

8 May 2007

## Budget Response

### **\$10.1m mental health funding set to save rural lives**

Tonight's \$10.1m announcement for rural mental health services is a windfall for struggling farming communities. The funding comes as a direct result of extensive lobbying by GPs, members of the Divisions Network and the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said he was delighted the Prime Minister, Treasurer and Minister for Health and Ageing have recognised this desperately needed assistance in what he described as a fair and equitable budget.

"Rural Australia is struggling with the social effects of the drought. Suicide is all too common. It is excellent to see drought assistance extended to mental health services.

"Rural GPs like me are seeing more and more seriously depressed farmers and others in our communities," Dr Hobbs said.

The funding under the *Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities* initiative will allow 39 divisions of general practice funding to employ specialist mental health workers and provide training and counselling in the communities that need them most.

"The funding will improve awareness of help services available, and provide education for clinicians and business leaders to recognise the signs of conditions such as depression.

"This funding will allow the Divisions Network to employ specialists in the field such as psychologists in areas of need. The Network already has an excellent track record in recruiting and retaining these professionals.

"With the effects of this one in 1000 year drought practical solutions on the ground will without a doubt save lives and help communities stay connected," Dr Hobbs said.

AGPN worked closely with beyondblue to develop a three pronged approach to improve mental health circumstances in rural and regional Australia.

1. Increasing services in rural towns by employing a dedicated mental health care professional through divisions
2. Build service and community capacity by rolling out Community Resilience Groups to help communities stay connected and respond to crises and critical events; and
3. Offer Mental Health First Aid training to families, community leaders and non-clinical services in drought affected areas, and introduce innovative programs take mental health information to rural people where they live and work.

**For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662 266**