



PRIMARY CARE PREPAREDNESS

DROUGHT

Drought conditions in Victoria and bordering regions of New South Wales have significant implications for community health, particularly in rural and regional areas. Primary healthcare services play a critical role in supporting individuals and communities during these times of environmental stress.

Primary health care providers and support staff can play a key role in:

Early detection and management of health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor and manage increased rates of respiratory illness, dehydration, and heat related conditions.• Address mental health concerns, such as stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide risk, which often rise during drought due to financial and emotional strain on farming communities.
Community education and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide public health information on staying hydrated, nutrition, hygiene and coping strategies for stress.• Promote awareness of government drought initiatives.
Integrated care and referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborate with mental health professionals, social workers and emergency relief providers to offer support.• Refer patients to specialised services where necessary ensuring continuity of care.
Outreach and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver mobile health clinics and telehealth services to isolated or underserved communities to provide support to the most vulnerable populations.• Ensure access to medications and medical supplies, particularly to areas which may have disrupted supplies.
Resources	<p>Primary healthcare plays an important role in managing the direct and indirect impacts of drought. By providing accessible community orientated care, primary healthcare services in Victoria and New South Wales can reduce health consequences of drought and strengthen resilience.</p> <p>National Centre for Farmer Health - supports primary producers through the delivery of initiatives to boost farmer mental health and wellbeing, including distribution of mental health resources and support information.</p> <p><u>Managing Stress on the Farm</u> book - explores the common causes of stressors on farms and offers practical ways to deal with them. It also includes the Steering Straight plan, to help individuals manage their mental health with practical, useful steps.</p>

	<p>Phone: (03) 5551 8533 Web: farmerhealth.org.au</p> <p>Rural Aid – Free, confidential counselling for registered farmers and their families. Rural Aid also provides critical support to farmers affected by natural disaster through financial, water, fodder and volunteer assistance. Phone: 1300 327 624 Email: contact@ruralaid.org.au Web: ruralaid.org.au</p> <p>Farmer Assistance Hotline – contact the farmer assistance hotline on 132 316 to obtain more information about Australian Government support services available to farmers and rural communities.</p> <p><i>Additional community groups and support service organisations include Aussie Hay Runners, Blaze Aid, Farm Angels, Need for Feed and Rotary.</i></p> <p><i>Farmers and communities may also be able to access additional funding and support through various programs.</i></p> <p>Visit Agriculture Victoria for more information: https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/drought-support</p> <p>For additional support services visit Murray PHN webpages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • After hours and urgent care
Keep up-to-date with alerts and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bureau of Meteorology • VicEmergency – Incidents and Warnings • Practice Management During a Disaster
Murray HealthPathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Community Support During Adversity • Disaster or Adverse Weather Event – Mental Health • General Practice Management During a Disaster
Update your emergency response documents	<p>Complete an Emergency Response Plan using a document such as the Emergency Response Planning Tool. If using a paper system, store a copy off site. This will not only help you to stay focused and respond under pressure but get your business back up and running more quickly.</p>
Ensure emergency contact details are current	<p>So that Murray PHN can assist in coordinating support with government agencies during an emergency, make sure to let us know who your emergency contacts are via your Quality Improvement Consultant or: primarycarerresponse@murrayphn.org.au</p>
Communicate service closures or impacts	<p>Use social media and other platforms. Prepare a message or email to patients using appointment confirmation system or Pen CS if needed.</p> <p>Use Pen CS and CAT Plus recipes to identify relevant patient groups and send an SMS message to those patients who have not opted out.</p> <p>You will need to set up your account and ensure you have enough credits in the system to send the messages.</p> <p>Inform Murray PHN of service closures or impacts: primarycarerresponse@murrayphn.org.au</p>

Plan staffing	<p>In the event of no or reduced access to your site or staff absences, consider alternate models of work, alternate sites and equipment needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are practitioners set up with ePrescribing so patients can obtain scripts immediately and remotely? Ensure paper scripts/prescribing pads are also available in the event that no internet is available. • Does the practice have an alternate contact number, or can you temporarily divert your practice number, so patients can call if the building is closed, and the phone system is inaccessible? • Can admin and clinical staff access your practice management and clinical software systems off site to facilitate remote models of care? • Ensure clinicians are able to create pathology and imaging requests if working remotely. • Have information available for VVED to share with patients.
Protect your data	<p>Ensure practice software is backed up, ideally to the cloud, to reduce the risk of data loss. Upload patient information to My Health Record.</p>
Join the emergency volunteer list	<p>If you have capacity to support in an emergency event, register your interest using this online form.</p>
Do emergency exercise training	<p>Undertake mock training incidents to ensure staff are competent and aware of their roles in the event of an emergency.</p>

Contact us

For more information or support email primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au

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