



Partnership to make ripples in improving rural mental health

The VFF, together with leading agricultural experts, health professionals and academics have been successful in obtaining a \$440,000 beyondblue funding grant to reduce the stigma around suicide experienced by males in rural farming communities.

Titled “The Ripple Effect”, the interactive digital program aims to combat the stigma experienced by males, aged 30–64 years, from the farming community who have lost someone to suicide, attempted suicide themselves, cared for someone who has attempted suicide, experienced thoughts about their own suicide, or been touched by suicide in some other way. VFF will partner with leading digital platform AgChatOZ, the highly regarded National Centre for Farmer Health, Deakin University, Mental Illness Fellowship North Queensland, Western District Health Service and digital company Sandpit for the development and roll out of the Ripple Effect.

The Ripple Effect recently appointed a steering group, comprised of farmers, health professionals and academics.

The Ripple Effect’s primary objective is to reduce self-perceived suicide stigma through the development, trial, implementation and evaluation of a repeatable and transferable digital intervention. It is envisaged that over time, the ripple effect of the program will also reduce personal and community suicide stigma and ultimately, assist with breaking the ongoing cycle of suicide risk in farming communities.

According to The Ripple Effect’s senior investigator Tom Whitty, the project is about thinking outside the box when it comes to mental health.

“This is about thinking of new and innovative ways to tackle one of rural Australia’s most taboo topics. It is our hope that through our anonymous, online portal, men from the farming community will feel comfortable to talk about their experiences among their peers, ask questions and learn new ways to think about and respond to their mental health needs,” Tom said

“We are a really proud that both beyondblue—through donations made by the Movember foundation—are willing to invest in the health and wellbeing of the men in our farming community.

“We will aim to build relationships, form a community of support and facilitate an understanding of how to turn the tide on stigma through shared experiences.”

The Ripple Effect is an online tool allowing men from the farming community to work shoulder to shoulder in the fight against the stigma of rural suicide—turning the negative ripple of suicide into a positive ripple of support. It will be available on multiple platforms—from PCs to the latest smartphones and tablets—to ensure that everyone can connect and contribute.

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