



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
**FARMER
HEALTH**

TACKLING THE TOUGH TOPICS



**A step-by-step guide to plan
mental health and wellbeing
events in farming communities**



ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FARMER HEALTH

Shaping tomorrow's healthiest farming communities worldwide

Since 2008, the National Centre for Farmer Health has partnered with Western District Health Service and Deakin University to tackle the health inequities faced by Australians living and working in farming communities compared to their city counterparts.

Driven by our pillars of **Evidence, Influence, and Action**, we prioritise the prevention and early identification of health, wellbeing, and safety risks. With a proven track record, we deliver timely and effective interventions that build trust and create lasting partnerships with farming communities.

Discover how we're making a difference by reading our Strategic Plan here: farmerhealth.org.au/page/about-us#strategic-plan

Guided by evidence, we influence positive change for health, wellbeing and safety in agriculture, fostering transformative action on farms.

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Photo: maxbélchenko

TACKLING THE TOUGH TOPICS:

A step-by-step guide to plan mental health and wellbeing events in farming communities

Introduction

Communities across Australia are showing increasing interest in promoting positive messaging to protect farmer mental health and support wellbeing. As a result, there are a growing number of events that include discussion on these topics—often through the lens of a guest speaker or panel of individuals with lived experience of navigating tough times on the land. This helps reduce stigma and increase discussion about (i) proactive ways to manage and protect wellbeing, and (ii) recognising when to seek assistance from within existing family, friends or farming networks. Events are often held in partnership with local health services. This enables participants to be more informed about where to get support from mental health professionals if needed.

While it may be an important goal, messaging about mental health and wellbeing is only part of a successful community event. Farmers may be attracted to attend by the opportunity to gain technical knowledge that enhances their farm business. When sporting clubs are involved, events may include a celebration of recent achievements, a motivational speaker or coaching opportunities for player improvement. At other events, the focus might be on having fun and connecting with community members and farming colleagues.

Effective mental health and wellbeing promotion events may target a specific sector of the farming community and tailor their messaging accordingly. For example, events aimed at flood/fire affected farmers, a women's retreat, a picnic for young families, a BBQ brekky for older farmers. The possibilities are enormous.

The National Centre for Farmer Health has developed this handbook outlining best practice guidelines to help individuals and groups plan successful farming community events with a mental health focus. The guidelines seek to provide the knowledge, resources, and support needed to organise successful events and avoid potential problems that can be damaging to vulnerable individuals and/or their communities.

You understand your community and its needs better than any outsider. We encourage you to use these guidelines to start important conversations and have confidence to tailor your events to your community's needs in a psychologically and emotionally safe way.

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Section 1

Event briefing

- 1.1 Who is the event for?
- 1.2 What are the goals for the event?
- 1.3 Why will people come to this event?
- 1.4 Who is on the organising team?

RESOURCES

- ▶ Event planning template

Question 1.1

Who is the event for?

Be clear on the target audience for any event. Will you invite the whole community or focus on one group? Knowing your target audience will help guide the conversation and choice of speaker. Focusing on a specific group may make the event more engaging and encourage participants to openly discuss issues and find relevant solutions.



Record your responses to each of the 14 planning questions in the **EVENT PLANNING TEMPLATE** at the end of this section (page 5). Update it as you work through the issues involved in bringing your event to life.



Case Study

SPORTING CLUBS

Country sporting clubs are well placed to integrate mental health and wellbeing messages into their existing club activities. With a high proportion of farmers active in such clubs, these existing networks often run timely and successful events which serve to break down the stigma around discussing mental health and promote help seeking and mutual support. Here are some examples from rural Victoria.

“People were glad to be able to have a frank and open conversation about mental health and be offered some advice on supports and tools to help. We really appreciated the funding to create this opportunity for our rural community to come together to learn and discuss mental health, particularly in our remote area where there are so many barriers to not only accessing adequate professional support, but also barriers to social connections and opportunities.”

- Rupanyup Football Netball Club



Pyramid Hill Football Netball Club



Birchip – Watchem Football, Netball and Hockey Club

“The day provided a much needed social/sporting event for farming communities to connect after the stress of recent widespread flooding... Rural sporting environments provide social connection and an opportunity for discrete mental health promotion in farming communities ... The FNC President addressed everyone at training during the FREE BBQs. He reinforced the message about the benefits of getting together over the season, of recognising signs of stress, and the need to keep looking out for each other.”

- Pyramid Hill Football Netball Club (PHFNC)



Photo: Speaking about protecting your Mental Health to farmers at Birchip Cropping Group Field Day on Farm Safety. (Credit: National Centre for Farmer Health)

Question 1.2

What are the goals for the event?

Every event will have a different goal. This might include teaching new skills, promoting behavior change, building social connections, or fundraising.

Having a clear understanding of your goal will help you identify what will make the event successful for attendees.

- ▶ How will you make sure people feel welcome, included and safe?
- ▶ How will you stimulate meaningful conversations or help community members learn something new about mental health?
- ▶ How will you encourage community members to support others or seek help themselves?



Use the **EVENT PLANNING TEMPLATE** on page 5 to write down your main goals, along with any secondary ones, and use them to guide your planning.

Question 1.3

Why will people come to this event?

How to attract people to a mental health event is often a complex question but it's worth thinking about. Answers will vary, but here are some common examples:

- ▶ Providing free food or entertainment
- ▶ Working with an existing team, club or network to run the event
- ▶ Providing an opportunity to talk or get off the farm
- ▶ Building on their existing social networks
- ▶ Offering an opportunity for people to learn a new skill
- ▶ Building on existing interest in technical or farm business advice
- ▶ Introducing an interesting guest speaker



TOP TIP!

Think about how this event will be attractive to community members who are often harder to reach.

For example, farm/seasonal workers from a cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, LGBTIQ+ community members, men and women, younger and older farmers, retired farmers, or those with a physical disability. Are there ways to make the event more attractive to them and encourage their participation?

Name it well

Choose a positive event title that will appeal to your target audience. For example, after a tough farming season, events described as “Tactics for Tough Times” or “Helping Your Mates Out of the Mud” are more appealing than “Managing Mental Health After a Disaster.” Use titles that will engage your farmers, like “Stressbusters” or “Building Back Better” for a practical tone, rather than “Talking About Mental Health” or “Learning Resilience Skills”.

If you sense that most people are motivated to come to the event to hear a technical farming presentation and mental health or resilience building is only a secondary motivation, put the resilience talk first but stick to the allocated time and invite discussion later. A 10-minute talk on farmer wellbeing to a group of 500 stressed farmers may be more impactful in the community than an hour-long workshop for 10 farmers.

Question 1.4

Who is on the organising team?

It is worth ensuring that you have a competent team of people with the right skill mix and clear roles and responsibilities to help organise your event. This will help guard against burnout with the event workload but also ensure your team understand the dynamics of your rural community and can use that to plan an amazing event that is relevant and achieves the goals you set.



Consider having a local health professional on your team. Check out any planning tools/advice available through your local government authority such as risk management requirements.

TOP TIP!



Discussions about mental health may be triggering for you or someone on your organising team. Having each other as a sounding board or safety net can be helpful. If some in the community identifies you as a champion of farmer mental health, they may overly confide in you. Knowing how to look after yourself by setting good boundaries and referring people to appropriate services is important. (Training such as Mental Health First Aid, Psychological First Aid or Accidental Counsellor may be easy to add to your existing skill set if you want to increase your skills in this area.)



Case Study

FARMER FIELD DAYS

Grower field days are a terrific opportunity to combine a guest speaker on farmer mental health with a technical presentation and farm visit.

“Farmer/grower participation for events on mental health promotion is high when these events are combined with field demonstrations/farm visits. Fruit Growers Victoria is planning to organise similar events in the future.”

- Fruit Growers Victoria



Photo: Warren Davies (aka The Unbreakable Farmer) talking with apple growers at a technical field day held by Fruit Growers Victoria. (Credit: Fruit Growers Victoria)

EVENT BRIEFING

1. Who is the event for? (e.g. men, women, young farmers, retirees)

2. What are the goals for the event? Why are you holding it now? (e.g. improve social connection during/after a difficult farming season; encourage discussion on mental health/wellbeing)

3. Why will people come to this event? (e.g. learn new information/skills, interesting speaker, free meal)

4. Who is on the organising team? (e.g. sufficient mix of skills, community connection and capacity)

EVENT PLANNING

5. When and where will the event be held?

(e.g. avoid busy farming seasons and other local events; safe access to venue)

6. How will you share positive health messages and promote help seeking?

(e.g. guest speaker, panel discussion, comedian, creative activity, film with discussion, distribution of wellbeing resources)

7. How will you ensure attendees feel welcome and included at this event?

(e.g. a clear welcome, program outlined, inclusive language, great venue, free food, accessible venue)

EVENT PLANNING TEMPLATE

EVENT PLANNING

8. Who will MC the event? Why are they the right person for this audience?

(e.g. well-briefed, introduced to all speakers, positive tone, appropriate humour and language, local personality)

9. Who would be the best guest speaker? Why? (e.g. guest speaker with lived experience relevant to farming; mental health professional giving tips; sport star or coach; or movie/documentary)

10. Will there be a panel of *local* community members/leaders to discuss their own wellbeing strategies? (who to ask; how many; why them; select questions carefully; brief well)

11. Is there an adequate budget/sponsorship to cover costs?

(who will draw up the budget and run the finances for the event? who will you approach as sponsors?)

IDENTIFYING & DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

12. Which support services will be invited or have resources available?

(e.g. local health services, farmer support organisations; what will be their role at the event?)

13. Who will promote this event in the community to ensure the right people attend?

(e.g. print media, social media post, sporting and service club newsletters, Local businesses and service providers, Local government or community noticeboards)

WHAT NEXT?

14. What follow-up is required after the event? (e.g. media article or social media post; report to sponsors; thanks to speakers and support agencies; future events)



Section 2

Event planning

- 2.1 When and where will the event be held?
- 2.2 How will the event convey positive health messages and promote help seeking?
- 2.3 How will you ensure that attendees feel welcome and included at this event?
- 2.4 Who will MC the event?
- 2.5 Who would be the best guest speaker for your audience?
- 2.6 Will there be a panel of locals discussing their own wellbeing strategies?
- 2.7 Is there adequate budget/sponsorship to cover costs?

RESOURCES

- ▶ Event briefing notes for guest speakers and MC
- ▶ Guidelines for lived experience speakers sharing their story
- ▶ Guidelines for health professional guest speakers

Question 2.1

When and where will the event be held?

Timing of farming community events is important. Consider whether a planned event or activity meets the current needs of your target audience. If possible, avoid busy periods in the season (sowing, harvesting, shearing, calving, etc.). In the aftermath of a natural disaster like flooding, communities are often focussed on immediate practical needs. At this time, providing a workshop about building resilience might not be a good fit. It might be more helpful to provide an opportunity for social connection (on the weekend or in the evening after work is done) and someone demonstrating practical tips (e.g. safely removing bogged machinery from water-logged paddocks).

Be mindful of the age group you are trying to attract. A field day/workshop targeting younger farmers may need to be in school hours to allow parents with school aged kids to attend. (You may consider offering supervised activities for younger children.) If your event is for dairy farmers, you may need to schedule it between morning and afternoon milking times, or early in the evening.

Check with other community groups, schools, farming or sporting organisations and local government to avoid event dates clashing. This might also be a good opportunity to explore potential collaborations that align with your goals.



Combining outdoor and indoor spaces encourages crowd mixing and varied conversation opportunities. (Photo: NDCH)

TOP TIP!



Make sure the venue suits the crowd you wish to attract. Is it a neutral place where participants will feel comfortable? Is it easy to find and accessible to all? For example, if you hold the event at the local hospital because it is sponsored by the health service it may be less attractive to farmers than at a local community hall or sporting clubrooms. When choosing an outdoor venue, ensure you check for safety hazards, particularly if children are likely to be attending. Also think about backup plans in case of bad weather.

Question 2.2

How will the event convey positive health messages and promote help seeking?

Language is important

Getting the language right is an important consideration when planning a mental health event. Keep language simple and relatable, avoiding jargon and complicated terms. Whether your event includes a guest speaker, panel discussion, comedian, interactive activity, or the promotion of local health services, think about how language is used to reduce stigma and encourage help seeking.



Read the **GUIDELINES FOR GUEST SPEAKERS** on pages 18 and 22 to give more insight into appropriate language and tone of an event discussing mental health.

2

TOP TIP!



During the event, keep the tone positive, realistic, and empowering without being overly simplistic, unrealistic or “over the top” (sometimes referred to as toxic positivity). Speakers should focus on the strengths and resilience of the farming community. It’s important to encourage self-awareness, finding solutions and being forward-thinking, while acknowledging that farming is complex, dynamic and demanding work.

Include local health professionals in event planning

To ensure attendees feel safe and supported, and to prevent causing unintentional harm or triggering vulnerable individuals, draw on the expertise of local health professionals. Benefits include:

- ▶ Helping to create a space that fosters hope and promotes seeking help to resolve issues that may be stifling an individual’s personal or business decision-making capacity, wellbeing and happiness.
- ▶ Emphasises that seeking help is a smart step towards wellbeing.
- ▶ Gives people confidence that they can move beyond their current feelings of inadequacy.
- ▶ Cultivates optimism using positive language and a “can do” attitude.



Case Study

MEN'S BBQ EVENT AND FARMER HEALTH CHECKS COMBINATION DISCUSSION

A well-planned men's community event focussed on mental health, social connection and farmer health in the year following floods in central Victoria.



Above: Health and Lifestyle Assessment with Northern District Community Health nurse (Credit: Northern District Community Health)



Above: Jarklin Men's Health BBQ afternoon (Credit: Northern District Community Health)

"Farmers and workers were supported and invited to consider their mental health and wellness over a BBQ Masterclass. Marc [lived experience speaker] spoke of the importance of taking care of yourself, finding purpose in something you love and how he had positively approached some of the health challenges he'd experienced. Not putting off health issues, regularly scheduling time for family and loved ones, and keeping the balance while running a busy business were some of his key themes. He spoke from the heart and had a very positive rapport with attendees. A guest speaker from "Making Men" spoke briefly about wellness coaching. Men were able to undertake an individual Health & Lifestyle Assessment with an agricultural health clinician to further consider and focus on their own individual mental health and wellbeing. The Rural Financial Counselling Service provided MC services to the event and appropriately it was the local staff member."

- Northern District Community Health

Question 2.3

How will you ensure that attendees feel welcome and included at this event?

When planning your event, think about how you can support attendees to feel welcome and included. What can you do to ensure that the group mixes and interacts during the event? This might include someone to welcome people on arrival, ensuring everyone has a name tag and a good understanding of what to expect from the event. You may want to do an *Acknowledgement of Country* or specific welcome announcement to children, young people or older community members or those from CALD backgrounds. Use inclusive language and be mindful of adult language or content that may be inappropriate for children (if present). Provide supervised children's activities to allow families to participate comfortably.

Consider how serving food and refreshments will assist with social connection, interaction and engagement with speakers. This might include offering finger food served by wait staff to encourage mingling in a crowd or providing a sit-down meal at tables for more in-depth conversations or brainstorming sessions. Choose healthy food options if feasible.



Above: Create a cozy corner for kids to read, create, and relax—it's their space to rebuild and feel safe too. Reading "Birdie and the Storm" Recovery Event at Birchip. (Credit: Buloke Shire Council)

Below: Kids grazing corner (Credit: Marnoo Cricket Club)



Give some thought to if and how alcohol is provided and what other drinks options are given. Ensure those serving alcohol are covered by a Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) licence and insurance.

Left: Music or entertainment can greatly assist social connection and bring a positive relaxing vibe. (Credit: Birchip Cropping Group)

Example of event run sheet

EVENT NAME:	CONTACT PERSON:
DATE:	PHONE:
LOCATION:	EMAIL:

Time	Activity	Responsible Person	Notes
1700	Set up venue	Anna	10 tables, each seats 8
1730	Test AV and microphones	Sam	Ensure presenter presentations work
1800	Caterers arrive	Caterer	
1830	Speakers arrive	Anna	Welcome and introduce to MC
1900	Guests arrive, collect drinks and mingle	All	Advise table seating arrangements, how are drinks served etc
1910-1920 (10 mins)	Official welcome	MC	Acknowledgement of country Housekeeping issues
1920-1950 (30 mins)	Serve first course	Caterers	30 minutes food service
1950-1955 (5 mins)	Intro first speaker	MC	Use bio provided
1955-2025 (30 mins)	Speaker presentation	Speaker 1	
2025-2035 (10 mins)	Q&A with speaker	MC	(Roving mic if needed)
2035	Serve dessert	Caterers	
2045-2050 (5 mins)	Introduce panel members	MC	Use bios provided
2050-2130 (40 mins)	Interview panel members	Panel	Dorothy Dixer question supplied
2130	Wrap up formalities	MC	- Thank sponsors and speakers and all support agency staff. - Ensure participants are aware of the follow up pathways for information and support. - Ensure participants are aware of the support resources available to take home. - Encourage further conversations with speakers, panel members and support agency staff.

Question 2.4

Who will MC the event?

Having an effective MC can elevate any event from a gathering to a group event with a clear purpose. The MC should be well-briefed on the event's goals, have good rapport with the audience, and the ability to confidently and enthusiastically connect the different elements of the event. Typically, a respected local producer or trusted farm advisor fills this role well.

It is the responsibility of the MC to keep each speaker to the time allocated. At the outset they should ask anyone not wishing to be in photos taken during the event to make themselves known to the photographer.

Simple housekeeping like letting people know where they will find the bathroom is also helpful. They should also thank sponsors and use positive language, appropriate humour, and briefly share relevant personal stories to help the audience relax and connect with the topics.



Photo: Sally Cunningham (NCFH) at an Igniting Resilience event. (Credit: Birchip Cropping Group)

TOP TIP!



Provide the MC with a clear event run-sheet (p.12) and briefing notes (p.17) and guidelines for guest speakers (p.18 & p.22) to ensure a good understanding of language 'dos and don'ts'. Introduce the MC to the guest speakers and any support workers in attendance prior to the start of the event to ensure they can redirect tricky questions if needed.

2

Question 2.5

Who would be the best guest speaker for your audience?

Lived experience and professional expertise each offer unique value when addressing mental health, particularly within farming communities. Guest speakers may have one or both. One is not necessarily "better" than the other. They serve different purposes and can complement each other. Here's a comparison of their strengths:

Health professional speakers:

1. **Expertise:** Mental health professionals provide evidence-based strategies, tools, and advice grounded in psychology, research, and clinical practice. Their training allows them to address mental health from a comprehensive perspective informed by evidence and best practice.
2. **Tailored interventions:** Professionals can assess individual needs and offer personalised evidence-based approaches, such as therapy, medication, or coping techniques.
3. **Holistic understanding:** While lived experience focuses on personal journeys, professionals can address mental health in a broader context, linking it to overall wellbeing, risk prevention, and long-term management.
4. **Access to resources:** Professionals can guide individuals toward further support, including counselling, crisis services, and community programs, which a peer may not be aware of.

Lived experience speakers:

1. **Relatability:** Personal stories of lived experience are deeply relatable, especially when shared by someone from the same community, such as a fellow farmer. Hearing about challenges similar to their own can make attendees feel understood and less isolated.
2. **Emotional connection:** Personal stories create an emotional bond, helping break down barriers by showing vulnerability and reducing stigma. Farmers may be more likely to open up after hearing about a peer's journey.
3. **Practical insights:** People who have gone through mental health struggles can offer real-world, hands-on guidance and positive, practical strategies that are relatable and applicable for peers.
4. **Hope and inspiration:** Personal stories can provide hope and inspiration by demonstrating that recovery is possible, even in challenging circumstances. This can be particularly powerful for those struggling in silence.



Photo: John Patterson from “Let’s Talk” speaking at Rokewood Community Mental Health Night (Credit: Hesse Rural Health)

Combining both types of speakers:

- ▶ **Balance of empathy and expertise:** Hearing from someone with lived experience can foster an emotional connection and normalise mental health struggles, while a professional can provide the practical tools and strategies needed for recovery and management.
- ▶ **Community trust and evidence-based help:** In a farming community, a speaker who has both lived experience and professional credentials may be especially effective, as they can combine trust from the community with evidence-based expertise and understanding.
- ▶ **Ensure that the speakers confer about their presentations** so that they are not repeating or undermining each other's message.



Photos: Provide time for Q&A as well as casual unstructured interaction following presentations (Credit: Loddon Plains Landcare Unbreakable Farmer Event and Molyullah Community Mental Health Night)



Above: Mary O'Brien from "Are you Bugged Mate?" at Indigo Shire Flood Recovery event (Credit: National Centre for Farmer Health)

Below: "The Unbreakable Farmer" at Girgarre Farmers' Day (Credit: Girgarre Community Group)



Do your homework

Not every health professional or person with lived experience of mental illness is a natural guest speaker. Check if they are good communicators and able to connect with a farming audience in a practical and relatable way. So, before you select a guest speaker for your event, do some research to ensure that they will be well suited to your audience. This could include:

- ▶ listening to them speak at other events, on podcasts, YouTube or in the media;
- ▶ following them on social media, or reading their blog or website;
- ▶ talking to event organisers where they have spoken previously;
- ▶ talking with them on the phone.

Do you think they would be a good fit for your audience? Will their story (and the way they tell it) help you realise the event objectives? Are they prepared to be flexible in the way they present their story so that your event objectives will be met? Will they follow the speaker guidelines provided?



Make sure you read the **SPEAKER GUIDELINES** provided on pages 18 and 22.



Photo: Farmer Health presentation at industry conference (Credit: National Centre for Farmer Health)

Brief your speakers well

Once speakers are chosen, provide briefing notes with key details like the event time, date, format, venue, other speakers, sponsors, and fees. Explain the event objectives and the time allocated for the presentation and questions. Include context on your target audience and your local community's strengths (e.g. very active sporting and social connections, productive farming, active volunteer network) and challenges (e.g. disaster, grief) to help the speaker connect with the audience. Request that they tailor language and humour accordingly.



Complete the **EVENT BRIEFING NOTES** on page 17 for speakers and MC.

TOP TIP!



How event organisers can use the guidelines for guest speakers

Read the guidelines then send to prospective speakers with the event briefing notes. This may be more important for lived experience speakers who are new to the public speaking role than to health professionals who may be familiar with this type of presentation (and who will use the guidelines more like a checklist).

Have a follow-up conversation with your guest speaker to ensure that they have read and understood the guidelines and event briefing notes and will tailor their presentation accordingly. Reassure your speakers that they do not need to answer any questions or share experiences that are beyond their comfort zone.



Case Study

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST DINNER DISCUSSION

A clinical psychologist with 40 years of experience in natural disaster recovery in Australia was a guest speaker at a community dinner. His topic was strategies for managing stress throughout the flood recovery process and included many farming examples relevant to the audience. The 50-minute presentation over a sit-down dinner led to 30 minutes of Q&A from the farming audience and countless hours of further conversations in that community. It was a positive, empathetic and practical approach to getting through a very difficult farming season.

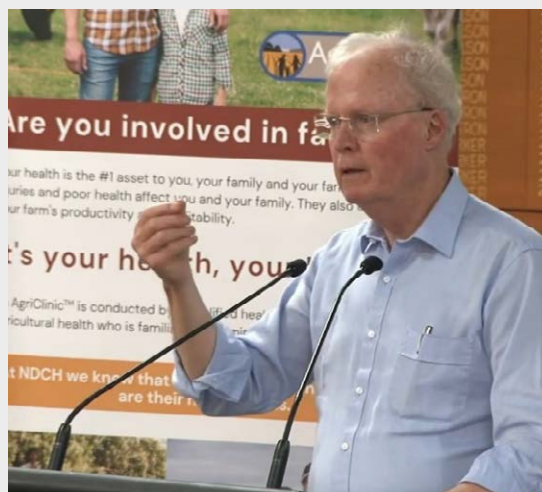


Photo: Dr Rob Gordon at Boort Flood Recovery Dinner (Credit: Loddon Shire)

EVENT DETAILS	
Event name	
Event date	
Time <i>Start and end time</i>	
Location <i>Include address details, parking instructions and venue layout if applicable</i>	
Event objectives/purpose:	1. 2. 3.
Event/primary contact: <i>Name and contact details</i>	
DEMOGRAPHICS	
Target audience	
Expected number of attendees	
Current local content / recent events in community impacting mental health	
ENGAGEMENT DETAILS	
Event run sheet	Please refer to event run sheet attached.
Arrival time	Please arrive by:
Meal/refreshments provided <i>Specify details regarding meals and refreshments (if any)</i>	
Accommodation Arrangements <i>Specify accommodation arrangements (if any)</i>	
Agreed payment/speaker costs <i>Specify details regarding payment arrangements (if applicable)</i>	
AV requirements <i>List AV and IT requirements that are available for event</i>	
Speakers, topics, bios and contact details <i>Please refer to the speaker guidelines for lived experience speakers and health professional guest speakers</i>	MC: Speaker/Panel details: 1. 2. 3.
Local support agencies in attendance <i>Name of organisation, contact details</i>	- - -
Other support agencies in attendance <i>Name of organisation, contact details</i>	- - -
Sponsors <i>List sponsors</i>	- - -



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
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HEALTH**

Guidelines for lived experience speakers sharing their story

These guidelines aim to ensure that individuals sharing personal stories do so in a way that is safe, respectful, and impactful. These guidelines help speakers deliver their stories effectively, while also respecting boundaries and protecting their own wellbeing.

Please send a copy to your proposed speakers.

WHY should I share?

Sharing a lived experience story about mental health, especially within the farming community, offers several benefits as outlined below.

1. **Reduces stigma:** Hearing real-life stories helps break down misconceptions and normalises conversations about mental health, making it easier for others to seek support.
2. **Encourages openness:** Farmers who share their experiences can inspire others in the community to open up about their struggles, promoting a culture of honesty and vulnerability.
3. **Fosters connection:** Personal stories create a sense of connection and solidarity, showing others that they are not alone in their challenges.
4. **Provides hope:** Seeing someone who has navigated mental health challenges can offer hope to others, reassuring them that recovery or management is possible.
5. **Increases awareness:** Lived experiences can shed light on the unique mental health challenges within the farming community, raising awareness about issues that may be overlooked or misunderstood.
6. **Builds trust:** When someone shares their personal journey, it can establish trust, especially in rural areas where farmers are often very private.
7. **Empowers others:** Sharing these stories can empower both the speaker and the listener, making it easier for others to reach out for help or support.
8. **Humanises mental health:** Lived experiences bring a human element to mental health discussions, moving away from abstract concepts and showing the real impact on individuals and families.

WHAT should I share?

1. **Personal challenges:** Share the specific mental health struggles faced, such as anxiety, depression, or stress, and how they related to life on the farm (e.g. financial pressure, isolation, or the unpredictability of farming).
2. **Triggers or stressors:** Talk about the factors that contributed to mental health challenges (e.g. weather conditions, market pressures, family expectations, or the long hours and isolation of farm work).
3. **Signs and symptoms:** Share the early signs that something was wrong, such as changes in mood, physical health, or behaviours like withdrawing from social events or feeling overwhelmed.
4. **How it affected daily life:** Explain how mental health challenges impacted your personal and professional life, including relationships, productivity on the farm, and overall well-being.

5. **Steps taken to get help:** Describe the actions taken to seek support, whether it was through counselling, reaching out to friends or family, or using community or professional resources.
6. **Coping strategies:** Highlight practical ways that helped in managing mental health, such as talking to others, mindfulness practices, physical activity, or setting boundaries around work and rest.
7. **Positive changes:** Share any improvements or positive changes that came from seeking help—better mental health, stronger relationships, more effective work habits, or feeling more in control of emotions and stress.
8. **Ongoing journey:** Mental health is often an ongoing process. Sharing the reality of ups and downs can make the story more authentic and reassuring, showing others that it's okay to have setbacks and continue working toward wellness.

What should I NOT share?

1. **Graphic or triggering details:** Avoid sharing overly graphic descriptions of distress, trauma, or harmful behaviours (such as suicide attempts or self-harm) that could trigger others. Instead, focus on the emotions and challenges without being too explicit.
2. **Names or identifying information:** Don't disclose the names of others involved (family members, colleagues, or health professionals) without their consent, especially in tight-knit farming communities where privacy is valued.
3. **Unsolicited advice:** While sharing your coping strategies is helpful, avoid framing them as the "only" solution. What works for one person might not work for everyone, and it's important to leave room for others to find their own path to healing.
4. **Overly negative or hopeless tone:** While it's important to be honest about your struggles, avoid presenting a story that feels completely hopeless. Balance the challenges with the positive steps taken to improve mental health or the lessons learned.
5. **Blaming others:** Avoid placing blame on specific people, systems, or circumstances for your mental health struggles. While it's okay to acknowledge contributing factors, focusing on blame can alienate or discourage others.
6. **Unverified medical information:** Sharing medical treatments, medications, or diagnoses should be done carefully. Avoid giving medical advice or suggesting that certain medications or therapies are universally effective or ineffective.
7. **Sensitive financial or personal details:** Sharing too much about personal finances or deeply private aspects of your life (like marital issues or family conflicts) can make the story uncomfortable for others to hear and might not be necessary for the message about mental health. Think about the impact your words may have on your family members.
8. **Minimising or dismissing others' struggles:** Be careful not to downplay the seriousness of others' mental health issues by saying things like "it wasn't that bad" or "just get over it". Everyone's journey is different, and what might seem minor to one person could be significant to another.
9. **Unrealistic expectations:** Avoid suggesting that recovery is quick or easy. Be mindful that mental health recovery is often a long and sometimes difficult process and setting unrealistic expectations could discourage others.
10. **Avoid criticising mental health professionals:** Be careful not to say things like, "I saw a counsellor, and they weren't helpful, so I didn't go back." Such statements can discourage others in the audience who may be considering seeing a counsellor or mental health professional for the first time, potentially disempowering them from seeking help.

How to care for the audience

1. Create a safe space

- ▶ **Acknowledge the sensitivity:** Begin by acknowledging that mental health discussions can be triggering and that it's okay for people to feel a range of emotions. Offer reassurance that it's a safe space to share or take care of oneself.
- ▶ **Offer options:** Let attendees know they are free to step out if they need a break or seek support, without judgment. Ensure there is a quiet area available if needed.

2. Mind language and details

- ▶ **Avoid graphic details:** While honesty is important, avoid going into explicit detail about self-harm, suicide attempts, or traumatic events, as this can cause distress and be harmful, not helpful.
- ▶ **Use person-first language:** Speak in a way that is respectful and empowering, avoiding labels or negative terms that can reinforce stigma. For example, say "person living with depression" instead of "that person is depressed".

3. Have support available

- ▶ **On-site support:** Arrange to have a mental health professional or support person present who can assist anyone who becomes distressed. Introduce them at the start of the event so attendees know who they are.
- ▶ **Provide resources:** Ensure you have contact information for local helplines or support services that attendees can access if they need further help after the talk.

4. Encourage self-care

- ▶ **Promote self-care:** Encourage people to be mindful of their own mental state during and after the talk. Suggest ways they can look after themselves, such as talking to someone they trust or engaging in a relaxing activity afterwards.

5. Be mindful of triggers

- ▶ **Trigger warnings:** Give people a heads-up before diving into particularly heavy topics so they can mentally prepare or decide if they'd prefer to disengage from that part of the conversation.
- ▶ **Stay grounded:** Keep the discussion balanced by integrating hope, recovery, and coping strategies, which can help attendees feel more empowered rather than overwhelmed.

6. Facilitate debriefing

- ▶ **Encourage discussion:** If appropriate, allow time for attendees to share their thoughts and feelings after the talk, either as a group or privately with a support person.



How to care for yourself as the speaker

1. Establish boundaries

- ▶ Take time to carefully consider what personal information you are comfortable sharing and what aspects of your life you prefer to keep private. This will help you protect your emotional space and maintain healthy relationships. **It's okay not to answer questions or share experiences or information that are outside of your comfort zone.**
- ▶ Ensure you schedule breaks between public engagements to allow yourself time to rest and recharge.

2. Prioritise ongoing self-care

- ▶ Maintain your regular self-care routine. This might be going for a walk before the event, writing in your journal or taking a hot shower. You will know what works best for you. Continue to do these important things to look after yourself.

3. Connect with your support systems

- ▶ Check in with your therapist, counsellor or trusted individual in your life. Having someone to talk to both before and after events can offer reassurance, helping you navigate any lingering feelings or triggers.

4. Prepare for emotional aftershocks

- ▶ It's normal to experience a mix of emotions in the days following an event. Be patient with yourself and seek support if these feelings become overwhelming.

Resources for speakers

▶ NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FARMER HEALTH

- Managing Stress on the Farm Booklet

<https://farmerhealth.org.au/managing-stress-book>

▶ MINDFRAME

- Self-care planning for sharing your lived and living experience publicly
- Preventing Burnout when sharing lived and living experiences publicly

<https://mindframe.org.au/our-stories-matter#self-care-and-burnout>



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NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
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Guidelines for health professional guest speakers

These guidelines are for a health professional working from a professional context rather than a personal context. They aim to ensure that these experts deliver information responsibly, ethically, and in a way that aligns with the audience's needs and expectations—empowering the audience without compromising professionalism or patient confidentiality. **Please send a copy to your proposed speakers.**

WHY should I share/present?

Having a mental health professional discuss mental health issues in a farming community offers several key benefits as outlined below.

1. **Expert guidance:** Mental health professionals provide evidence-based insights and tools that are grounded in research and best practices, which can help farmers better understand and manage their mental health.
2. **Tailored advice:** Professionals can address the unique challenges faced by farmers, such as isolation, financial stress, or the impact of environmental factors, offering relevant strategies for coping and resilience.
3. **Destigmatises mental health:** Having a professional openly discuss mental health helps break down stigma, showing that these issues are normal and can be openly discussed without judgment.
4. **Encourages proactive self-care:** Professionals often emphasise the importance of early intervention and self-care practices, empowering farmers to take proactive steps in maintaining their mental wellbeing.
5. **Increases awareness:** A mental health professional raises awareness of the specific mental health challenges in rural and farming communities, which may otherwise be overlooked, misunderstood or normalised.
6. **Provides access to resources:** Professionals can share information about local or specialised resources that farmers might not be aware of, connecting them to helpful services and support networks.
7. **Promotes a sense of community:** Listening to a mental health expert in a group setting fosters a collective understanding of shared challenges, building a sense of solidarity and encouraging open conversations among farmers.
8. **Improves coping strategies:** Mental health professionals offer practical tools and coping strategies that farmers can apply to their daily lives, helping them better manage stress, anxiety, or depression in the context of farming.
9. **Builds trust and reduces isolation:** Professionals can create a safe, non-judgmental space where farmers feel more comfortable talking about their experiences, helping to reduce the sense of isolation that is often prevalent in rural areas.
10. **Empowers future action:** Hearing from a mental health professional can inspire farmers to take the next step in their mental health journey, whether it's reaching out for help, talking to a peer, or adopting new wellness strategies.

WHAT should a professional share/present?

1. Understanding mental health

- ▶ **Basic information:** Explain what mental health is and the importance of maintaining it, including recognising the early signs of stress, anxiety, and depression, which are common in high-pressure professions like farming.
- ▶ **Common conditions:** Share information on mental health conditions relevant to farmers, such as burnout, anxiety, depression, and the impact of chronic stress.

2. Impact of farming on mental health

- ▶ **Unique challenges:** Highlight how farming-specific issues like financial uncertainty, isolation, long working hours, and the unpredictability of weather and markets can contribute to mental health struggles.
- ▶ **Statistics and research:** Share any research or data that demonstrates the mental health trends within rural and farming communities, helping to raise awareness about the prevalence of these issues.

3. Practical coping strategies

- ▶ **Stress management:** Offer practical, evidence-based strategies for managing stress, such as mindfulness techniques, relaxation exercises, time management, and setting healthy boundaries between work and personal life.
- ▶ **Self-care:** Discuss the importance of self-care for mental wellbeing, especially in an industry where work often takes priority over personal health.

4. When to seek help

- ▶ **Recognising the signs:** Explain when and why it's important to seek professional help, outlining the red flags that indicate mental health issues may require more support (e.g. persistent low mood, trouble sleeping, or feeling overwhelmed).
- ▶ **Local resources:** Provide information on where to find help, such as local counselling services, helplines, and online support. Mention professionals who understand the unique challenges of farming life, if available.

5. Normalising mental health support

- ▶ **Address stigma:** Acknowledge the stigma around mental health in farming communities and encourage openness, ensuring that farmers feel it's okay to reach out for support.
- ▶ **Success stories:** Share general examples of how seeking professional help has made a positive difference in other people's lives, without breaching confidentiality.

6. Treatment options

- ▶ **Therapeutic approaches:** Explain the different forms of treatment available, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), talk therapy, or medication, and how these can be tailored to individual needs.
- ▶ **Prevention and early intervention:** Stress the importance of addressing mental health concerns early before they escalate and offer strategies for preventing burnout and mental health decline.

7. Support systems

- ▶ **Encouraging peer support:** Professionals can discuss the value of peer support within farming communities, encouraging farmers to check in on each other and offer a listening ear.
- ▶ **Family and community involvement:** Talk about the role that family and community members can play in supporting someone who is struggling and provide tips on how to approach these conversations.

8. Confidentiality and trust

- ▶ **Building trust:** Reassure the audience about the confidentiality of mental health services, addressing concerns that might arise in smaller, tight-knit rural communities where privacy is often a worry.
- ▶ **Professional boundaries:** Clarify the role of mental health professionals and how they can help, emphasising that their work is confidential and focused on improving wellbeing.

Looking after your own self-care

As a mental health professional, practising good self-care includes being mindful of how certain discussions or events may affect you emotionally. It's important to acknowledge any triggers that arise during your work and take steps to address them.

- ▶ Speaking with your manager, supervisor, or a trusted colleague about emotions you felt during or after the event can play a healthy role in maintaining your own mental health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Actively practicing some of the strategies you may have spoken about in your talk. Such as getting a good night's rest, going for a walk, journaling or connecting with others.



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Question 2.6

Will there be a panel of locals discussing their own wellbeing strategies?

Selecting a panel of local community members to discuss their own wellbeing strategies can be a very powerful way to open a discussion about farmer mental health and wellbeing. This might be stand alone or in conjunction with a guest speaker. It requires careful preparation, including the right people and the right questions. Panel members need time to prepare answers to their allocated questions so they can be concise, on message and within safe boundaries. Panel members may wish to confer with each other prior to the event to avoid duplication.



Photo: Wide range of presenters at Girgarre and Stanhope Farmers Day. (Credit: Girgarre Community Group)

They will also benefit from reading the guidelines for lived experience speakers, especially regarding what to share, what NOT to share, use of language, caring for the audience and themselves.

Ensure that there is some diversity on the panel which reflects the diversity of your audience (for example, not just five grey-haired blokes who are neighbouring farmers in the same industry, when the audience is a mix of men and women from a wide age range and several industries).



Photo: Wimmera Mallee farmers reflecting on their wellbeing and decision-making strategies following a presentation by a lived experience speaker at the Ignite Resilience event for young farmers. (Credit: Birchip Cropping Group)

Question 2.7

Is there adequate budget/sponsorship to cover costs?

The expenses of staging a community event need careful consideration. Preparing a budget is a vitally important aspect of planning and will assist in identifying and attracting suitable sponsorship.

Seek local sponsorship where available. Businesses that are involved in agriculture and value their farming clients often like to sponsor such events too. These may include rural merchandise suppliers, banks, agricultural contracting companies, grower groups/networks, etc. State government departments associated with agriculture and local government authorities may also have grants available for community-building events—particularly when seasonal conditions are challenging.

A range of small grants programs—including those offered through government and philanthropic organisations—are also available to support community mental health events (e.g. Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR)). Health promotion organisations are also likely to be of assistance and may know of funding grants available. Plan well in advance when seeking funds—check application requirements, eligibility and submission dates carefully.

Consider seeking in-kind contributions if cash contributions are not possible (e.g. products or services that can be raffled to raise funds to support your event, secondary school hospitality students assisting with food service, local produce that can be prepared and served with a meal). If the event is designed to benefit the local community, try to support local businesses or use local service clubs where possible, especially with catering.



Ensure that you are clear on how sponsors will be represented at the event. Will they send employees to represent the organisation? If so, will they be given time to speak briefly? Will their logos or poster banners be on display? Do they require any evaluation of the event or reporting?

TOP TIP!



Any potential sponsor will want to see clear planning, so using the templates included in this booklet will help you to demonstrate that sponsoring this event will have value and reflect well on their business/organisation in the farming community.



Photo: Dairy farmer (Neville Hauffe) discussing his flood recovery strategies at Rochester RRT event. (Credit: National Centre for Farmer Health)



3

Section 3

Identifying and developing partnerships

- 3.1** Which support services will be invited or have resources available?
- 3.2** Who will promote this event in the community to ensure the right people attend?

RESOURCES

- ▶ NCFH resources and support contacts for mental health and wellbeing

Question 3.1

Which support services will be invited or have resources available?

Local support services

Organisers need to consider which local support services would add value to their event. There may be benefit in several types of support services attending. For example, financial or wellbeing counsellors from the Rural Financial Counselling Service, local community health service staff, and/or a local GP, psychologist or social worker. Avoid duplication of services, especially at smaller events.



TOP TIP!

Local health service providers may also be willing to contribute valuable input to the design of the event.

Consider how these support services/staff will be introduced and incorporated into the event. Will they have time to speak? What printed resources will they have available and how will these be distributed? As a minimum, consider providing information on where to find help locally when you need it—the services suggested will vary depending on your target audience.

3

TOP TIP!



People feel conspicuous collecting information brochures from a display table at an event focussed on mental health. Small show bags on every seat can be a better approach so reading material is taken home.

Other support services

Opportunities to involve other support services from outside the local area should also be considered, especially if they bring additional specialised support, information or resources that may not be available locally, or if they add to and complement local support services.



Consider what resources and information you want to have available and how they will be distributed or made available to participants.

National Centre for Farmer Health resources



Resources available from the National Centre for Farmer Health are listed on page 29. These are tailored to the needs of farming communities and are available online on our website:

<http://farmerhealth.org.au/support-hub>

Support contacts for mental health and wellbeing are also detailed on page 29. This includes crisis support and support for particular groups and issues.

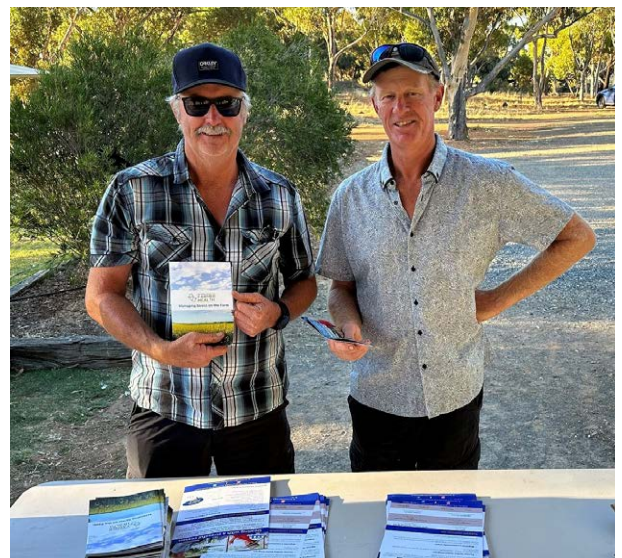


Photo: Distributing wellbeing resources at Donald farmers' post-harvest event. (Credit: Donald Scouts)



MANAGING STRESS ON THE FARM BOOKLET

Walks you through the common causes of stressors on farms, and offers practical ways to deal with them.

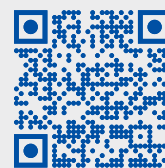


[farmerhealth.org.au/
managing-stress-book](https://farmerhealth.org.au/managing-stress-book)

FARMER HEALTH ASSESSMENT TOOL (HAT)

A free online tool to identify your health, wellbeing and safety risks and help you take action.

farmerhealth.org.au/farmerhat



FARMER WELLBEING TOOLKIT

Provides you with practical tools, information and support to enhance your wellbeing.

farmerhealth.org.au/farmer-wellbeing-toolkit



SUPPORT CONTACTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Crisis support services

If you or someone you know are in immediate danger - call 000 immediately

BEYOND BLUE

<https://beyondblue.org.au>

1300 224 636

Support for anxiety, depression and stress.

LIFELINE

<https://lifeline.org.au>

13 11 14

24/7 telephone service that offers confidential support and advice to help you deal with stress and personal challenges.

1800RESPECT

<https://1800respect.org.au>

1800 737 732

Sexual assault, domestic family violence counselling service.

13 YARN

<https://13yarn.org.au>

13 92 76

24/7 support for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. Confidential one on one yarning opportunity with a Lifeline Trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter.

SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE

<https://suicidecallbackservice.org.au>

1300 659 467

24/7 telephone and online counselling to people affected by suicide.

SUICIDE LINE

<https://suicideline.org.au>

1300 651 251

24/7 telehealth service that offers free professional phone and online counselling for people at risk of suicide and anyone experiencing mental health issues.

MEN'S LINE AUSTRALIA

<https://mensline.org.au>

1300 789 978

24/7 telephone and online counselling service offering support for Australian men anywhere, anytime.

HEAD TO HEALTH

<https://headtohealth.gov.au>

1800 595 212

Website that links Australians to online and phone mental health services, information and resources.

SUPPORT CONTACTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Sites for specific issues or groups

RURAL FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICE

<https://rfcsnetwork.com.au>

1300 771 741

Provides free and independent financial counselling to eligible **farmers, fishers, foresters and small related businesses** experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship.

TIACS (THIS IS A CONVERSATION STARTER)

<https://tiacs.org>

0488 846 988

TIACS is a free phone and text counselling service offering mental health support to Australia's blue-collar workers, including **farmers**.

RURAL AID

<https://www.ruralaid.org.au/services-provided>

1300 175 594

Counselling **on phone or on farm**, financial assistance, fodder, domestic water, farm army.

EMERGING MINDS

<https://emergingminds.com.au/families/natural-disasters>

Resources, fact sheets and podcasts about **children and young people's** mental health following natural disasters.

HEADSPACE

<https://headspace.org.au>

1800 650 890

Online and phone counselling service for **young people** aged 12-15 years.

KIDS HELPLINE

<https://kidshelpline.com.au>

1800 551 800

Free confidential 24/7 online and phone counselling service for children and **young people** aged 5 to 25.

PARENTLINE

<https://parentline.com.au/issues/coping-crisis-or-disaster>

1300 301 300

Free confidential online and phone counselling service for **parents with children**. 8am to 9pm, 7 days per week.

REACHOUT

<https://about.au.reachout.com>

Online mental health service for **young people and their parents**.

MEN'S REFERRAL SERVICE

<http://mrs.org.au>

1300 766 491

Counselling, information and referral service for **men who use violence and abuse** to change their behaviour. Available 24/7.

DIRECT LINE

<http://directline.org.au>

1800 888 236

Confidential **alcohol and drug** counselling and referral. Phone or online. 24/7.

GRIEFLINE

<https://griefline.org.au/resources/natural-disasters>

1300 845 745

Free telephone support and resources for those dealing with **grief and loss**.

WOMEN'S REFERRAL INFORMATION SERVICE

<https://wire.org.au/about/what-we-do>

1300 134 130

Victorian state-wide free support, information and referral service for Victorian women, non-binary and gender-diverse people.



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Question 3.2

Who will promote this event in the community to ensure the right people attend?

There are many avenues for promoting events in local farming communities. A short positive media article or social media post can be very effective in attracting your target audience. Include content in existing newsletters and on social media pages of other local organisations (e.g. sporting clubs, community pages/noticeboards). Sponsors will always help to promote an event by advertising in-store or through their client network or newsletter. Local and regional radio often have community announcements that can reach your farming community audience. Designing an appealing informative poster will also be useful.



3



Photo: Sponsorship from Agriculture related businesses can help you run a better event.
(Credit: Birchip Cropping Group)



4

Section 4 What next?

4.1 What follow-up is required after the event?

Question 4.1

What follow-up is required after the event?

In the days following a community event, there is still work to be done. This may include a short media article or social media post highlighting the main messages of the speaker and the reasons for the success of the event. Be sure to include local support contacts in follow-up communications as well.

Your generous sponsors will need some form of thanks or reporting and evaluation or financial acquittal. Even local businesses appreciate a letter of thanks or a certificate of appreciation for their contribution. It's also important to provide thanks and feedback to the speakers, checking in to see they are okay after sharing their story and taking questions. Similarly, thanking them for their attendance (including input in the event planning process) helps maintain a good ongoing relationship.

If you had left over resources following the event, think about how you could distribute these to wider community networks where they would be well used.



TOP TIP!

After the organising committee has had time to reflect, recover and gather feedback, they may wish to evaluate and consider planning a follow-up event. Some general evaluative criteria might include:

- ▶ Did the event fulfil its goals and objectives — why or why not?
- ▶ What worked well and what needs fine-tuning? Which stall holders should be invited to future events?
- ▶ Which items were missing on the checklist?
- ▶ Was the event well attended?
- ▶ Was informal and formal feedback about the event positive/negative?
- ▶ Given all that went into staging the event, was it worth it?



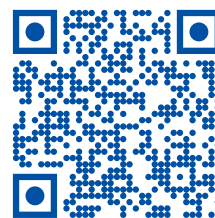
Photo: Patchewollock Music Festival (Credit: Patchewollock Music Festival)

[illegible]

Thank you for using our guidelines!

Thank you for choosing these guidelines to help plan your event. We hope they have been a valuable resource in organising an event in your local farming community with a mental health focus.

Your feedback is important to us! It helps us improve and ensure our resources continue to meet the needs of communities like yours. Please take a moment to provide us with your feedback.



farmerhealth.org.au/ninja-forms/83kqtq

We appreciate your time and dedication to supporting mental health in your farming community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NCFH wishes to acknowledge the contribution of the project Steering Committee members (and their organisations) who have collaborated to develop this guide.

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Find us on:     

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders past, present, and emerging.



Photo: FledIMAGE



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