

# Farmer health takes centre stage at PAC

**STEPHANIE ZEVENBERGEN**

THE gates on farmer health were officially opened on Monday afternoon at the inaugural National Centre for Farmer Health conference.

The three-day conference aimed to inform residents of the health issues that faced farming families in Australia.

Minister for Agriculture Joe Helper officially opened the conference and said it was an important milestone on the road to improving the health, well-being and safety of Australian farming families.

"We know that those in rural or remote areas generally have poorer health than those in major cities with higher rates of mortality, disease and health risk factors," he said at Monday's opening.

"The research from the National Centre for Farmer Health is helping us get a better understanding of the magnitude of this issue."

National Centre for Farming Health director Sue Brumby said the conference was designed to encourage and develop relationships across agriculture, health sciences, medicine, public health, occupational health, veterinary science, health promotion and allied health.

"The conference is bringing together presenters from 14 universities from six states and territories across Australia, over 20 health services and organisations and including people from the United States of America, the UK and Sweden as well

as many other government departments," she said.

"Farming people have long been known and regarded as being strong, fit and healthy. But we do know that farming is a dangerous occupation, with high numbers of fatalities and injuries and high rates of suicide is common in rural and farming populations.

"Probably less well known is the number of farming people with lifestyle health conditions, such as the chronic things like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, alcohol misuse and chronic pain. And also going under the radar is the number of people with animal acquired infections."

ABC radio presenter Libby Price was the facilitator of the conference and spoke of her time living in Hamilton some years back.

"I lived here when I was about 20 and worked on farms in the area," she said.

"And my body is evidence you can go through numerous farm related injuries and survive, although, only just."

Many events were run over the three-day period including the launch of the DVD 'Farming Fit', sessions about men's health, agricultural health and safety, mental health, social transitions, diet, oral health and disease.

The conference was run by the National Centre for Farmer Health in partnership with the Western District Health Service and Deakin University.



NATIONAL Centre for Farmer Health director Susan Brumby and Deakin University acting Dean Professor Joe Graffam were both speakers at the official opening of the farmer health conference.

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