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NATIONAL Centre for Farmer Health coordinator Sue Brumby, Wannon MP Dan Tehan and WDHS chief executive Jim Fletcher smile for the cameras during the centre's last minute funding announcement on Tuesday. Photo: JANETTE ANTON. 140701ja003

# LIFELINE FUNDS

Flagship program receives "one-off funding"

REX MARTINICH

HAMILTON'S National Centre for Farmer Health has been given a \$625,000 lifeline from the federal and Victorian governments just hours after funding for its flagship program ran dry.

Wannon MP Dan Tehan announced on Tuesday morning that the federal government will grant "one-off funding" of \$375,000 to "unlock" the Victorian Government's \$250,000 annual recurring funding pledge.

The centre was founded in 2008 with a donation from Geoff Handbury but government funding was cut by the 2012/2013 Victorian budget and the centre has faced a struggle to survive ever since.

Mr Tehan joined with centre's directors, management and remaining staff to officially announce the funding approved by Assistant Federal Health Minister Fiona Nash.

"It's required a lot of hard work from WDHS chief executive Jim Fletcher, from the centre

coordinator, Sue Brumby, from the National Farmers' Federation from the Victorian Farmers Federation and from the community itself but we have got the federal and state governments to listen," Mr Tehan said.

"(We got them) to understand and they want the work to continue; it's extremely good news.

"I look forward working with you to ensure that we put in place a plan which will mean the centre will continue to be viable into the future."

Western District Health Service chief executive Jim Fletcher said the combined grant would allow the centre time to find other sources of funds.

"This is great news for WDHS, for the National Centre for Farmer Health and more importantly for the farming families of Victoria and Australia," he said.

"It's been two-and-a-half years of hard work, a lot of lobbying of state and federal governments but we finally got here.

"Perseverance has paid off and it means that the excellent work of the centre can continue on and it gives us some security going forward for the next couple of years."

Centre coordinator Sue Brumby said fundraising efforts would continue.

"I'm very excited, it's great and it's been a hard road as Jim has said. I'd really like to thank Dan for his perseverance, I'd like to thank the State Government and I'd like to thank the local government," she said.

"I'd particularly like to thank the staff and all the farmers who have supported us all the way through."

"I know the battle is not over yet but this is a great start and we'll still be running in the Melbourne Marathon to raise funds."

The \$375,000 from the Federal Government is, as described, a one-time deal but Western Victoria MP Simon Ramsay said the Victorian Government was prepared to offer a \$250,000 co-contribution each year.

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WESTERN Victoria MP Simon Ramsay at the Hamilton National Centre for Farmer Health funding announcement on Tuesday. Photo: JANETTE ANTON. 140701ja005

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## Flagship program receives "one-off funding"

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"As a past president of the VFF and now local Member for Western Victoria Region 1 have over a number of years seen the work that the National Centre for Farmer Health has been doing," he said.

"I've been closely involved with Sue Brumby with Sustainable Farm Families which was very important during the drought years.

"I have been supportive of the work and as a local Member I have been supportive of ongoing funding."

The Sustainable Farm Families program is the centre's flagship program that has achieved international recognition and resulted in the Canada sponsoring an adopted version for its farmers.

Sustainable Farm Families was due to officially wind down on Tuesday as it was the first day of the new financial year.

"The centre was already winding down. We were down to three staff members so we have now got to work to replenish the National Centre for Farmer Health," Mr Fletcher said.

"I've always believed in the National Centre and the work that it does and

it's a great note to retire on come July 31."

Southern Grampians Shire Councillor Dennis Dawson said he was "very pleased" to see the "terrific announcement".

Lowan MP Hugh Delahunty said the National Party state conference had helped the centre by passing a motion put forward by Lowan Candidate Emma Kealy to advocate for new funding.

"Our federal colleagues, particularly Fiona Nash, have come through and they also announced funding for a farmer health centre in NSW but the one in Hamilton was what we were fighting for," he said.

"As someone who was a farmer and worked with the (former Victorian) Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, I did not want to see the programs lost."

WDHS chief executive Jim Fletcher, Wannon MP Dan Tehan and National Centre for Farmer Health coordinator Sue Brumby at the centre's last minute funding announcement on Tuesday. Photo: JANETTE ANTON. 140701ja004



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