

Opening the gates to health

FARMERS will be encouraged to open their gates to health this October.

The National Centre for Farmer Health is hosting the inaugural 'Open the gates on farmer health' conference from October 11 to 13 at the Hamilton Performing Arts Centre.

There will be several speakers including two from overseas: Professor Kelley Donham from the USA and co-founder and trustee of the Farming Life Centre in the UK Linda Syson-Nibbs.

Other speakers include Dr Neil Barr, Professor John Catford, Professor Marisa Gilles and Professor John Martin.

The National Centre for Farmer Health is in partnership with Western District Health Service and Deakin University and was

officially opened last year.

NCFH director Sue Brumby said farmer health was an area that was often overlooked with the myth that all farmers were healthy.

She said it was important to get the message out about farmer health.

"We are opening the gates and opening the discussion," she said.

"I think we are really early days ... it is just the tip of the iceberg.

"Rural media is really important. The farm men and women read local papers and agricultural weekly's; we need to be a bit more savvy about how we are communicating this too."

Associate Clinical Professor Brumby said she was excited about the calibre of speakers at this year's conference.

"There might have been many rural health conferences covering the health issues of the rural population, but this is the first time a conference has focused just on farmer health," she said.

"Which is crucial because not only are farmers and their families equally exposed to the vagaries of rural health, they are generally the most isolated, have poor physical health and are the most affected by climate variability.

"Farmers and their families also face the occupationally specific hazards of the industry, the second most dangerous in Australia behind mining."

For more information go to the website at www.farmerhealth.org.au.