



MAKING OUR
FARMS
SAFER



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

Harvesting Change

Breaking Stigma, Building Resilience

Taking Charge of Your Mental Health



Harvesting Change

Breaking stigma, building resilience

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In a mental health emergency, call 000 or go to your local hospital.

Disclaimer:

This book is intended to provide general information and support for mental health and well-being. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of a qualified healthcare provider with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your mental health. Never disregard or delay seeking professional help based on the information contained in this book. **In a mental health emergency, call 000 or go to your local hospital.**

Suicide is mentioned throughout this handbook, please refer to the support lines in Section 7 should you or someone you know need help.

The terms “farmer,” “farm employees,” and “agricultural workers” are used interchangeably throughout this handbook. This is intended to encompass all members of rural communities, including farm owners, contractors, employees, farming families, and others involved in rural life.

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Making Our Farms Safer

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Message from the Chair

Danyel Cucinotta

“The emotional and mental burdens that come with farming are often underestimated, or worse, ignored.”

As Chair of the Making Our Farms Safer Mental Health Steering Committee, I am proud to introduce this guidebook, designed specifically for farmers, farming families, and rural communities. This guide reflects the importance of mental health support tailored to the unique challenges we face in regional communities. Our committee, comprised of mental health professionals and farmers, has worked to ensure the voices of those on the land are not only heard but guide the direction of this vital resource.

Farming is not just a job - it's a way of life. Yet, the emotional and mental burdens that come with it are often underestimated or, worse, ignored. The pressures of unpredictable weather, economic uncertainty, isolation, and the responsibility of sustaining livelihoods can have a profound impact on a farmer's mental health. According to the National Farmers' Federation Wellbeing Report, depression and anxiety are prevalent among Australian farmers at levels higher than the general population. This is a crisis we can not afford to overlook.

Despite the nature of these challenges, stigma around mental health persists in our rural communities. Many farmers feel they must remain stoic, battling through adversity without seeking help.

This mindset can be detrimental, leading to a sense of isolation and worsening mental health outcomes.

It is critical that we break down this stigma, and this guidebook is a step in the right direction.

Our mission is simple: to provide farmers with practical tools, knowledge, and pathways to mental health support. By equipping individuals and families with resources, we aim to create a culture where mental health is openly discussed and treated with the same importance as physical safety on our farms.

As we continue to face the realities of farming life, let's also commit to fostering safer, healthier, and more supportive communities. By addressing mental health with the same dedication we apply to our work on the land, we can ensure a brighter, more resilient future for all. If this guide can save one life or help one person, we will have reached our goal.

This guidebook has been crafted with input from those who understand the farming life firsthand. It's more than just a document - it's a lifeline. Whether you're a farmer experiencing mental health challenges or someone supporting a loved one through tough times, this resource is for you. It is here to remind you that you are not alone and that reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Section 1: Understanding Mental Health

What is Mental Health?

Fact

A part of everyone's wellbeing

Real and complex

As important as physical health

Something to look after



Fiction

An illness

Made up or pretend

Weird or shameful

Nothing important

It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right and it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.

Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm.

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well, work well, and contribute to their community.

Definitions and Continuums

The term "mental health" can be defined in various ways. Some definitions focus on positive psychological well-being, while others emphasise the absence of mental health problems. The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of well-being that enables individuals to cope with life's stresses, realise their abilities, learn effectively, work productively, and contribute to their communities.

In addition, the Mental Health First Aid manual in Australia views mental health as a continuum, ranging from good mental health to mental illness. A person's position on this continuum can change at different stages of life.

Take a moment to stop and think...

If any of these symptoms are hitting close to home, it might be time to dig a little deeper and see what may be lurking under the surface.



Is your sleep pattern as unpredictable as the weather?



Have your eating habits made you feel like you're grazing all day or turning into a picky eater?



Is your outlook on life stuck in a never-ending winter?



Do you often feel your heart racing or as if you've just had to chase down a runaway lamb or cow?



Do you find concentrating on tasks as overwhelming as herding cats?

A happy farmer makes a happy farm

As a farmer in Victoria, you know the importance of maintaining the health of your land and livestock. Equally vital is your mental health:

- Mental well-being is essential for your overall health, influencing how you think, feel, and act.
- It affects your decision-making on the farm and your relationships with family and friends.
- A healthy mind allows you to:
 - Make better decisions
 - Manage stress effectively
 - Enjoy your work and life more fully

Just as you care for your crops, it's important to nurture your mental well-being.

This booklet is designed to help you and your family recognise and address mental health challenges, providing encouragement and practical solutions for taking control of your well-being.

Just as weather conditions can impact your crop, or pasture various factors can affect your mental health, including:

- Stress from long hours and unpredictable weather
- Financial pressures
- Isolation
- The demands of running a farm

Recognising the signs of mental health challenges is the first step to addressing them. Let's explore how your mental and physical health are connected and what happens when one isn't in good shape.



Recognising Your State of Mind

Read through the below feelings and behaviours to help identify where your mindset is at.

If you or someone you know are experiencing thoughts dangerous to yourself or others, call 000 or go to your nearest hospital.

Red

Engine's smoking, stop and get help



Yellow

Not quite right, time to check in for a service



Green

Ticking along, stay mindful



Very anxious

Exhausted

Very low mood

Very poor sleep

Avoiding work

Weight loss

Worried

Sad

Nervous

Trouble sleeping

Irritable

Distracted

Positive

Sleeping well

Calm

Regular eating habit

High performing

Usual social activity

Where Are You on the Continuum?

Red: Crisis

Engine's smoking, stop and get help

In a mental health emergency, call 000 or go to your local hospital, if there's a threat to yourself or others.

Signs of a Crisis:

- Feelings of severe, persistent hopelessness or anxiety.
- Withdrawing from friends or family.
- Extreme mood swings or risky behaviour.
- Talking about not wanting to live or having a plan to harm yourself.
- Bizarre or unusual thinking, hallucinations

When to Seek Urgent Care:

- If you or someone you know talks about suicide or shows dangerous behaviour.

How to Get Urgent Help:

- Immediate support is crucial —call an ambulance (000) or go to a hospital.
- Your feelings are valid; seeking help is important.

Where to Find Ongoing Support:

- Reach out to a therapist, GP, with trusted person.
- **Refer to Section 7 for support organisation contacts.**

Yellow: Struggling

Not quite right, time to check in for a service

Signs of Struggling:

- Physical Symptoms: Headaches, stomach pain, or other unexplained aches.
- Trouble with daily tasks or activities.
- Feeling agitated or restlessness.
- Significant ups and downs in emotions.

Signs of Just "Surviving":

- Sleep Issues: Disrupted sleep patterns.
- Lack of Motivation: Losing interest in activities once enjoyed.
- Appetite Changes: Eating less or more
- Low Energy.

When to Seek Help: If ongoing symptoms lead to stress and hinder daily functioning, it's time to reach out for support.

Getting Support:

- Local doctors, helplines, friends and family, or trusted neighbours can provide assistance.
- Early intervention can help shift from distress to well-being.

Goal: Addressing these signs can lead to significant improvements and a return to feeling good.

Green: Thriving

Ticking Along, Stay Mindful

Signs of Thriving:

- Resilience: Bouncing back from setbacks and adapting well to change.
- Effective Coping Skills: Using healthy strategies to manage stress and challenges.
- Strong Relationships: Maintaining healthy, supportive connections with family, friends, and community.

Risks of Suppression:

Farmers often adopt a pragmatic perspective when it comes to their mental health, which can sometimes lead to challenges being overlooked.

- Ignoring mental health can lead to intensified issues during tough times.
- Waiting until a crisis hits limits options and makes recovery harder.

When to Seek Help

- Invest in mental health when things are stable to ensure better coping during challenges.
- Consistent attention to mental well-being helps maintain strong connections with family and navigate difficulties.
- Utilise self-care strategies

Goal: Building resilience during good times prepares farmers to handle the inevitable ups and downs, ensuring they stay safe and supported.

Taking Charge of Mental Health

Poor mental health and physical symptoms can be managed. Key steps include building a healthy lifestyle, practicing stress management, seeking professional support, and staying connected with loved ones.

Recognising signs of mental health issues helps you care for yourself and check on friends and colleagues, enhancing overall well-being for a happier, healthier life.

Get to Know the Signs of Mental Strain

Do these signs show up in you or someone you know?

Emotional Signs

- **Persistent Sadness or Depression:** Feeling sad, down, or hopeless for extended periods.
- **Anxiety and Worry:** Excessive fear, worry, or feeling on edge.
- **Mood Swings:** Extreme changes in mood, including highs and lows.
- **Irritability or Anger:** Increased irritability, frustration, or anger outbursts.
- **Guilt or Worthlessness:** Overwhelming feelings of guilt, worthlessness, blame, or self-doubt.

Behavioural Signs

- **Withdrawal:** Avoiding social interactions, withdrawing from friends, family, or activities once enjoyed.
- **Changes in Sleeping Patterns:** Insomnia, excessive sleeping, or disrupted sleep.
- **Changes in Eating Habits:** Significant weight loss or gain, loss of appetite, or overeating.
- **Decreased Functioning:** Struggling to perform daily tasks.
- **Substance Abuse:** Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or engaging in other harmful behaviours to cope with emotions.

Cognitive Signs

- **Difficulty Concentrating:** Trouble focusing, making decisions, or remembering things.
- **Negative Thinking:** Persistent negative thoughts, excessive self-criticism, or pessimism.
- **Indecisiveness:** Finding it hard to make decisions, even about small matters.

Physical Signs

- **Fatigue:** Constantly feeling tired or lacking energy, even with adequate sleep.
- **Aches and Pains:** Unexplained physical symptoms like headaches, muscle pain, or stomach issues.
- **Changes in Appearance:** Neglecting personal hygiene or changes in physical appearance.
- **Sexual Health:** Decreased sexual function or decrease in libido.

Social Signs

- **Relationship Issues:** Increased conflicts, arguments, or a noticeable strain in relationships.
- **Isolation:** Spending much more time alone, avoiding social activities, or feeling disconnected from others.

Severe Signs

- **Thoughts of Self-Harm or Suicide:** Thinking about or attempting to harm oneself or having thoughts of suicide.
- **Psychosis:** Experiencing delusions, hallucinations, or severe paranoia.

Differences in Mental Health Signs and Struggles

The below signs and struggles are not unique to a certain gender or age, however understanding common differences is crucial for recognising when someone might need support.

Men's Mental Health

Common Signs:

- Increased irritability or anger.
- Withdrawal from social activities and friends.
- Substance use as a coping mechanism.

Struggles:

- Difficulty expressing emotions or seeking help.
- Pressure to appear strong or self-reliant.
- High levels of stress related to financial or farming pressures.

Find Support:

Mensline: Support for men dealing with relationship problems

Phone: 1300 78 99 78

Website:

<https://mensline.org.au>

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days

1800Respect: Domestic and Sexual Violence

Phone: 1800 737 732

Website:

www.1800respect.org.au

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days

Women's Mental Health

Common Signs:

- Mood swings and heightened emotional sensitivity.
- Increased anxiety or feeling overwhelmed.
- Physical symptoms like fatigue or headaches.

Struggles:

- Balancing multiple roles (farming, family, community).
- Feeling isolated or unsupported in their mental health needs.
- Greater likelihood of experiencing depression due to stressors.

PANDA: Support line for post or ante natal depression

Phone: 1300 726 306

Website:

<https://panda.org.au>

Hours: 9am-7pm, weekdays

Older Farmer's Mental Health

Ageing on the farm brings both physical and mental challenges. Many older farmers find it difficult to adjust their tasks to match their changing abilities. The deep, lifelong commitment to their land can lead to significant anxiety about the future, particularly concerning who will manage the property once they step back. This worry can be alleviated through effective succession planning.

Struggles:

- **Physical Limitations:** Older farmers may struggle with tasks that were once manageable, leading to frustration and a sense of loss.
- **Transitioning Roles:** Coming to terms with stepping back from a role they have held for most of their lives can be emotionally taxing.
- **Succession Planning:** Navigating the complexities of succession planning for both the farm business and property can add to their stress.

Finding Support:

Stay Farming Longer and Safer: A Practical Guide for Older Farmers and Their Families is an invaluable resource that offers tips and advice on succession planning. This guide provides essential information to help farmers begin planning for a smooth transition, ensuring their legacy continues while also addressing their mental well-being.

Scan to download “Stay Farming Safer and Longer” Guidebook PDF, or visit <https://www.makingourfarmssaferrg.au/stay-farming-longer-and-safer-campaign>.



NOTE:

To access QR codes throughout the handbook, open the camera of your smartphone and hold over the code.

Children's Mental Health

Common Signs:

- Behavioural changes, such as increased irritability or aggression.
- Decline in school performance or lack of interest in studies.

Struggles:

Children living in rural areas face several unique struggles, including:

- **Limited social opportunities** and clubs to allow socialisation and meeting new people.
- Rural children may experience **bullying** related to their lifestyle, or struggle to find like minded friends due to lower numbers in schools.
- **Long distances to travel** to schools or activities can make participation difficult and time-consuming for families.
- Many rural children help with farm work, which can lead to **increased responsibility** and difficulty balancing school, work, and leisure time.
- There may be a **stigma around discussing mental health issues**, making it harder for children to seek help or express their feelings.

Finding Support for Children:

Kids Helpline: Free, confidential, 24/7 phone counseling for people aged 5-25

Website: <https://kidshelpline.com.au>

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days



Reachout: better mental health and wellbeing for all young people

Website: <https://au.reachout.com>

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days



Parentline: Support for parents and carers with children from birth to 18 years

Phone: 13 22 89

Website: <https://parentline.com.au>

Hours: 8am-midnight, 7 days



CASE STUDY **How Abbi Faced Post-Natal Depression**

In 2020 at the peak of Covid-19 restrictions, I relocated from South Australia with my dog, cat, handful of cattle, an alpaca and a horse in tow to start a new life with my partner. We lived on a farm in Victoria, an hours drive from the next major town. Within the space of 12-18 months, we were engaged and soon fell pregnant with twins – which was the shock of my life!

During the pandemic, I was isolated from my interstate family meaning no baby shower or pregnancy celebrations, having the babies relatively alone with no hospital visitors allowed. On top of that was then home managing the menagerie of animals, housework, and starting a new business which took all of our money. I started to struggle with post-natal depression. It was actually really surprising to me!



"Eventually I realised that I was struggling, I let go of my pride and opened up."

I always saw myself as mentally fit and healthy; I had a psychology university degree and regularly undertook personal development, so thought I was relatively immune to mental ill-health.

It started with letting the washing pile up – I went from a load a day, to a load once a week. The dishes got on top of me, I was sleep deprived and exhausted from raising and breastfeeding two babies. I started crying A LOT, always feeling highly emotional, then snapping at my partner and occasionally at my babies.

Thank goodness for my Mum! She noticed these warning signs when I was in too deep to realise I was struggling. She told me she was worried about me and pointed out a few of the things I had been neglecting, including myself.

At first I was in denial, but mum persisted and chipped away at that concerned conversation over a few days, and thank goodness she did!

Eventually I realised that I was struggling, I let go of my pride, opened up, blurting out how I felt, realising I needed professional help because the help from my mum and partner wasn't going to be enough.

After Googling near-by "mental health counsellors". I chose one who sounded best qualified to help with my specific issues. I saw my counsellor for over 12 months, beginning with an appointment each week, eventually only once a month for a check-in, once she'd taught me my own coping tools.

This period of my life seems like a distant memory now, and while I've had some ups and downs since, I learnt the value of putting my pride aside to reach out for support, and I still have the occasional maintenance appointment with my wonderful counsellor.

Abbi Power

Section 2: Frequent Mental Health Challenges in Rural Communities

Farmers often face unique challenges that impact mental health. Understanding these challenges is a crucial step towards ensuring healthier communities and fostering resilience.

Burnout

Burnout is emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion from prolonged stress, common in agriculture, and many other professions.

Signs and Symptoms

Emotional Exhaustion:

- Drained
- Overwhelmed
- Unable to cope with daily stressors

Physical Exhaustion:

- Chronic tiredness
- Struggling to get out of bed
- Difficulty focusing on tasks

Performance:

- Poor decision making
- Missing important tasks
- Struggling to maintain standards.

Finding Support

If you identify with the above symptoms of burn out, you will benefit from **reading Section 3 or visiting your GP.**



Environmental Factors - Weather Conditions and Natural Disaster

Farmers know that weather conditions and natural disasters impact mental health and well-being. Reliance on weather for crop yields and livestock health makes farmers particularly vulnerable to the unpredictability of nature.

When to Seek Help

If you notice any of these responses persisting, reaching out for support is vital.

Finding Support

Australian Disaster Resilience Community Recovery Handbook: Check out the handbook for detailed guidance on recovery at <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-community-recovery> or scan the QR code below.



Scan for Disaster Relief Handbook.

Flood Recovery – Farmer Perspective Video: Gain insights from fellow farmers by watching the video at <https://farmerhealth.org.au/buildingfarmspirit-2> or scan the below QR code.



Scan for Flood Recovery Video.

Life Events - Sickness, Permanent Injury, Parenting, Job Loss, Relationship Issues, and Loss of a loved one, including Suicide

Major life changes, such as caring for ill family members, parenting challenges, divorce, or relocation, can significantly impact mental health. These events can disrupt the balance between work and personal life, leading to increased stress and emotional strain, especially in rural areas where support networks are often limited.

The death of a loved one is a reality we all face, however can feel more isolating in rural and remote areas. If the death is by suicide, families and whole communities can struggle to find support and the way forward.

Finding Support

Seeking support from peers, professionals, or community resources can foster resilience, enabling individuals to navigate these challenges while maintaining their well-being. There are also numerous community and charity organisation available that support people effected by such challenges.

Finding support for bereavement: LifeLine

Bereaved by Suicide Support Page

Website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/information-and-support/bereaved-by-suicide>

SuicideLine Victoria

Accessing Support After a Suicide

Website:

<https://suicideline.org.au/bereaved-by-suicide/accessing-support-after-a-suicide/>



Financial Pressure

Financial pressures are a major stressor for Australian farmers, stemming from the volatile nature of the profession. This uncertainty affects farmer's mental health.

When to Seek Help

If financial pressures are leading to feelings of hopelessness, overwhelming stress, or thoughts of self-harm, it is crucial to seek professional support.

Finding Support

Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)

The RFCS is an ongoing Australian Government program, providing free financial counselling to eligible farmers experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship.

Victoria Eastern Region

1 Peart Street Leongatha VIC
3953

Phone: 1300 045 747

Email:

support@rfcsgippsland.org.au

Website:

www.ruralfinancialcounselling.org.au

Victoria West Region

77 Kennedy Street
Hamilton VIC 3300

Phone: 1300 735 578

Email: admin@wswracs.com.au

Website: <https://wswracs.com.au>

Victoria North Eastern Region

102 Hume Street Wodonga VIC 3690

Phone: 1300 834 775

Email: info@agbizassist.org.au

Website:

<https://www.rfcsvicne.org.au>



Alcohol, Drugs and Addiction

Alcohol abuse, whether acute or chronic, causes significant health issues, leading to an estimated 3 million deaths annually, worldwide. It is linked to over 200 diseases, affecting both the drinker and those around them.

To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day

- Rural communities often have higher rates of binge drinking.
- Rural males drink more than their urban counterparts.
- One-third of rural men consume alcohol several days a week.

Signs of potential alcohol or drug misuse:

You or your loved one may be negatively impacted by a combination of mental health and alcohol or drug concerns if you notice:

- Drinking more alcohol than usual.
- Using drugs to cope or 'escape'.
- Actively seeking social situations or opportunities where alcohol and drugs are present.
- Avoiding situations where the use of alcohol or drugs is limited.
- Inability to perform basic tasks.

What can you do?

- **Start a Conversation:** Open up about concerns with loved ones.
- **Avoid Blame:** Recognise that these issues are complex and not anyone's fault.
- **Seek Local Support:** Consult your GP or local mental health services for assistance.
- **Prioritise Self-Care:** Ensure you take care of your own mental health while supporting others.

When to Seek Help

If you or someone you know is using substances daily, struggling with responsibilities, or having thoughts of self-harm, it's crucial to seek professional support.

Alcohol and Drug Support Line (ADSL):

Offers 24/7 support, information, and advice for people affected by alcohol and drug use.

Phone: 1800 888 236

ALCOHOL
& DRUG
SUPPORT LINE



Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a serious issue affecting individuals and families in rural Victoria. If you are facing domestic violence know that you are not alone, even though it may feel isolating. In rural areas, the stigma surrounding abuse can make it difficult to speak up, and the limited access to support services can leave you feeling trapped. Know you are not alone and that help is available.

Abuse is not just physical; it can also be emotional, financial, or psychological, and all of these can take a toll on your mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and even PTSD.

Financial control is another challenge that many victims face, especially when an abuser makes you dependent on them financially. This can make leaving feel even more difficult. It is important to remember that your safety and well-being come first, and there are ways to access financial and legal help if you need it.

Finding Support

While it may feel like you have no support especially when resources in rural areas are scarce, there are shelters, counselling services, and crisis support that are available and the close-knit nature of many rural communities can actually support you, if you reach out. There are people who can help, whether it is a professional therapist or trusted friend or family member. The organisations below are there for your immediate support.

For immediate safety concerns or incidents - Call Police on 000

The Orange Door: Connects individuals with family violence services, including support for men, women, and children.

Phone: 1800 319 353

Website: www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au



24/7 Family and Domestic Violence

Support for Victorians: If you or someone you know is experiencing or afraid of family and domestic violence, you can contact Safe Steps for support by phone, email or web chat. Open everyday of the year.

Phone: 1800 015 188

Email: safesteps@safesteps.org.au

Website: <https://safesteps.org.au>



Isolation and Loneliness

Due to the geographical separation and the isolating nature of agricultural work, loneliness and isolation is taxing on the rural and regional communities, and lead to a number of symptoms including:

- **Alienation:** Farmers may feel misunderstood by those outside the industry.
- **Impact on Mental Health:** Isolation can lead to persistent stress, depression, and feelings of hopelessness and despair.
- **Internalisation of Stress:** Many farmers, especially men, may internalise their challenges and avoid sharing due to mental health stigma.
- **Consequences of Silence:** This reluctance to speak out can deepen isolation and lead to dangerous coping mechanisms.

Finding Support

Community Support: Farming communities thrive on mutual support, but modern pressures and isolation can reduce neighbourly engagement. Make an effort to attend local events.

Engage Locally: Farmers are encouraged to participate in local social activities, such as sports clubs, markets, or community centres, to alleviate feelings of isolation.

Utilise Technology: Online forums, video calls, and telehealth services can help bridge the geographic divide, providing access to mental health support from the farm.

If you struggle if technology and connectivity on your property visit the **Regional Tech Hub** website for free and independent phone and internet support.

Website:

<https://regionaltechhub.org.au/onfarm>



Physical Disability

Limitations due to injury or disability can lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and isolation.

The inability to perform certain tasks can diminish self-esteem and disrupt long-standing routines.

Farmers may also experience stress related to adapting their operations to accommodate their disabilities, which can be financially and emotionally taxing.

Finding Support

Access to resources, adaptive technologies, and open conversations about experiences can help foster resilience and improve mental well-being.

Worksafe Victoria: Workers with a Disability Toolkit.

Website:

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/workwell-toolkit-workers-disability

NDIS: Supports in Employment.

Website:

www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/supports-funded-ndis/supports-employment



Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are critical issues within the farming community, often stemming from exposure to life-threatening situations, accidents, or loss of livestock.

Signs and symptoms of PTSD:

- Flashbacks
- Severe anxiety or uncontrollable thoughts
- Emotional numbness
- Nightmares

Addressing trauma requires a supportive environment where farmers feel safe to share their struggles.

Finding Support

Phoenix Australia: Australia's National Centre of Excellence in Posttraumatic Mental Health.

Website: <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org>

Phone: 03 9035 5599

Black Dog Institute Trauma Support:

Resources and information on trauma and PTSD.

Website:

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/help-support



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) farmers often face unique challenges. Language barriers may hinder effective communication with service providers, making it difficult to access essential resources, including mental health support, financial assistance, and agricultural advice.

Additionally, CALD individuals may experience feelings of isolation and alienation, particularly in rural communities where cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings.

Creating networks that encourage open dialogue and community engagement can help CALD farmers feel valued, understood, and connected, ultimately enhancing their mental health and resilience.

Finding Support

Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC):

Promotes multiculturalism in Victoria, provides policy advice, and supports CALD communities.

Website:

www.multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au



Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health (CCEH):

Focuses on improving health and wellbeing for CALD communities through research, training, and resources tailored to specific cultural needs.

Website: www.ceh.org.au



LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Plus+)

LGBTQIA+ individuals in the farming community often face stigma, discrimination, and a lack of acceptance.

Farmers who identify as LGBTQIA+ may struggle with the fear of being rejected by their communities or families, leading to internalised stress and a sense of loneliness. The pressure to conform to traditional gender roles within agricultural settings can further exacerbate stressors.

Access to resources and mental health support tailored to those identifying as LGBTQIA+ are essential for well-being. By fostering an environment of acceptance and understanding, the farming community can cultivate a healthier, more inclusive atmosphere.

Finding Support

Thorne Harbour Health: Health services and support specifically for the LGBTQIA+ community. They provide counselling, peer support, sexual health services, and advocacy, with a focus on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Victoria.

Website: <https://thorneharbour.org>



Switchboard Victoria: Provides telephone and web-based peer support, information, and referrals to the LGBTQIA+ community, with a focus on mental health and well-being. They also offer the "Out & About" program, which is designed to support older LGBTQIA+ people.

Website: <https://www.switchboard.org.au>



Rural Rainbows: Rural Rainbows is here to provide information, education, support and advocacy to all LGBTQIA+ communities, individuals and Allies living in rural and regional Victoria.

Website: <https://ruralrainbows.org.au>



Section 3: Selfcare Strategies

Breaking the Cycle. You can mitigate the impact of negative thinking on physical health by utilising self-care strategies, including:



Practice Stress Management: Techniques such as mindfulness, regular breathwork, and physical exercise can help manage stress levels.

Engage in Positive Thinking: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) with a psychologist and other therapeutic approaches can help reframe negative thoughts and promote a more positive outlook.



Maintain Healthy Eating: A nutritious diet plays a crucial role in providing the energy needed for long hours of labour. Aim to include daily fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, to support stamina and enhance productivity.

Seek Social Support: Connecting with friends, family, or support groups can provide emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation.



Professional Help: Consulting mental health professionals can provide strategies and treatments to manage negative thinking and its physical impacts effectively.

Spend Time with Animals/Pets: Interacting with animals can lower stress, improve mood, and enhance well-being. Activities like walking a dog or grooming a horse can reduce blood pressure and provide companionship. The unconditional love of pets helps combat loneliness and anxiety.



Take Walks in Nature: Take notice of nature's beauty. Experience the sea, trees, wildlife, birds and focus on what you can see, hear, and touch.

Laugh: The evidence tells, use laughter is so important for our health and wellbeing, watch a funny movie or read an entertaining book



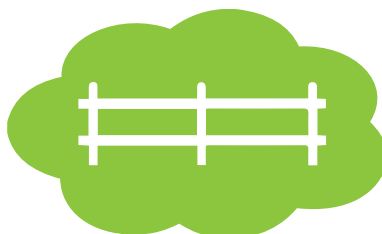
Listen to Music: Select what you like and know it will take your thoughts and feelings to another place.

Rest and Routine: A consistent routine can enhance productivity. Aim for eight hours of sleep per night, or sleep period. Regular breaks can rejuvenate both the mind and body, reducing fatigue and stress.



Regular Exercise: Incorporating exercise into daily routines can significantly improve physical fitness and mental clarity. Simple activities like walking during breaks, home gym, or bike riding or jogging of an evening.

Journaling: Online journaling prompts from websites like Bullet Journal, mindfulness blogs, or buy journals at local stationery stores or online.



Boundary Setting: Work-life balance on farm can be achieved with boundaries such as taking time away from the farm for weekends or a day out, or switching your phone off when not on-call or managing employees.

Breathwork: Breathing is a powerful tool for reducing stress. Slowing your breath during stressful moments can calm your mind, and exercises can be done anywhere to promote relaxation.



Try Breathwork Now: experience a quick burst of calm

Box Breathing (4:4:4:4) - Improve Concentration

This technique involves equal counts for each phase of the breath: inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, and hold again for 4 seconds. It creates a balanced and controlled breathing pattern that helps improve concentration, manage stress, and calm anxiety.



Find a comfortable position: Sit comfortably with your back straight. Place your feet flat on the ground and rest your hands on your lap.



Inhale: Slowly breathe in through your nose for a count of 4. Focus on filling your lungs completely.



Hold: Hold your breath for a count of 4, keeping your body relaxed.



Exhale: Slowly breathe out through your mouth for a count of 4, releasing any tension.



Hold Again: Hold your breath on the bottom of the exhale for a count of 4 before starting the next inhale.



Repeat: Continue this cycle for 5 rounds or until you feel calmer.

Activity: Take a Breather

Scan the QR Code below to access three, 6-minutes guided breathwork sessions from Bluesky Breathers, or visit <https://www.blueskybreathers.com/>.



Scan QR code for Bluesky Breathers' breathwork activities and website.

CASE STUDY

Lana's Mission to Embrace Emotion on the Farm

I recently moved to Victoria to work on my partner's family farm as part of the succession process. We began this journey during the challenging period of the green drought. Unlike other droughts, this one was deceptive—it appeared that we had feed, but the grass lacked sufficient nutrients. This unexpected situation led to a significant drop in our ewes' condition scores, resulting in high mortality rates among lambs and ewes struggling to survive.

The sight of dead stock was devastating for my mental health. I often found myself crying, which was seen as a weakness in this male-dominated environment. This perception and verbalisation led to internal struggles and self-doubt: Could I cope with these challenges? Was I cut out for this? Why can't I harden up? Despite the stigma, I realised that expressing my emotions was crucial. Women in farming do what needs to be done, and that includes showing emotion. Crying allows me to stay connected to my feelings, which is important to me.



"Working in an environment where I'm expected to "harden up" is tough, but I believe that bottling up emotions only makes things worse".

Working in an environment where I'm expected to "harden up" is tough, but I believe that bottling up emotions only makes things worse. I choose to both cry and keep going, proving that feeling deeply does not diminish my capability to do the work.

To look after my mental health, I spend time with my horses, hike with my dog, Netflix with my cat, and debrief with my partner when I need to talk it out. This combination helps me stay grounded and cope with the emotional challenges of farming life.

Lana Siebert

Section 4: Seeking Help and Support

How to Talk About Mental Health

Seeking help for mental health issues is not just about addressing personal struggles—it is about valuing your life and recognising that you matter.

By taking steps to care for your mental health, you are not only improving your own well-being but also ensuring that you can be there for your family and loved ones.

When you take care of yourself, you are better equipped to support and cherish those around you.

Remember, seeking help is a courageous , but important, step towards being present and strong for the people who matter most in your life.

What Different Services Offer:

- **General Practitioners (GP's):** Offer initial mental health assessments, support, and referrals to specialised services.
- **Psychologists:** Provide therapy and counselling to help individuals manage mental health issues through evidence-based techniques.
- **Psychiatrists:** Diagnose and treat complex mental health conditions, often involving medication management.
- **Mental Health Nurse:** Deliver specialised care, education, and support for individuals managing mental health conditions.
- **Occupational therapists:** Assist individuals in developing skills and strategies for daily functioning and improving mental well-being.
- **Social Workers:** Offer emotional support, counselling, and connect individuals with community resources and services.
- **Counsellors:** Provide guidance, support, and coping strategies for those dealing with personal or emotional challenges.
- **Case managers:** Coordinate mental health services and ensure individuals receive comprehensive, ongoing support.
- **Paramedics:** Provide emergency medical support, including mental health crises, stabilising patients for further care.



Why You Might Seek Help

Preventing an Issues from Worsening

Just like baiting snails **before** they destroy the paddock, seeking professional support for yourself early means you control the issue **before** it becomes worse for you and others.

Improving Quality of Life

Therapy and counselling can help you develop coping tools, improve your relationships (even the surprising ones you might not have thought of) and enhance your quality of life.

Leading By Example

Seeking support helps break the stigma surrounding mental health, making it easier for others to follow suit. A leader is always needed to guide a group to move forward, you can be that leader, paving the path for others to seek help as well.

Opening Up About Your Mental Health

It can be challenging to share your personal thoughts and feelings with a stranger. However, remember that the professional's role is to provide a safe, confidential space for you, so there's no need to worry about judgment or your information being shared.

When you do speak, be open and respond to their questions as accurately as possible, so they can provide the most appropriate support for you.

Try These Conversation Starters When Seeking Support

With a friend:

"Things are a bit off with me lately"

"I'm not enjoying things I used to"

"I'm not travelling well."

With a doctor:

"Someone I know was worried about me and told me to come see you"

"I'm struggling to cope with life at the moment"

"I feel exhausted most of the time"

CASE STUDY

Jane's Story: Break the Silence Talk Before It's Too Late

The most precious gift in the world is our life. As a parent I was blessed with two gifts, a daughter Sophie and son Sam. Michael & I are third generation beef and sheep farmers operating 1200 hectares at Mortlake in Southwest Victoria and I worked as a Director of Nursing at a local health service. Early 2016, life was picture perfect, the farm was thriving, we welcomed a new granddaughter, and our son Sam was busy on the farm. This all changed on March 31st, when our son Sam took his life by suicide.



To the outside world Sam appeared to be happy, making future plans for the farm and to travel, always a smile and firm handshake with a chat. Sam was very loved, had many friends, no financial concerns, and was a proud perfectionist.

Our beautiful son wrote us a goodbye letter detailing that he loved us and his friends so much, loved the farm and never wanted to be anywhere else. He wrote that his mental ill-health had taken over and that he needed to leave us. Sam's anxiety and depression (which are both very treatable) had spiraled and due to his pride and feeling that he couldn't tell anyone about his struggles, none of us could save his life. If Sam had spoken out about his silent mental battles, all of us would have supported his recovery, but unfortunately, we don't know what we don't know. Whenever Sam had a physical concern, he'd ask me to book him a doctor appointment, so why couldn't he have done the same with his mental health concerns?

Following Sam's passing, Michael and I sought counselling for ourselves, and were fortunate to meet mental health clinician John Parkinson who supported us through our grief and taught us how to survive.

Our local community was in disbelief following Sam's death, so with John's support, we organised a gathering at the East Framlingham Golf Club, expecting maybe 50 people to attend.

200 people attended and we discovered that our community were in fear for themselves and their families about who would be next.

During 2016, Sam was one of 16 to die by suicide in Victoria's south-west.

Following Sam's death, Michael, John and I, bought together community members with lived experience, bereaved families, mental health clinicians, and other supportive community leaders and we established the LET'S TALK Foundation.

The 3 aims of the LET'S TALK Foundation are to:

- Break the stigma of mental health
- Increase help-seeking behaviour and
- Raise the level of community competence in supporting people with mental ill health

To this day, LET'S TALK has delivered mental health educational presentations, incorporating lived experience speakers, to over 22,000 people throughout Southwest Victoria. To find out more about the work of LET'S TALK or become involved, please visit www.letstalkaustralia.org or follow us on social media.

Jane Fitzgibbon

Reach out confidentially to Let's Talk now:
<https://www.letstalkaustralia.org> or scan the QR code to their website.



Support May Come in Many Forms

Seeking support can feel overwhelming, so read through the options below and to help identify what is of value to you.

Individual Support

- **Personal Counselling:** Access to one-on-one therapy or counselling can provide a safe space for individuals to discuss their mental health challenges and receive professional guidance.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Joining groups where individuals with similar experiences share and support each other can help combat feelings of isolation and provide practical coping strategies.
- **Mental Health Apps and Online Resources:** Digital tools and resources can offer additional support, such as self-help strategies, mindfulness exercises, and virtual counselling services.

Family Support

- **Education and Awareness:** Providing family members with information about mental health issues can help them understand and support their loved ones better.
- **Family Therapy:** Professional counselling for families can improve communication, address conflicts, and strengthen the support system within the home.
- **Support Networks for Families:** Connecting with other families experiencing similar challenges can provide emotional support and practical advice.



Local Community Initiatives

- **Community Events and Workshops:** Initiatives like RUOK Day promote awareness and encourage conversations about mental health within local communities.
- **Local Support Groups:** Community-based support groups can offer regular meetings for individuals to share experiences and support each other.
- **Educational Campaigns:** Local efforts to educate community members about mental health can reduce stigma and foster a more supportive environment.

Support Organisations

- **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs):** Organisations dedicated to mental health can provide resources, advocacy, and support services tailored to specific needs. See **Section 2, page 11** for dedicated support organisations.
- **Charities and Foundations:** Many charities focus on mental health issues, offering support programs, and information to help those in need.
- **Crisis Support Lines:** 24/7 crisis support lines can offer immediate assistance and guidance during mental health emergencies. See **Section 7, page 36** for contacts.

Business Support

- **Workplace Mental Health Programs:** Employers can implement programs to support mental health, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), mental health days, and stress management workshops.
- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Providing options for flexible hours, remote work, and adequate leave can help employees manage their mental health better.
- **Training and Awareness:** Educating managers and employees about mental health issues can create a more supportive and understanding workplace environment.



Section 5: Work Related Risks to Mental Health in Farm Workplaces

Traits of a Mentally Healthy Workplace



Prevent harm by identifying risks to mental health.



Everyone contributes to a culture where people feel safe and supported to talk about mental health.



Mental health is everyone's responsibility, and is considered in every way you do business.

Demonstrate commitment to mental health in the workplace

Manage workplace relationships respectfully

Provide feedback in a constructive way

Demonstrate a zero-tolerance toward bullying and discrimination

A mentally healthy farm workplace requires leaders who:

Treat employees with fairness and respect at all times

Listens and are accessible to employees

Clarify role expectations and reporting structures

Ensure employees have safe workloads

Provide reward and recognition for good work

Communicate clearly and openly in a timely manner

Resources

Key resources to assist employers to address work-related risks to mental health in their farm business include:



WorkSafe Victoria has resources for the legal OH&S obligations of employers providing a psychologically safe environment

Preventing and Managing Stress:

A guide for employers is available here:

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/preventing-and-managing-work-related-stress-guide-employers-pdf-version

People at Work also have resources and practical tools to help employers understand obligations around workplace mental health. **Visit**

<https://www.peopleatwork.gov.au>.



For more resources on creating a mentally healthy workplace, visit the Business Victoria website. You will find practical tools, strategies, and guidelines to help foster a supportive environment. Explore materials on training, policies, and programs that can make a positive impact in your organisation.

Scan QR code for link to Business Victoria resources
or visit <https://business.vic.gov.au/business-information/workplace-wellbeing/create-a-mentally-healthy-workplace>.



Building a Mentally Healthy Farm Workplace

Work Related Risks

It is important to identify the key work-related risk factors and actions that can be taken to make a difference in creating a positive workplace culture on the farm and meet the legal obligations around farm safety.

Work Demands

Work requirements must be flexible depending on the seasons and market forces. This includes high work demands related to busy periods like harvest or calving or in the aftermath of a disaster like fire or flood. Actions could include:

- Identify high priority tasks
- Plan ahead for any additional labor needs

Level of Control

Improving the sense of control people have in the workplace is achievable. Actions could include:

- Encourage suggestions for improvements and efficiencies
- Give employees some control over how tasks are completed. Avoid micro-managing.

Organisational Change Management

Change is an everyday part of farming and it can lead to high levels of stress when it is not managed well. Actions could include:

- Good communication is critical to successfully achieving change.
- Involve the whole team when proposing changes, including why they are happening, the expected outcomes and time frames.

Building Culture

As you reflect on each of these work-related risks to mental health in your business you need to consider not only your employees, but also family members who work in the business and yourself.

Remember, you are aiming to build a positive and safe workplace culture in which everyone will benefit and thrive. A positive workplace culture will also benefit your farm business and help it to thrive and operate as a high functioning team.

A happy healthy workplace will also have fewer issues around absenteeism and staff turn-over (staff retention).

Activity

How do you think your business stacks up?

Take a few minutes to reflect where you stand as an employee or as an employer.

Use the 'Small Business Assessment Tool' on the VicGov Website:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/small-business-self-assessment-tool.pdf>



Scan QR code to access the assessment tool.



Implementing Wellness Programs On-Farm

Boost both the health of your employees and the overall productivity of the operation.

- 1 **Assess the Current Situation:** Talk to employees about their current health and wellbeing, stress levels and any support they may need. Review farm safety for both mental and physical risks.
- 2 **Set Clear Objectives:** What is the focus of your wellness program? Maybe reducing workplace injury, improving mental health or better work-life balance. Make sure to address unique farming challenges such as seasonal work and lengthy hours.
- 3 **Create an Actionable Plan:** Initiatives such as encouraging regular breaks, highlighting the importance of hydration and healthy eating, movement and stretching particularly when sitting for a long time or prior to lifting a heavy load.
- 4 **Promote Open Communication:** Schedule regular, informal chats or Toolbox Talks between employees and supervisors to talk about how they are doing, both physically and mentally.
- 5 **Provide Resources:** This could be information about local community groups such as sport or exercise, or social clubs like men's shed. You may also invite a mental health professional to an employee workshop.
- 6 **Lead By Example:** The best way to action the wellness plan is by demonstrating that you prioritise your own wellbeing.
- 7 **Evaluate and Adjust:** Monitor the progress of the plan, note how many people are taking action on the plan and ask for feedback on how it can be tweaked to be more beneficial.

Example Wellness Activities

- **Farm Yoga:** Try a quick morning yoga session to help stretch out muscles and prevent injuries.
- **Healthy Tucker Roster:** Set up a roster where employees bring in healthy snacks to share.
- **Mental Health Support Line:** Ensure employees have access to a mental health support line for extra help when they need it.

More valuable tools are available at on the **ifarmwell website:** <https://ifarmwell.com.au>.

Section 6: Creating a Supportive Environment

Watch Your Language

The below comments may invalidate a person's struggles, can make them feel worse and decrease the chances of opening up about their mental health.



Try These Responses When Someone Opens Up



Approaching a Deeper Conversation

"As a farm consultant I see firsthand the impacts that so many issues have on a farmer's overall health. Mental health is like an iceberg, quite often we only see the tip of the problem, there is a lot more going on below the surface.

I've found talking shoulder to shoulder, like driving around paddocks in the ute, or sitting side by side around a campfire, rather than front on provides one of the best environments for openness and honesty. It is in these situations where you have the greatest chance for someone who is suffering to open up.

You don't have to know how to fix the problem, there are people out there that can do that, your job is to come to the realisation that they are not right and then support them to receive help."

- Ken Solly, Agribusiness Consultant, Western VIC and SA.

Creating a Supportive Local Community



Encourage Open Communication

Creating an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences is essential. Hosting regular community meetings or informal gatherings allows farmers to exchange knowledge, express concerns, and seek advice. This open dialogue not only builds trust but also strengthens bonds within the community.



Share Knowledge and Resources

A strong farm community thrives on the exchange of information and resources. Whether it's farming techniques, equipment, or safety tips, sharing knowledge can increase productivity and enhance the collective resilience of the community. Establishing a local online forum or resource hub can facilitate this exchange.



Celebrate Successes and Traditions

Celebrating milestones, whether personal or collective, strengthens the community's identity and sense of belonging. Events like harvest festivals or farm visits help reinforce these connections while acknowledging the hard work and dedication of farmers.



Support During Tough Times

In challenging times, such as natural disasters or economic hardships, the community's strength truly shines through. Offering practical help, such as lending equipment, assisting with tasks, or checking in on fellow farmers, builds a network of mutual support that benefits everyone.



Foster Inclusivity and Collaboration

A welcoming and inclusive community ensures that all members, regardless of age, gender, or background, feel involved. Collaborating on local projects or initiatives creates shared goals and enhances the community's sense of purpose and cohesion.

Matt came to me during a particularly challenging time in his life. He was overwhelmed, feeling lost, and disconnected from his wife. His physical health was deteriorating due to the constant pain from his need for hip replacements, which made daily tasks around the dairy and farm a grueling ordeal. Despite his best efforts, his energy levels were depleted, and he struggled to keep up with the demands of his work. The physical toll only deepened his emotional strain.

At home, things weren't any better. Matt dreaded returning to the house, especially in the evenings, fearing his wife's outbursts. The tension was suffocating, and he found himself avoiding confrontation by sleeping in a recliner, where he barely managed 1-2 hours of rest each night. His thoughts were clouded with uncertainty—he knew something needed to change but had no idea where to begin.

“Matt began rediscovering life. He ventured out, both on his own and with friends, exploring activities he had once never considered.”

Then, one morning after finishing his milking routine, he found a note on the kitchen table. His wife had left him. His initial reaction was a mix of confusion and emotional turmoil.

He didn't know whether to feel relief or sorrow, and in that uncertainty, life began to feel unbearably heavy. Over the following days and weeks, he spiraled into a dark place, contemplating whether life was still worth living.

Recognising his despair, he began to take things one step at a time. He managed to complete the essential tasks on the farm but allowed himself to rest during the remaining hours. He began to lean on family for emotional support, and with their help, he tackled a long-overdue challenge: clearing out 30 years of clutter from the house, a consequence of his wife's hoarding. As the clutter disappeared, so did some of his emotional burdens, and for the first time in years, he experienced a sense of freedom.

Matt began rediscovering life. He ventured out, both on his own and with friends, exploring activities he had once never considered. Slowly, the fog of despair lifted, and he started feeling hopeful again. His physical health improved as his body healed, and emotionally, he found new joy in spending time with his family. His connection with his children grew stronger as he created time and space for both him and those he cared about.

Today, Matt is in a much better place. He laughs easily, enjoys his family, and looks forward to a future filled with possibilities. His journey from despair to healing is a testament to resilience and the power of support during life's most difficult moments.

Section 7: Resources and Contacts - Victoria Wide

You don't need to be in a certain state of mind to access these services. If you or someone you know needs support or urgent help, please reach out to the contacts below. If an organisation isn't the right fit, they can help direct you to a better option. If you feel you are a threat to yourself or someone else, call 000 you can go to your nearest hospital emergency department anytime.

Emergency and National Support Lines

All available 24 hours, 7 days

Emergency Services 000

Lifeline 13 11 14

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

Mensline Australia 1300 789 978

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

1800Respect Domestic and Sexual

Violence

1800 737 732

Suicide Call Back 1300 659 467

Suicide Line Victoria 1300 651 251

Additional Mental Health Supports

SANE: People affected by complex mental health issues

Phone: 1800 187 263

Hours: 10am-10pm, weekdays

Bush Support Line: Support for people in rural and remote areas

Phone: 1800 805 391

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days

ARAFMI Carers Helpline: Family and carer support for people affected by mental illness

Phone: 1300 550 265

Hours: 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday

Family Support Services

Safe Steps: Family violence Support

Phone: 1800 015 188

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days

Griefline: Support for those experiencing loss and grief

Phone: 1300 845 745

Hours: 12pm-3am, 7 days

Family Drug Help: Support for people impacted by drug use

Phone: 1300 660 068

Hours: 9am-9pm, Monday-Friday

Gamblers Help: Support for problem gambling

Phone: 1800 858 858

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days

NURSE-ON-CALL: Expert health advice from a nurse

Phone: 1300 60 60 24

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days

Government Resources

Victorian Virtual Emergency Department

Website: <https://www.vved.org.au>

Victoria Department of Health Telephone and Online Services: Directory of a wide range of mental health and emergency help lines

Website: www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-services/telephone-and-online-services

Message from Making Our Farms Safer Team 2024

The VFF Making Our Farms Safer (MOFS) project is dedicated to providing all Victorian farmers with invaluable, free support through our team of experienced safety specialists. We offer comprehensive guidance, skill development, and practical assistance to help ensure your farm's safety.

Our support includes farm safety visits, community meetings, monthly newsletter, and a rich toolkit of handbooks and resources designed to assist you in implementing and maintaining effective safety practices.

Since its inception in 2010, MOFS has developed various guidebooks through the support of government grants.

Including:

- Telehandler Safety Handbook
- Stay Farming Longer and Safer Handbook
- Child Safety on Farms Guidebook
- Hazardous Chemical Guidebook
- OHS Consultancy Handbook

This time, our focus is on mental health. We want to assure you that this new handbook is more than just a resource—it's a trusted guide and a supportive companion on your journey.

We understand the unique challenges you face, and we are here to bridge the gap between you and the organisations that can provide you with the necessary support.

Our goal is to empower you with the understanding and tools to manage mental health effectively and to support yourself, your loved ones and your community.

Know that we are here to help you every step of the way, and if we can't provide the help you need, we'll guide you to someone who can.

The MOFS Team

Acknowledgments

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Making Our Farmers Safer (MOFS) Team extends its sincere appreciation to our dedicated committee members, who have generously volunteered their time, shared their knowledge, and contributed their invaluable experience. Their unwavering support throughout the development of this resource has been fundamental to its success. The committee's dedication has ensured that *Harvesting Change* will serve as a meaningful and lasting contribution, fostering a culture of support, resilience, and strength in rural communities for years to come.

Special thanks to:

Danyel Cucinotta	Committee Chair
A/Prof Harry Hill	Albury Wodonga Health
Michele Mitten	Mind Goals Psychology
Shilpa Ullagaddi	Neami National
James Diamond	Air Agri
Katherine Myers	Farmer
Kellie Malcolm	Farmer - Coach/Mentor
Gemma Pfeiffer	Ambulance Victoria
Jane Fitzgibbon	Farmer
Tania Herold	Bluesky Breathers
Jane Hayman	Monash University
Abbi Power	Let's Talk Australia
Delshea Sobhee	MOFS Project Manager
Karli Evans	MOFS Communications Officer
Paul Wearing	MOFS Senior Farm Safety Advisor

This initiative is funded by the Victorian Government through Agriculture Victoria.



Taking Notes: Your Ideas Matter

We encourage you to jot down your thoughts, reflections, and insights as you read through this handbook. Taking notes helps you engage more deeply with the content and provides a handy reference for the future. Revisit your notes and the handbook whenever you need a fresh perspective or inspiration—it's a great way to make the most of the ideas shared here.

[illegible]

Taking Notes

Every great harvest starts with small seeds. Use this space to plant your ideas and watch them grow.

[illegible]

Tear me out!



Sort Your Sheep Out



When you are feeling well, take 10-15 minutes to fill in each section of your Action Plan. Think carefully about what will be helpful for you if you find yourself struggling. Stick this on your fridge or somewhere easy to grab.

When you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed or in crisis follow the steps to get back on track.

1) My red flags: circle ANY or ALL below that show you're feeling overwhelmed or stressed...

Thoughts:

Difficulty concentrating

Racing mind

Easily distracted

Persistent worry

Negative thoughts

Slow or sluggish thoughts

Difficulty making decisions

Physical:

Neglecting health

Dramatic weight gain or loss

Appetite changes

Headaches or migraines

Upset stomach or cramps

Feeling weak or unable to perform tasks

Sleep and energy:

Struggling with sleep, trouble drifting off

Feeling flat, constantly tired or lethargic

Sleeping more or less

Regularly waking throughout the night

Anything else?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Feelings:

Persistent sadness

Anger or Frustration

Anxiety or Nervousness

Overwhelmed

Stressed

No patience

Work and Life:

Working much more or far less

Not doing or enjoying social activities or hobbies

Consuming more alcohol or drugs

Procrastinating

Reminder

You can only control what you can control - focus on this and don't stress yourself over things you can't control!

2) Staying grounded: Reminding ourselves of what we can and can't control in a situation keeps us present, and gives us hope about what exciting things are still to come. Like your life, the grounded roots of a wheat crop are what helps it weather storms and keep growing to produce a bountiful harvest.

In my control:

e.g. - How I spend my money

.....

.....

.....

What can I look forward to?

e.g. - Watching my kids grow up

.....

.....

.....

Not in my control:

e.g. - The weather and commodity prices

.....

.....

.....

TURN ME OVER



3) What I can do to DE-STRESS or FEEL BETTER: List some things you can do by yourself and with others to either calm down when you're feeling stressed OR pick you up when you feel down... Remember, these don't need to be complicated or time consuming!

By Myself:

e.g. - Take a nap

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

With Others:

e.g - Take my kids to the playground

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4) Who can I reach out to for support?
 Social supports help us to stay well and can help when we're struggling.

We all have different relationships with people in our life who could be helpful if you're feeling overwhelmed.

It's helpful to know who you can talk to about whatever is bothering you (this may be any number of farm, family, financial or personal worries).

List down the people in your life, both personal and professional contacts who can support you with all of your concerns.

Lean on these people like you would a pair of crutches if you broke your leg!

Name	Number	Chat About
e.g. Tony (neighbour)	04.....	How are ya going?

If you need further information or support, please contact any of the below services:

MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78
 Kids Helpline 1800 551 800
 13YARN (Aboriginal & Torres Straight Islander) 13 92 76
 Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467
 Relationships Australia 1300 364 277
 Q Life (LGBTQIA+) 1800 184 527
 Open Arms (Veterans) 1800 011 046
 COPE (Parenting) 1300 740 398

Making Our Farms Safer
Phone: 1300 882 833
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