

Delivering a message about alcohol abuse in rural areas

THE rural alcohol misuse - and abuse - message needs to be delivered at the grass roots level and the Hamilton-based National Centre for Farmer Health is doing exactly that.

In partnership with the Western District Health Service and Deakin University, it is arming rural health professionals with intervention skills to address the worsening problem.

The centre's director clinical Associate Professor Susan Brumby said the education strategy was part of a broader research project supported by the Australian Research Council in partnership Deakin University School of Psychology and WDHS.

She said the intervention training had been piloted in Hamilton and delivered as far afield as Queensland. This week the program was run in Hamilton for a group of health professionals based in the south-west.

"At the same time our broad-reach Sustainable Farm Families program has successfully engaged farm men and women and provided health assessments and health education packages which are leading to improved health attitudes and behaviours," she said.

"But the health professionals in these programs are telling us about barriers to the identification of, and response to, alcohol-related behaviours and outcomes." The program is designed

to enhance the knowledge, willingness and confidence of health professionals to discuss and respond to alcohol-related problems, and the impact this has on the behaviours and mental health of the farming community.

Hamilton-based trainer and research assistant Alison Kennedy said she was excited to be part of the ground breaking project.

She said the project could have widespread positive implications both for the health of farm men and women and the health professionals undertaking

the training, who were themselves often farmers.

She said the course included material on the impact of alcohol misuse - physical, psychological, social and financial; measures for assessing alcohol misuse and mental health problems; communication techniques for raising and discussing these problems and practical techniques for reducing alcohol misuse.

Associate Professor David Mellor, head of the Deakin University research team, said he had been working closely with the SFF team

to design a program based on the latest international research into alcohol and mental health problems.

Prof Mellor said the research had also been tailored to the Australian rural context.

"We expect it will provide health professionals with skills to enhance their work and impact positively on farm men and women's health," Professor Mellor said.

For further information, Alison Kennedy can be contacted on 5551 8533 or alison.kennedy@wdhs.net



LOOKING after health... Alison Kennedy at the health day for farmers at Hamilton Base Hospital this week.