
Ministerial Roundtable on Rural and Remote Mental Health

Communique

11 December 2014

On 11 December 2014, the Honourable Lawrence Springborg MP, Minister for Health convened a further roundtable to discuss the ongoing drought and its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of Queenslanders in rural and remote communities across the State.

Participants noted with concern the on-going drought across so much of the State despite recent rainfall and storms.

As at 10 November 2014, more than 75% of Queensland has been drought declared under the State process, covering 44 entire local government areas and three part local government areas, with the most recent addition of shires to the drought declared list on 1 August 2014. At the same time there were 67 current Individually Droughted Property declarations in an additional eight local government areas.

Progress since September 2014

Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014-2019

Queensland's Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan was released in October 2014. This strategy provides the platform for a coordinated and concerted effort over the next five years. This is a plan for all Queenslanders, because in one way or another we are all affected individually and as a community, by problems with mental health and substance misuse. This plan includes a commitment to an on-going action plan that addresses the mental health and wellbeing of people living in rural and remote Queensland.

Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Services Plan 2015-2020

The Queensland Government is committed to providing strategic direction to guide contemporary and high quality delivery of mental health and alcohol and other drugs services, to ensure equitable healthcare for all Queenslanders. A shared commitment in the whole-of-government strategic plan is the development of a *Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Services Plan 2015-2020* (the Services Plan). The Department of Health is responsible for leading the development of the Services Plan, which will govern service planning and delivery of the state funded mental health, drug and alcohol system in accordance with the [Blueprint for better healthcare Queensland](#) and relevant quality and safety standards. It is anticipated the development of the Services Plan will commence January 2015.

Firearms License Renewal

Concerns were raised at the previous roundtable on rural and remote mental health for people in Queensland who may have existing or previous mental health issues, and the implication this has on their ability to complete the weapons licensing renewal forms.

In Queensland, the application for a licence form under the *Queensland Weapons Act 1990* requires the applicant to declare if they have ever received treatment for "psychiatric or emotional problems". If such a declaration is made the applicant must provide details of the illness and treatment and a doctor's certificate to certify the condition does not affect the applicant's ability to possess or use a firearm. This process does not necessarily prevent a person with a mental illness who has a valid and legitimate reason for owning or use of a gun from obtaining a licence.

The main concern for some farmers/graziers is that a declaration will result in their licence being removed. Some people are unsure of the process and are intimidated by the consequences of completing the form honestly. Farmers/graziers or others may not seek treatment and support for mental health problems because of concerns that this might jeopardise their eligibility for a firearms licence.

It is recommended that it would be beneficial for graziers and farmers who have previously had treatment for mental health problems to consult their general practitioner upon receiving their licence renewal for an independent assessment and a general health check-up. This would include a capacity and risk assessment of the use of firearms. Given the nature of the licensing process, this may be a good time to incorporate a general assessment of physical and psychological or mental health issues by the general practitioner. The general practitioner (GP) is not obligated to report unless the person is considered a high risk. Further consultation with Rural GPs and the Queensland Police Service about enabling GPs to hold the confidential information similar to the way assessments are made for renewal of driving licences will be undertaken by the Department of Health.

Workforce - Psychiatry Vocational Training Programs

Improving access to clinical services, either directly or through Telehealth, remains an ongoing concern. There are a range of initiatives underway. One of these initiatives is the continued education of GPs about online programs in Australia that have demonstrated efficacy and are currently available for use by people with mental health problems. The recently published paper [e-Mental health for mood and anxiety disorders in general practice](#) from the Australian Family Physician Vol 43, 12 Dec 2014 provides an excellent overview. Consumer consultations funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission to further inform Telehealth guidelines will be completed by 30 April 2015.

Additionally, there is ongoing work by the Queensland Health Mental Health Rural Generalist Consultative Committee to enhance mental health training for Rural Generalists. The Australian College for Rural and Remote Medicine advanced specialised training mental health curriculum has been endorsed as the training endpoint for Rural Generalists completing their 12 month Advanced Skills Training as part of Rural Generalist training. Further work is being progressed on informing and engaging senior mental health staff across the State in the medical workforce development program. The Department of Health is also examining industrial aspects to assist with recruitment and retention of this form of medical workforce.

Queensland currently has 53 trainees in regional and rural psychiatry appointments. Traditionally Queensland has relatively more psychiatry training positions located in regional and rural areas than other jurisdictions. These are filled by local graduates and overseas trained psychiatrists.

In 2012, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) introduced the Substantial Comparability Pathway (SCP) for overseas trained psychiatrists whose training is assessed to be substantially comparable to the RANZCP. This is an accelerated workplace based program that takes less than 18 months to complete, as opposed to the examination process which takes the average candidate four years to complete. Queensland has had a higher uptake on the SCP in comparison to other jurisdictions, graduating a total of 13 psychiatrists between 2012 and 2014 and additional six since the beginning of 2014. The majority of these posts are in rural or outer metropolitan settings across Queensland.

Queensland has traditionally operated a state-wide psychiatry rotational training scheme incorporating all Hospital and Health Services. Currently the metropolitan area has filled 80 per cent of psychiatry training appointments, compared to 60 per cent for the outer metropolitan area and 50 per cent in rural/regional areas. The RANZCP removed compulsory rural training from its curriculum in 2012. A preliminary options paper has been developed by the Queensland Director of Psychiatry Training on the rural rotation of psychiatry registrars. A revised model of the rural rotation for psychiatry training would ensure a more appropriate distribution of training opportunities and equal access to resources. One of the proposed models is similar to the Queensland Basic Physician training program with rotations between the metropolitan, outer metropolitan and rural areas across a number of zones across Queensland. To achieve fairness preliminary work suggests these training zones may not be based on the adjacent geographical groupings that have existed in the past. Further modelling and

consultation with RANZCP, Hospital and Health Services and Trainees will be undertaken in 2015 to achieve a better balance of training opportunities.

Mental Health Act

On 27 November 2014, the Minister for Health introduced the Mental Health Bill 2014 into the Queensland Parliament. The Bill arises from a review of the [Mental Health Act 2000](#) and proposes substantial amendments to the mental health legislative framework in Queensland.

In relation to rural and remote services specifically, the Bill provides that the Chief Psychiatrist may declare an authorised mental health service (AMHS) or part of a service to be a 'regional AMHS'. A regional AMHS can be declared for limited purposes to support service delivery in rural, remote and regional areas, such as allowing for community assessment and treatment to be provided. The Bill also supports the use of audio-visual technology and providing for extended review periods for involuntary treatment authorities to be confirmed where a psychiatrist is not readily available.

More broadly, the Bill also supports clinicians in rural, remote and regional areas to work to their full scope of practice by expanding the role of health practitioners generally, and by providing that certain qualified and expert practitioners may be appointed by the Minister to undertake functions usually reserved for authorised doctors.

It also includes principles which require due recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

National Health Service Directory

One of the key outcomes sought from the discussion in Charleville was an online searchable database of all local mental health services. A search box (or 'widget') has been placed on the Queensland Health [Find a mental health service](#) webpage. It is pre-configured to search mental health services and accesses data from the National Health Services Directory (NHSD).

Since September 2014, updated health service information from all Hospital and Health Services has been provided to Healthdirect Australia to be uploaded onto the NHSD. In addition, a content management process has been established and a business unit within each Hospital and Health Service has been identified as the team responsible for the management of the NHSD. Furthermore, a communication strategy has been developed to prompt the NHSD across the State.

Consultation is continuing with Queensland Health, the Queensland Mental Health Commission and other key stakeholders regarding the collection and maintenance of information for non-government service providers and how the NHSD can interact with other community directories.

The NHSD project is a joint initiative of the Australian, state and territory governments. It provides Queenslanders with a comprehensive national online directory of health services that can be accessed via web, tablet, and mobile and can be printed as required.

Community Mental Health Toolkit

The process to develop the community mental health toolkit has commenced with the appointment of a steering committee chaired by Central Queensland Rural Health with support from North West Hospital and Health Services. The Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health (MICRRH) will undertake research which will identify other similar initiatives which have been successful and also identify the specific work required to be carried out for this project. A project officer and project consultant will commence in January 2015. Phase two of the project will include community consultation in identified local government areas and is scheduled to commence in February 2015. For further information on the project please contact Central Queensland Rural Health (07) 4992 1040 or admin@cqrdgp.com.au.

Funding to support the development of the community mental health toolkit has been provided by the Department for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, the Department of Health and the Queensland Mental Health Commission. .

2014-15 Queensland Government Drought Assistance Package

The Queensland Government has continued to demonstrate its commitment to supporting farming businesses, families and communities for the duration of the current drought through the 2014-15 Drought Assistance Package.

The Honourable Lawrence Springborg MP, Minister for Health, announced that Queensland Health has provided funding of \$1.43 million to the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) to enhance community based, primary mental health and outreach services in drought affected areas of Queensland.

The RFDS Drought Wellbeing Service will provide an integrated, flexible and responsive service delivery model, with a focus on early intervention for local communities within the drought declared regions across five Hospital and Health Services, including North West, Central West, Cairns and Hinterland, Darling Downs and South West Hospital and Health Services. The RFDS service will be delivered by a team of psychologists and clinical support workers to introduce additional interventions to support individuals and local communities in drought affected areas. The Drought Wellbeing Service includes fly-in-fly-out primary mental health services, as well as Telehealth and the development of strong linkages with local providers, services and communities. In particular, the RFDS will ensure integration between the Drought Wellbeing Service and the relevant Hospital and Health Services, as it is envisaged these new services will augment existing services provided by the Hospital and Health Services. It is anticipated the enhancement of services will commence January 2015.

Additionally, under the Queensland Government Drought Assistance Package, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) have facilitated the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS). DRAS provides freight subsidies of up to 50% for the movement of fodder and water for droughted livestock. In 2014-15 the Queensland Government introduced the Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate under DRAS, which provides rebates of up to 50% from the Queensland Government and up to 25% from the Australian Government, for the installation of water infrastructure for producers who have no water, or insufficient water to provide to their livestock. Under the Queensland Government Drought Assistance Package in 2013-14 and 2014-15, the total expenditure of DRAS is \$37.25 million, with an additional \$12.2 million from the Australian Government.

DAFF periodically also delivers agriculture-focused drought workshops and field days for drought affected producers in order to ensure access to the most current drought management information and stock feeding options available as the drought progresses.

Furthermore, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services has committed an additional \$3.9 million for the provision of community events, training and resources for local community members and direct support for farmers, their families and the wider communities in drought declared regions across the State.

To date, 46 Local Government Areas have been funded to deliver community events and support services. In addition, UnitingCare Community will continue to provide a range of counselling services and training for the drought affected communities. Two agriculture industry advocate organisations, AgForce and the Queensland Farmers Federation, will provide vital information across different agricultural sectors, via various mechanisms including YouTube, Facebook and newsletters. The Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA) has received a one off donation to their Public Crisis Fund.

Queensland Country Women's Association

The QCWA continue to engage with the media to raise awareness of the importance of supporting local businesses in the drought affected communities. Under the QCWA Public Rural Crisis Fund,

\$100,000 has been provided between July-November 2014 to drought affected communities across the State, with applications steadily increasing.

QCWA has recently been contacted by a local farmer proposing the development a Men's Shed in conjunction with the QCWA, as a result of an increase in farmer suicides within his local community. The QCWA and Men's Shed already successfully work together in Tully in North Queensland, sharing a purpose built building.

The QCWA are primarily focused on ensuring their Country Kitchens initiative is prepared for the launch in January 2015. In conjunction with promoting healthy eating habits, the initiative will provide a forum to discuss strategies when dealing with stress related to the drought.

Shared commitments going forward

[Queensland's Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014-2019](#) was released in October 2014. The responsibility for implementation rests with many agencies. The wellbeing of people living in rural and remote communities is a priority within this plan which contains eight shared commitments to action over the next five years.

The issues and work plan that has arisen from the series of Ministerial Roundtables on Rural and Remote Mental Health form the starting point for an action plan that aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of rural and remote Queenslanders. Consideration needs to be given to strategies to improve access to existing services and also to customisation of information, services and supports where necessary.

The Chair of the North West Hospital and Health Services Board has nominated to take a lead role on behalf of the public health services in working with the Queensland Mental Health Commission to progress this on-going work.

As the agency responsible for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Queensland Mental Health Commission will prompt consideration of issues for rural and remote Queenslanders in all aspects of its implementation. The Commission will be actively seeking input from existing consultative and planning forums on issues and proposed solutions and bring these to an annual forum for further deliberation prior to making recommendations to relevant agencies for further action.

This will be informed and supported by the Department of Health's more detailed service planning as well as that of other relevant agencies.

Get further information about the previous roundtables [here](#).

Attendees:

Hon Lawrence Springborg MP	Queensland Minister for Health (Chair)
Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck	Queensland Mental Health Commissioner
Assoc Prof John Allan	Chief Psychiatrist Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch Department of Health
Ms Jane Williams	Board Member Central West Hospital and Health Board
Ms Marie Pietsch	Board Member Darling Downs Hospital and Health Board
Mr Paul Woodhouse (VC)	Board Chairman North West Hospital and Health Board
Assoc Prof Bruce Chater	Chairman Rural and Remote Clinical Network
Mr Andrew Harvey	Chief Executive Officer Darling Downs-South West Queensland Medicare Local
Ms Brooke Winters	Regional Executive Director South West Region Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
Mr Vern Rudwick	Director Land Management Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Ms Loretta Johnson (VC)	Officer In Charge Longreach Ambulance Station Central West Local Ambulance Service Network
Ms Liz Lynch	Health Promotions Officer Royal Flying Doctor Service
Ms Trish Feehely	Manager Partners In Recovery Lifeline Darling Downs and South West Queensland
Ms Janet Baines	Health Information Director Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service
Ms Lynda Miller	Business Change Manager - Clinical Program Health Service Information Agency Department of Health
Ms Shirley Wigan	Executive Director Mental Health Alcohol and other Drugs Services Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service
Ms Tracey Morgan	Rural Manager Mental Health Alcohol and other Drugs Services Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service
Ms Jill Mazdon (VC)	Team Leader Mental Health, Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drugs Services Central West Hospital and Health Service
Ms Christine McDougall (VC)	Program Manager & Nursing Director Mental Health, Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drugs Services South West Hospital and Health Service