



Project update

August 2021

A new approach to supporting farmers' wellbeing

Rural farming communities face: (i) a higher risk of suicide than urban communities; (ii) a range of specific stressors (e.g. drought, bushfires); and (iii) limited access to appropriate mental health support. The National Centre for Farmer Health, and our research partners at Deakin University, the University of Melbourne, the University of South Australia, and La Trobe University, are working with community to develop new ways of supporting farmers and rural community members to provide mental health assistance to their peers.

Doing things can help you feel better!

We're particularly interested in learning how farmers and rural community members can support their peers to schedule activities into their daily lives that will help improve their mood (the formal term for this evidence-based approach is 'behavioural activation' (BA)). Compared to other treatments for depression, BA has been found to be more effective than medication, and at least as effective as talking treatments (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy). This practical approach to solving problems is also likely to appeal to farmers.

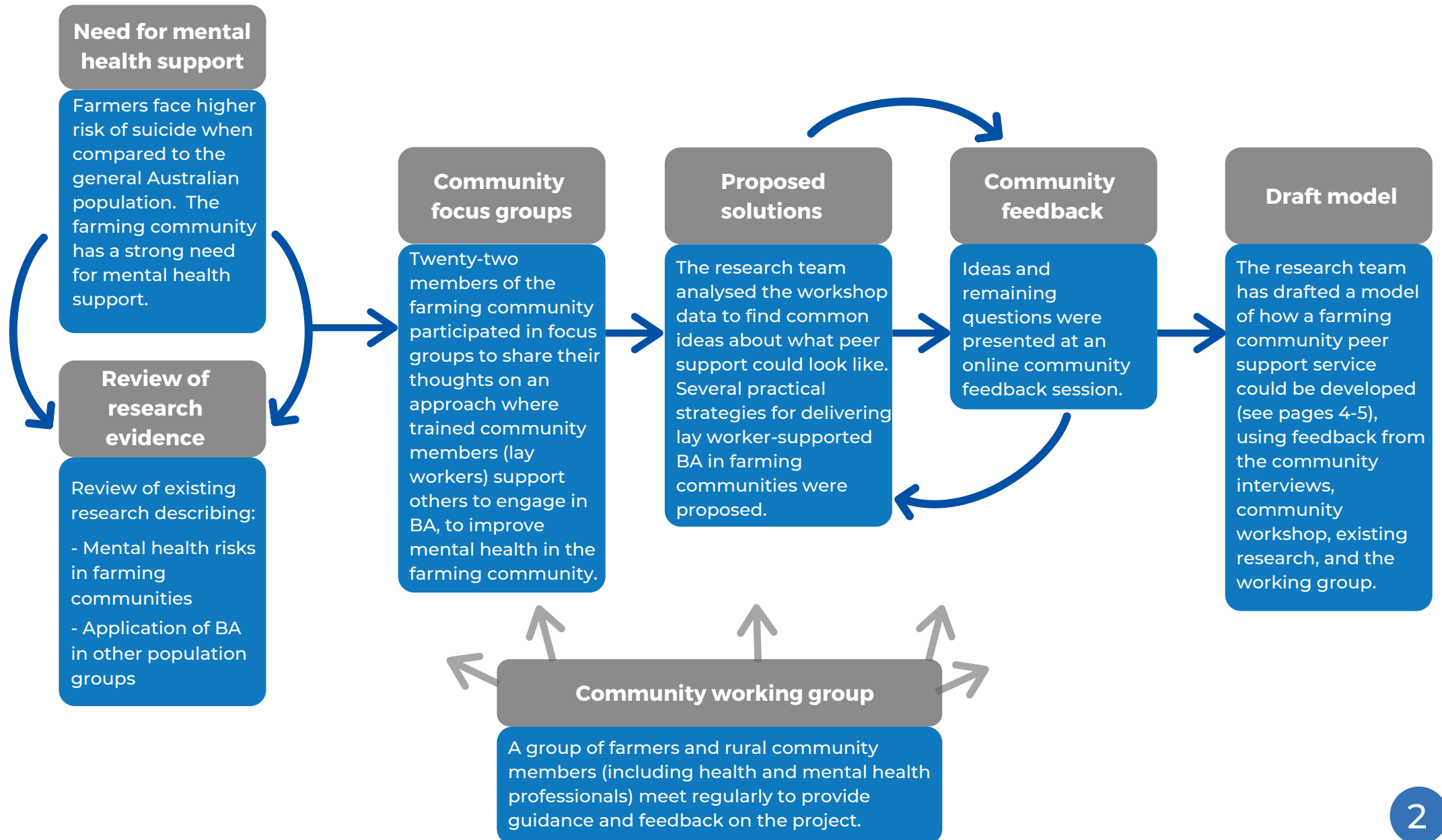
Video explanation:

www.bit.ly/activity_scheduling
www.bit.ly/peer-BA

What's in this document?

- The work we have done so far (*page 2*)
- Voices from the community - what could BA in the farming community look like? (*page 3*) This has helped inform our draft research framework.
- Our draft framework for delivering BA in the farming community
 - Findings so far (*page 4*)
 - The vision for this project (*page 5*)

The MH4Ag project process and work to-date:



Voices from the community: focus group thoughts on what BA in the farming community could look like

"Particularly in the area where I am, the services are sparse still, certainly for psychologists."

Current services do not meet community need

"When [my son] died [by suicide]...the big hide started to reveal itself to me...I could go down the main street...and in every household there was people who was suffering depression or suicide behind the door."

"You just know how much community is, and how important it is to you...you always try and be there as you get older, because you know you've lived a lot more of your life than you've got left, so you hope to make a difference."

Importance of community involvement

"I would further highlight that farmers like to help farmers. There's a really strong community spirit."

"I come from a family of a lot of farmers [and] there would be no substitute for me than someone coming to the local CFA tin shed and [bringing] sausages with them, and having a bit of a yarn...before they head off home."

This program needs to be community-based, informal and trusted

"If the community feels that are not in control anymore, they will clam up again and not necessarily be as open."

"If...you've got farmers in a large group, you'll get two that will be speaking the whole time, and the rest of the room will be quiet...So I think small groups, face-to-face."

Format of training

"If you said to me, it's going to take five days to train you, [it would be impossible]. But if...I could be filling in some stuff online and reading some things...that would be a lot easier...to facilitate."

"I think you have to be really clear about the role of the peer behavioural activation person...It's not fair on that person for them to think that they're therapists."

Clear role of lay workers and strong support pathways

"[Coaches would need a] clinical support debrief, [and a] network of peers to be able to connect to as well."

"A [coach] is exactly a [coach]: somebody you go to because you respect them...and not just because they're being paid to do so."

Recognition of lay workers' contribution

"If there was someone that is unemployed, or can't work for whatever reason, but they want to be a [coach], but they can't afford the petrol [you should cover it]."

"The sporting clubs in rural communities are the lifeblood, so...you can tack something on your existing event or meeting."

Engagement and connecting people with the program

"You'd have to go to those rural community leaders. Small towns...there'd be somebody in that town that...knows everybody. He'd...be able to end up with a group of people."

"The rural community gets a bit weary of things being outsourced; things moving and coming back...the ongoing need is left...I think that makes the situation worse."

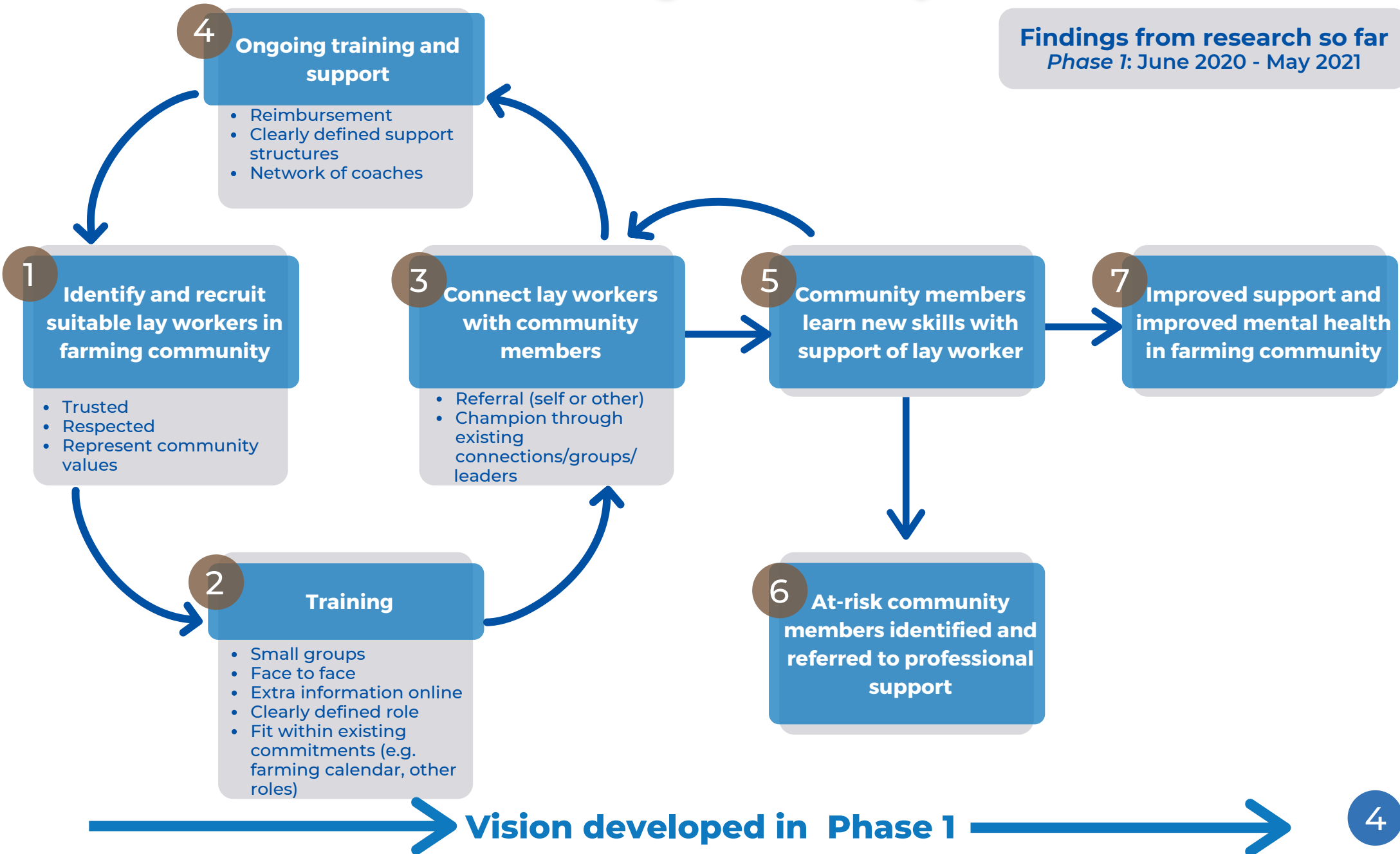
Program sustainability

"If you really want it to be sustainable in communities, there still needs to be that layer of someone who's employed... because [otherwise] you'll get that burnout."

Our vision for lay worker mental health support for the farming community

DRAFT FRAMEWORK

Findings from research so far
Phase 1: June 2020 - May 2021



Focus of current and future research
 Phase 2: June 2021 - February 2022
 Phase 3: ~November 2021 onwards

Please note that Phase 3 is outside the scope of the current funding

