

Ramsay calls for NCFH funding

KIERAN ILES

A STATE Liberal MP has called on his Coalition colleagues in Canberra to find funding for Hamilton's National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) in this month's budget.

Upper House member for Western Victoria, Simon Ramsay said the State Government had pledged \$250,000 towards the centre to "complement a national approach to a national problem" and urged the Abbott Government to do the same.

The State Government contribution is conditional on the Commonwealth chipping in \$750,000, with the centre needing \$1 million

in annual base funding to continue its work beyond June this year.

Mr Ramsay's plea came as the Nationals State Conference in Benalla on Saturday considered a motion from the party's Lowan sub-branch for the state and federal governments to match funding to ensure the centre's continuation.

Mr Ramsay declared himself a "strong advocate" for the ongoing funding of the centre through the Western District Hospital Service.

"The centre works specifically to improve the quality of life for Australia's farming community, in response to a disturbing trend of poor physical and mental health in that demographic of the community," Mr Ramsay said.

"In my previous life representing the farming community, I was well aware of the work of the National Centre of Farmer Health in the sustainable farming family project.

"This was active during one of the worst droughts Australia has seen. It was critical in reducing the impact of high rates of depression and suicides in our farming communities," Mr Ramsay said.

"Poor farmer health and incidence of disease is high in the farming communities and the nature of their work requires specific research and programs to respond to this disturbing trend".

Wannon MP Dan Tehan has declared his full support for the centre.

Since 2012 he has lobbied for federal funding, including arranging meetings in Canberra for the centre to put its funding case directly to the Health Minister and others.

"We have put in a lot of work and I am hopeful that the upcoming budget will include funding for the centre, however given the very high levels of debt that the government has inherited from the former Labor government it's going to be a very tough budget.

"Given Mr Ramsay's strong support for the centre, I would politely suggest he focuses on ensuring the State Government provides funding for the centre, especially when we recall it has been funded by the State Government



DAN TEHAN

since its inception."

The centre has been operating since November 2008 as a partnership between the Western District Health Service and Deakin University.

But its future was plunged into doubt when the State Government decided to scrap the centre's \$1million in recurrent funding in its 2012-13 budget.

A spokesperson for Health Minister David Davis, Ashley Gardiner accused the previous Labor Government of "short-changing" the centre by not agreeing to fund it beyond four years.



SIMON RAMSAY

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