

Our farmer health centre a top VFF priority

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FUNDING for Hamilton's ailing National Centre for Farmer Health sits near the top of an election wish-list released by Victoria's peak farming body.

The Victorian Farmer's Federation (VFF) released 11 demands on Friday, with the call for \$500,000 in re-current funding for the centre listed third.

The centre has been rallying for funds since its \$1 million in core funding was left out of the 2012 State Government Budget.

VFF president, Peter Tuohey, told The Spectator it was "a sorry state of affairs" that the centre had not received ongoing support.

"Sometimes things like this don't get funding and don't get looked after because they're in a rural area," Mr Tuohey said.

"It's just beyond belief that they're not funding it; it's so important and it's not a huge amount of money."

Victorian Premier, Denis Naphine, has maintained a commitment of \$250,000, which he said should be matched by \$750,000 from the Commonwealth Government.

But the centre and the VFF are asking Mr Naphine to double his offer and enter into a dollar-for-dollar agreement – a pledge that Western District Health Service chief executive, Jim Fletcher, is confident would be matched by the Commonwealth.

Mr Fletcher flew to Canberra to meet with Agriculture Minister, Barnaby Joyce, and Assistant Health Minister, Fiona Nash, in December last year.

"We've had a better hearing from the Commonwealth and a positive indication of interest, which is a far cry from what we had previously with the Gillard/Rudd Government," Mr Fletcher said.

"We'll be seeking a commitment from the Victorian Government to provide correspondence to the Commonwealth indicating that they're prepared to commit \$500,000.

"It's always been in discussions that the \$250,000 was negotiable."

Other demands from the VFF in the lead up to a November election include a \$250 million upgrade to regional rail freight lines, aerial baiting of wild dogs, a Parliamentary Inquiry into rural rating and simplified native vegetation clearance laws.



NATIONAL Centre for Farmer Health director, Sue Brumby, and WDHS chief executive, Jim Fletcher, meet with Member for Wannon, Dan Tehan, just minutes before their meeting with Agriculture Minister, Barnaby Joyce.