

Stakeholder report



Longreach and Barcaldine community consultations 7-9 February 2016

On 7-9 February, the Queensland Mental Health Commissioner, Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck, and the Deputy Chair of the Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council, Ms Jan Kealton, visited Longreach and Barcaldine to hear about ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people living in rural and remote communities.

During the three day visit, hosted by the Central West Rural Wellness Network (CWRWN) and the Commissioner met with the Chair of the Central West Hospital and Health Service Board and representatives of the Central West Rural Wellness Network, Queensland Police Service, Royal Flying Doctors Service, Central West Mental Health Service, Barcaldine Hospital, Remote Area Planning and Development / Rural Financial Counselling Service, Agforce and Anglicare.

What we saw

Communities across western Queensland have experienced their fair share of adversity in recent years. A protracted drought has had effects across the community, from farms, to local businesses, local services and community groups. While recent rains in some areas have brought welcome relief, it is clear that it will take some time yet for the drought to lift.

Supporting mental health and wellbeing in the west can be challenging. Mental health professionals work with minimal specialist backup, while workers outside mental health are often called on to support those who are doing it tough. Distance, difficulty retaining experienced staff, and constraints on available resources are also part of the challenge.

Despite these challenges, the region is an inspiring place to visit and a place many are proud to call home.

What we heard

Community members and service providers told us that:

- There is a need to tailor mental health, alcohol and other drug services to meet local needs. Many stakeholders indicated that what works on the east coast will not necessarily work in the west.
- Services will be more effective if they are designed in consultation with local community networks. Providers are keen to see longer-term flexible funding to help local services build their capacity, and to help address the difficulties in retaining experienced staff.
- Stigma remains a major barrier to people seeking help and there is a need to talk more openly about mental health and wellbeing. Community events that provide opportunities for 'safe conversations' have proven valuable in overcoming stigma. Creating ways for people to discreetly access mental health support is also considered critical.
- Attracting and retaining a skilled and well-connected workforce in western Queensland is challenging and needs innovative approaches that make it attractive for health and human services professionals to work and live in rural areas.
- A whole-of-community approach to drought support is needed — with support available for both those directly and indirectly affected. This should include a more coordinated and proactive approach to supporting the transition from drought and planning for future adverse events.
- The increasing number of community members with complex mental health and social support needs is placing a strain on existing services. Greater support for community members living in public housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people has been identified as a priority for the region.

Our next steps

The Queensland Mental Health Commission will publically release a discussion paper seeking input on the development of a rural and remote mental health and wellbeing action plan for Queensland.

The release of the discussion paper will be announced through the Commission's website at www.qmhc.qld.gov.au and through its eNews, Twitter and Facebook accounts.

An action plan is intended for release later in 2016.

Further information

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