

Media release

Free mental health support for drought affected Western NSW

Drought affected communities across rural and regional Western NSW can now access free mental health coaching support developed by Beyond Blue and delivered locally by Marathon Health.

All of Western NSW remains drought stricken and the sustained stress on locals, along with uncertainty around livelihoods, can take a toll and leave lasting effects on people's mental health.

With many farmers, small business owners, workers and parents feeling the pressure, it is vital that people receive mental health support as early as possible to prevent their issues leading to more serious mental health conditions.

- In 2015-16 more than 20,000 people in Western NSW received mental health treatment plans from their GPs
- In 2013-14, 3524 people were hospitalised for mental health reasons while 401 people were hospitalised for intentional self-harm
- The five-year average suicide rate is 16 per cent higher than the NSW average

The NewAccess program will be launched in Dubbo on Wednesday, March 13 and is available to people over 16 years living in the Western NSW Primary Health Network (PHN) area, which covers 26 council areas.

NewAccess is available to anyone feeling stressed, anxious, isolated or struggling to deal with difficult work or personal life challenges – getting on top of challenges like these can prevent conditions such as depression.

The program is funded by the Australian Government via the Western NSW PHN.

NewAccess pairs people with a mental health coach trained in Low Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Over six free sessions, coaches give people the skills they need to get on top of the issues causing their distress.

NewAccess coaches come from a range of backgrounds including agriculture, farming, Indigenous and youth mental health services.

Coaches will develop individual recovery plans for each person, empowering them to manage their own mental health especially if those issues arise again.

The program is available in person, by phone and via Skype and Facetime, making it easier for people living in rural areas to access quality support without long delays.

A doctor's referral is not required but general practitioners can refer patients to NewAccess.

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Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said: “Access to mental health services is crucial in rural and remote areas, especially amid relentless drought conditions that have placed enormous pressure on local families and communities.

“We know country people are resilient, but no one is immune to the kind of stress that comes with life changing events like this drought.

“NewAccess was designed to make it easier for people to get mental health support early; it’s free, accessible from home, confidential and it gives people practical ways to regain control of their mental health.”

Federal Member for Parkes Mark Coulton said supporting the mental wellbeing of farming communities dealing with the drought is essential.

“Mental health is an important issue right across my electorate, which is almost half of New South Wales,” Mr Coulton said.

“I’m pleased that with Federal Government funding, the Western NSW PHN is providing the support and care people need to take care of themselves, through services like NewAccess.”

Western NSW PHN spokesperson Andrew Harvey said: “The importance of mental health support in our region, especially during times of hardship that have currently been caused by drought, cannot be understated.”

“Western NSW PHN is dedicated to supporting programs that remove barriers and make it easier for the people of our region to access the help they need.”

Marathon Health Acting CEO Garry Burton said: Marathon Health is very pleased to work with Beyond Blue and the Western NSW PHN to deliver NewAccess in Western NSW.

“Considering the struggles in this region, due to the drought and tough economic situation, it’s a timely service that aims to give control back to the people doing it tough. We aim to empower individuals with the skills to help them get through it.”

To register or to find out more about NewAccess Western NSW

- Call (02) 6333 2838
- Go to www.marathonhealth.com.au/newaccess

Dubbo launch details

Wednesday, March 13 – Lazy River Estate, 29R Old Dubbo Rd, Dubbo from 10.30am-12pm

Available for interview:

- Local resident with experience of depression/anxiety
- NewAccess mental health coaches
- CEOs from Beyond Blue, Marathon Health and PHN.