

\$2.9m boost in statewide health plan

By LYNDAL READING

A MENTAL and physical health program for rural communities that has been under trial in the Western District is to be rolled out across the state.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper announced \$2.9 million for the Sustainable Farm Families program while in Hamilton yesterday.

Mr Helper will also announce a further \$2.03 million for drought recovery planning at the Mallee Machinery Field Days, to be held at Speed today.

The \$2.03 million includes \$1.2 million to help farmers in drought-affected areas to develop recovery plans.

Sustainable Farm Families involves initiatives to help people cope with stress and depression, farm safety, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, women's and men's health, nutrition and exercise.

The program was developed by Western District Health and was under trial with 400 farm families from 2004 until this year.

Mr Helper said the trial participants showed a drop in blood cholesterol and blood pressure, and a reduction in medical referrals.

He said it was time for



Joe Helper

Victorian farmers and their families to think about and plan for their long-term recovery.

"It aims to help farmers in drought-affected communities take stock of their current position and develop long-term recovery plans," Mr Helper said.

The \$2.03 million being announced at Speed today also includes \$830,000 for a series of Rural Futures Forums.

The forums will be held in areas undergoing significant changes due to the drought.

Mr Helper said the forums would provide drought-affected farmers and their families with information and advice about recovering from the drought.