



Farming families to benefit

FARMING families in the Southern Grampians are set to benefit from free health assessments with the extension of the Sustainable Farm Families program.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper officially launched the program's summit in Dunkeld yesterday, revealing the government would invest \$2.18 million over the next four years to ensure an additional 500 farmers would be able to access the program.

Funding will be used to run workshops with a focus on practical steps to improve the lives of farm families, targeting families in areas undergoing significant change.

"The Sustainable Farm Families program has already worked with almost 1000 farmers across Victoria and as a result of its success, further workshops will be rolled out over the next four years," Mr Helper said.

"The Brumby Government is taking action to ensure farmers are in good health and able to run their farm business more effectively."

He said the program was a fantastic opportunity for farmers to understand their own health risks, how to manage them better and integrate into farming life, which can be difficult given the pressures they face.

The funding is on top of a \$2.4 million

investment in Hamilton earlier this year for the National Centre for Farmer Health.

Results from farmers who participated in previous workshops revealed 73 per cent of men and 61 per cent of women were classified as overweight or obese, instantly putting them into a high risk category for cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and osteoarthritis.

Just over one-third of participants were also identified as having high blood pressure.

High risk participants such as these were referred for follow up with appropriate health professionals.

Mr Helper said prevention is often better than the cure so the Sustainable Farm Families program focused on participants being able to walk away from the program with a greater understanding of how to prevent disease and injury, and the motivation to take action.

"There were some cases where participants had malignant skin cancers identified at the workshop, which could have otherwise gone unchecked," he said.

The workshops cover a range of health topics including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, stress, depression, anxiety, nutrition and exercise.

People wanting to attend the program should contact the DPI on 136 186.