

## MH4Ag: Co-designing a peer-supported approach to improve mental health in rural farming communities

### Participant Information Form

Compared to the general Australian population, rural farming communities face higher risk of suicide. While farmers are generous at providing help to others, they are often reluctant to ask for help themselves. Living in rural areas, access to mental health support is limited and where support is available, providers may have poor understanding of the realities of life and work in the farming environment. This project aims to develop a framework — working with farming community members and rural stakeholders — for the delivery of peer-supported, evidenced-based psychological therapy to farming community members experiencing depression or psychological/situational distress. To complement this, the project will also work with farmers and community stakeholders to develop a personal ‘Steering Straight’ plan for members of the farming community. This plan aims to help improve farmers’ and farming community members’ ability to focus on what TO DO in a challenging situation, rather than what NOT TO DO.

The project is led by the National Centre for Farmer Health (Deakin University) in partnership with Western District Health Service and with the involvement of researchers from the University of South Australia, La Trobe University and University of Melbourne.

This project is funded by the Western Victoria Primary Health Network.

### HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

#### Project Element 1: Community Working Group

A Community Working Group (made up of farmers and community stakeholders) will meet monthly to help guide the project and to provide feedback on the development of the personal challenge ‘action plan’. Meetings will be held online during COVID-19 restrictions (likely to remain for the duration of the project). Members attending in their own time (i.e. not as part of their paid employment role) will be offered a sitting fee of \$100 (voucher of choice) per meeting to offset some of the associated cost with taking time away from their business/work to contribute to the project.

#### Project Element 2: Co-Design workshops

Co-design workshops involve bringing people together to discuss a particular topic to ensure that we design resources that are more engaging and relevant for you. In this project, farming community members and service providers/rural stakeholders from across Victoria’s Great South Coast region will participate in co-design workshops to inform the development of a framework for delivering peer-supported Behavioural Activation support to farming community members experiencing depression or psychological/situational distress. During COVID-19 restrictions (likely to remain for the duration of the project), all co-design workshops will be held online. Workshops will be interactive and involve a range of activities such as virtual brainstorming, ranking of ideas and group discussion (e.g. workshop participants are presented with a range of 10 ideas to encourage uptake of peer-supported mental health support and asked to rank these ideas in order of feasibility and acceptability within the farming community). One-to-one phone/online interviews will also be considered for those who wish to contribute to the co-design process but are unable or unwilling to attend online workshops. Being online, you can participate from your own home. Workshops will be recorded to capture your input and

help us develop the most effective resources. Online workshops will be password protected to ensure security of data. Participants will attend one 2-3 hour workshop. There will be no compulsory follow-up, however, participants will be invited to attend a follow-up feedback workshop (see Project Element 3). Participants attending a workshop in their own time (i.e. not as part of their paid employment role) will be offered a sitting fee of \$100 (voucher of choice) to offset some of the associated cost with taking time away from their business/work to contribute to the project. Participants attending an interview in their own time (as an alternative to the workshop) will be offered a reimbursement of \$50 (voucher of choice). Participants will be invited to complete a feedback survey (and optional follow-up interview) about their experience of being part of the co-design process.

### Project Element 3: Feedback workshop

Information from the co-design workshops will be used to inform the development of a pilot framework which will be fed-back to the farming community members and stakeholders through a community presentation and feedback workshop. All participants from the co-design workshop will be invited to contribute to the feedback workshop. Interested people from the broader rural community will also be welcome to attend the feedback workshop. The workshop will be held online during COVID-19 restrictions (likely to remain for the duration of the project) and involve interactive tools (e.g. small group discussion, online polling) to provide further information which can be incorporated into the final framework design. Participants will be invited to complete a feedback survey (and optional follow-up interview) about their experience of being part of the co-design process.

### Project Element 4: Feasibility testing of 'Steering Straight'

The template of 'Steering Straight' will be pilot tested for feasibility, appropriateness and relevance via participant feedback. The survey will be sent through the National Centre for Farmer Health farming community and industry networks (including Farmer Health website, social media and NCFH eNews). The survey will involve participants completing their own personal 'Steering Straight' plan and answering some simple ranking scale and short answer questions (approximately 30 minutes). Participants who complete the survey will be invited to participate in a 6-week follow-up survey.

Involvement in this project is not designed to cause significant psychological or emotional stress, but you may be reflecting upon events in your life that may be challenging. If you feel that taking part will cause you distress, you may consider not participating in this research. You will have the opportunity to make contact with the researchers via phone, email or the website should you have any questions during your participation in this project. You will also have the opportunity to request a written referral to a support provider (local where available and appropriate).

**COMPLIANCE WITH COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS:** This project has been designed to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and will not require any face-to-face contact during the pandemic period (likely to remain for the duration of the project).

**LIKELY BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS:** There may be some benefits of participating in the project such as increasing your understanding of wellbeing, lifestyle factors, prevention of emotional distress in yourself and with peers. You may decide to change personal behaviours to improve your health and wellbeing.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:** All comments and responses made during the project will be de-identified and remain confidential. Any information you share via surveys or interviews will remain anonymous. While the information you share may be included in reports to funders or in scientific publications, this will be general in nature and will never identify individuals.

**PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY:** Your involvement in the project is voluntary and we respect your right to withdraw at any time. You may discontinue your participation at any time and do not need to provide any explanation. Should you withdraw your participation, information provided to the project team will be excluded from analysis where possible (e.g. interview data). Where information has been provided anonymously (e.g. online surveys), it will not be possible to exclude this information, as there will be no way of identifying your data. Where information has been provided in a group format (e.g. co-design workshops) it will not be possible to exclude this information as there is no way to identify individual contributions to the data.

**STORAGE OF INFORMATION:** Any information you choose to share in this project will be securely stored. Hard copies of any information will be kept in a locked cabinet in the research office. Electronic data will be kept on a password-protected computer. Only the research team will have access to the information. All of the information collected in this research will be kept at the National Centre for Farmer Health for a minimum of five years after successful completion of this research as is required by the National Health and Medical Research Council. After this, relevant computer files will be deleted and hard copy materials will be destroyed or shredded.

**RESEARCH PROCESS:** The de-identified aggregated results of the research will be included in reports to the funder, presented at conferences, published in peer-reviewed academic journals and distributed through the Farmer Health website.

**ETHICS:** This research has been approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HEAG-H Approval No. 2020-232. Valid to 19/8/2024).

**CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:** Should you have any questions about taking part in this study, please contact Dr Alison Kennedy on (03) 5551 8533, email [a.kennedy@deakin.edu.au](mailto:a.kennedy@deakin.edu.au) or contact any of the other members of the research team:

Dr Susan Brumby: (03) 5551 8533 or email: [susan.brumby@deakin.edu.au](mailto:susan.brumby@deakin.edu.au)

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Ms Sonya Duke: (03) 5551 8533 or email: [sduke@wdhs.net](mailto:sduke@wdhs.net)

**COMPLAINTS:** If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact: The Manager, Research Integrity, Ethics and Biosafety, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: 9251 7129, Facsimile: 9244 6581; [research-ethics@deakin.edu.au](mailto:research-ethics@deakin.edu.au).

Please quote project number 2020-232.

**If, after reading this Participant Information Sheet or sharing your experiences through any stage of this study, you feel distressed, we urge you to contact your GP for support and/or local referral. You can also access online psychology support services from psychologists trained in farmer health via <https://www.farmerhealth.org.au/access-a-psychologist-online>. You can also request a written referral from a member of the project team to assist you to access a support provider (local provider where available and appropriate).**

**If you are at risk of harming yourself or others, please phone Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Emergency Services on 000.**