mental Health Program Council in June 2006 and has been approved as government policy.

## **Rural Mental Health Support Line**

The *Rural Mental Health Support Line* provides advice for people seeking mental health assistance, advice and support for themselves, or somebody they know. The Support Line plays an important role in projects that involve the mental health and wellbeing of people on NSW farms. The CRRMH continues to provide leadership for the implementation of the *Rural Mental Health Support Line*.

## **Strategies That Build Mental Health Awareness & Networks**

This project involves a series of Mental Health First Aid courses and Farmers' Mental Health and Wellbeing seminars. These courses and seminars were held in Parkes, Inverell, Narrabri, Scone and Bourke in 2006. The NSW Farmers Association also hosted eight Mental Health First Aid courses in December 2006. These courses were targeted at service providers working with farmers and farming families. The CRRMH was employed to organise the delivery of these courses across rural NSW. A pilot network evaluation for this project which was funded by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund was completed at the end of 2006 and funding received to continue the evaluation through 2007/08 (see *Building Mental Health Service Networks: A Service Collaboration Model* in the Research section).

## **Transcultural Mental Health**

The *Transcultural Rural & Remote Outreach Project* aims to improve the cultural responsiveness of mental health services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds living in rural and remote NSW. The project is operating in partnership with NSW Health Mental Health Services in four demonstration sites (Griffith, Tamworth, Dubbo and Coffs Harbour), through initiatives in workforce, service, systems and community development. The project's organisational infrastructure was completed in 2006 with the appointment of Field Liaison Officers in Tamworth and Coffs Harbour. Data collection commenced among both CALD community groups and service providers working with migrants and refugees. The project's strategic plan and evaluation matrix were endorsed by the key state and national representative bodies that make up the Project Advisory Group. This project continues until June 2009.

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