

Briefing for information

Primary industries and mental health

Date due to MO:	6 November 2024	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Reference:	H2024050987
To:	Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health and Associate Minister of Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand: ☒ Ministry for Primary Industries ☒		
Proactive release:	This title is proposed by the Ministry of Health for proactive release: ☒		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Michael Woodside	Group Manager, Mental Health, Addiction & Suicide Prevention, Strategy & Policy	s 9(2)(a)
Geoff Short	Deputy Director-General, Clinical, Community & Mental Health	

Minister's office to complete:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Noted | ☐ Seen |
| ☐ Needs change | ☐ Withdrawn |
| ☐ See Minister's Notes | ☐ Overtaken by events |

Comment:

Briefing for information

Primary industries and mental health

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Date: 6 November 2024

To: Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health and Associate Minister of Health

Purpose of report

1. This briefing provides follow up information on mental health needs, services, potential gaps and opportunities from a primary industries sector perspective, building on previous information provided about rural mental health [HNZ00058092].

Summary

2. Primary industry employees are primarily located in rural areas, and while experiencing many of the same mental health issues as other New Zealanders, they also experience specific stressors such as financial and regulatory pressures, adverse weather impacts, labour shortages, and isolation.
3. This briefing outlines the available services and supports for the primary industries sector. Given the overlap between those living and working rurally and the primary industry sector, barriers to access to services and support are similar. Including transport, internet access and reliability, uneven service availability, uncertainty about how to find services, and fears of stigma and discrimination.
4. Health New Zealand (Health NZ) and the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) are discussing ways to enhance local collaboration and awareness of available services and supports, working with such organisations as Federated Farmers, Rural Support Trusts, iwi, and local authorities. This could include piloting mental health promotion days in some areas, utilising such spaces as community halls, marae, or workplaces.
5. Sustainable funding is a challenge for many non-government organisations (NGOs), including Rural Support Trusts who provide wellbeing support for rural businesses. MPI notes that additional dedicated government funding may be needed for these Trusts.
6. Within the health sector, development of a mental health and wellbeing Pae Ora strategy presents an opportunity to consider rural mental health needs. Potential funding to support primary industries and rural communities may also be supported by the draft Suicide Prevention Action Plan for 2025–2029, which proposes expanding the suicide prevention community fund for populations with higher needs, including rural communities. The new Mental Health Innovation Fund could also potentially support some rural initiatives.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that the Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand, and the Ministry for Primary Industries will continue to work together to identify opportunities to meet the mental wellbeing needs for rural communities and those working in the primary industry sector
- b) **Note** there could be opportunities to partner with leading primary industries to promote mental wellbeing, and you may wish to discuss this further with the Minister for Rural Communities
- c) **Forward** a copy of this briefing to the Minister for Rural Communities for his information. **Yes/No**

Geoff Short
Deputy Director-General
Clinical, Community and Mental Health
Date:

Hon Matt Doocey
**Minister for Mental Health and Associate
Minister of Health**
Date:

Primary industries and mental health

Background

1. You have previously received a briefing and weekly report items outlining mental wellbeing services and supports available for rural communities [HNZ00058092 refers]. You also met with the Minister for Rural Communities on 28 August 2024.
2. At your Associate Health meeting with officials on 23 September 2024 you asked for further advice on mental health from a primary industries sector perspective, including issues and opportunities, to help inform next steps for supporting and promoting mental wellbeing.

Context

3. Around one in five people live in rural communities in New Zealand, and 360,000 people work in New Zealand's primary industries.¹ While some primary industry employees are in urban locations, most are rurally located, working in three main categories: farmers (pastoral, aquaculture, apiculture), growers (horticulture, forestry, cropping, viticulture), and fishers. Because of this overlap, statistics and insights on rural mental health help shed light on those working in the primary industries sector.
4. In rural areas, 8.5% of adults experience high/very high levels of psychological distress compared to 11.6% in urban areas. Hazardous drinking for those over 15 years old is 20.9%, compared to 17.6% in urban areas. Notably, suicide rates are 40% higher for men, 20% higher for women, and 20% higher for 15–24-year-olds than in urban areas.
5. The *Survey of Rural Decision Makers 2021* found 32% of people in the dairy or arable sectors, 25% of sheep and beef workers, and 21% of horticulture workers had poor mental wellbeing (possibly indicating an underlying mental health condition) based on WHO-5 criteria. Additionally, 18.7% in other livestock sectors and 18.3% in forestry were at risk.²
6. While many factors affecting the mental wellbeing of primary industry workers are in common with the rest of the population, the 2023 Scarlatti report³ noted specific work stressors including debt and interest payments, regulations and compliance, climate change impacts, labour shortages, isolation, and customer and social expectations.

Mental health and addiction services and supports

7. **Appendix A** (updated from HNZ00058092) outlines mental health and addiction services and supports available for rural communities funded by Health NZ and MPI.
8. Health NZ is responsible for funding and delivering primary and specialist mental health and addiction services, and some mental health promotion programmes. MPI supports people in primary industries and rural communities, such as through funding for Rural

¹ www.workforceinsights.govt.nz

² www.landcareresearch.co.nz/discover-our-research/environment/sustainable-society-and-policy/survey-of-rural-decision-makers/srdm-2021/information-sheet/

³ Primary Industry Wellbeing Action Plan: A business case for partnership (Jan 2023). Commissioned by MPI.

Support Trusts, advice and tools to support businesses, and On Farm Support's advice and resources for farmers and growers. Assistance with response and recovery following adverse events is also provided.

9. **Appendix B** outlines wider supports (from the Scarlatti report), including from primary industry bodies, other agencies (eg, ACC and Worksafe), regional councils, and non-government organisations. Further initiatives are likely funded through the Lottery Grants Board, philanthropy, gaming machine proceeds and whānau, hapū and iwi trusts.
10. Primary industry employees have access to services and resources available for the general public in rural communities as well as some supports tailored for these workers. A broad range of services and supports across a continuum (from equipping individuals and whānau within their own homes through to specialist services) is provided below.

Supports and services continuum	Types of support available for primary industry employees
Individual/family/neighbourhood support	• Digital mental wellbeing tools and websites • Informal support by family members, neighbours and friends • Local support groups
More formalised community/industry-based activity	• Training programmes specifically for primary industry employees • Basic training to respond to mental distress in others • Facilitator/connector roles to present workshops and link people to mental health resources • Suicide prevention initiatives in communities • Support for recovery from adverse weather events
Primary health system mental health and addiction services	• Counselling through telehealth • Counselling through employee assistance programmes • Counselling via ACC for sensitive claims and mental injury • Primary mental health and addiction services through general practices and NGOs
Specialist mental health and addiction services	• Specialist mental health and addiction services within hospitals and community settings

Accessibility and gaps in services and supports

11. No information is available on access specifically by primary industry employees to mental health and addiction services and supports, and access by rural people generally is also difficult to determine, (eg, the full extent of mobile outreach services is not known). The Ministry of Health is looking to explore further analysis of rural versus urban access to specialist mental health and addiction services, as a proxy for determining access to these services by primary industries employees.
12. However, it is clear that rural access to services and supports is often more difficult, eg, due to longer travel distances and poor internet connection. A recent study also found mental health hospitalisations are lower for residents of rural areas but the reasons were

not identified.⁴ In terms of initially reaching out for help, a 2022 study of barriers for rural young men in accessing mental health services found lack of awareness of where to seek help, stigma and feelings of shame, concerns about counselling inaccessibility, and costs.⁵

13. The range of services and supports have increased over recent years, for instance with more online and telehealth options since COVID-19, more Access and Choice primary mental health and addiction locations, and more mobile outreach. Recent investment includes funding for Farmstrong's *Getting Through* resources to deliver resilience building and wellbeing events, and the new Ka Ora out-of-hours rural telehealth service.
14. In relation to primary industries, the Scarlatti report (focused on prevention and early intervention rather than clinical level care) found that:
 - there is not consensus on whether the existing resources fulfil the needs of farmers, growers and fishers, and whether their needs are different to the general population
 - often when generic resources are delivered by primary industry people who use primary industry language, the resources become extra effective
 - funding for some programmes is not sustainable and providers are sometimes competing against each other rather than working together
 - the real challenge does not lie in providing the resources, but in ensuring they are the right resources and that they are widely used
 - while there is an array of resources and supports for farmers, growers and fishers, they are delivered unevenly across the country and in an uncoordinated way.

Opportunities to improve support

15. Many solutions to mental distress within primary industries and rural communities lie in addressing the root causes and determinants of health, including specific regulatory pressures and the need for climate change adaptation. That aside, health-focused opportunities lie in areas discussed further below.
16. Given the wide range of existing services and supports, much of the future focus likely needs to be on promoting what is already available; delivering in a way tailored to the needs of communities; ensuring sustainability of effective services; and joining up across government, industry, and community to deliver local responses.

Improved coordination and collaboration to promote services and supports

17. Health NZ's primary mental health and addiction service providers promote services in rural communities, including through connections to Heartlands Services. Health NZ's regional health promotion teams and MPI intend to work together to further promote wellbeing resources to rural communities and primary industry organisations. This will include promoting HNZ's rural wellbeing support page www.wellbeingsupport.health.nz/.

⁴ Nixon, G et al. Rural-urban variation in the utilisation of publicly funded healthcare services. NZ Medical Journal Vol 137, no. 1590, 23 Feb 2024

⁵ <https://www.farmersweekly.co.nz/people/the-state-of-mental-health-services-for-nzs-young-rural-men/>

18. For instance, Health NZ and MPI are discussing trialling mental health promotion days in a couple of communities, joining up with such organisations as Federated Farmers, Rural Support Trusts, iwi and local authorities. Spaces such as halls and marae (that act as hubs during emergencies) could be utilised, as well as workplaces.

Enhancing and sustaining mental wellbeing supports

19. Organisations including Federated Farmers, Rural Women and Young Farmers have called for a contestable fund to support existing, well-established organisations and projects, such as the Rural Support Trust, Farmstrong and Surfing for Farmers. Health NZ does not have specific resources it can apply to this, and MPI notes that any ongoing funding for initiatives would require additional dedicated government funding.
20. Within health sector funding, the outcome of tenders for the new Mental Health Innovation Fund will soon be known and these may include rural components. Also, the draft Suicide Prevention Action Plan for 2025–2029, which has recently finished public consultation, includes a proposed Health-led action to establish an expanded suicide prevention community fund from its current focus on Māori and Pacific community organisations to additional populations with higher needs, including rural communities, and therefore would be a new source of support.

Rural considerations within the mental health and wellbeing strategy

21. The recently passed Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) (Improving Mental Health Outcomes) Amendment Act 2024 requires the development of a mental health and wellbeing strategy. The strategy could provide an opportunity to acknowledge rural mental health needs, and an associated implementation plan could include related actions.

Equity

22. Rural communities have a higher proportion of Māori than urban populations, who experience various poorer health comes, and this is likely reflected in primary industries. Iwi Māori Partnership Boards have an important role in advancing wellbeing aspirations in rural communities. Iwi and marae-based responses to adverse events are important in mitigating impacts on farmers, growers and fishers.
23. Specific needs related to gender are supported within primary industries through resources that include male perspectives (eg, Farmstrong) and support for women (eg, Rural Women).

Next steps

24. The Ministry of Health is investigating further the extent to which specialist mental health and addiction access data can be analysed on a rural-urban basis. We will also be providing advice for you this month on development of the mental health and wellbeing strategy, including how it could reflect the needs of priority populations such as rural communities.
25. Health NZ will work with MPI on enhancing local collaboration and coordination around mental wellbeing, including the potential to pilot mental health promotion days in some rural areas. Further advice on this will be provided in due course.

26. You may wish to discuss further with the Minister for Rural Communities what opportunities there are to partner with primary industries to support employee mental wellbeing.

ENDS.

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

Appendix A: Health NZ and MPI mental wellbeing services and initiatives for rural communities

Build the social, cultural, environmental and economic foundations for mental wellbeing	Funding agency
Funding extension activities to help farmers farm sustainably which includes a focus on community-led solutions, including the development of environmental catchment groups.	MPI
Equip communities, whānau and individuals to look after their mental wellbeing	Funding agency
Digital mental wellbeing tools available nationally (where there is digital coverage) include: • Small Steps – a series of micro-tools to help maintain and regain wellbeing • Groov – an app to maintain and manage mental wellbeing by setting daily goals and tracking progress • Headstrong – Chatbot platform to support young people to maintain and regain mental wellbeing	Health NZ
Mental Health 101 and Addictions 101: training programmes to give people the confidence to recognise, relate and respond to people experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. These can be delivered virtually or face-to-face and there is a specific rural programme for rural communities.	Health NZ
The establishment of 32 rural community hubs that foster community connection and run local wellbeing initiatives. Rural Support Trust facilitators are trained to recognise signs of distress and/or stress, and to triage rural people with anxiety and/or depression in a caring, confidential and compassionate manner. They are also focused on the developing individual and community resilience through education.	MPI
Foster community-led solutions	Funding Agency
Suicide prevention funds targeted at grass roots solutions for communities at risk, including Māori, Pacific and Youth in Northland (as a specific COVID-19 response).	Health NZ – Hauora Māori Services Group
Funding to help primary industries recover from adverse medium- and large-scale events that affect rural communities, for example floods and droughts.	MPI
Expand primary mental wellbeing support in communities	Funding Agency
Primary mental health and addiction services are available across the country through the “Access and Choice” programme (www.wellbeingsupport.health.nz) giving communities access to: • Integrated primary mental health and addiction services accessed through local general practices • Youth specific primary mental health and addiction services • Kaupapa Māori primary mental health and addiction services • Pacific focused primary mental health and addiction services (in rural areas with high Pacific populations, e.g. Hawke’s Bay) The extent of rural coverage and outreach is to be confirmed.	Health NZ
National telehealth services enable people in rural communities to access phone, text and web-based counselling services including: • 1737 – which provides 24-hour access to a trained counsellor • Alcohol and Gambling Helplines	Health NZ

• Youthline Helpline	
School Based Health Services (SBHS) are nurse-led primary health care services for young people available in deciles 1–5 public secondary schools nationally (including schools in rural areas). A key component of these services is mental wellbeing supports for students.	Health NZ
Aoake te Rā, a national service for people bereaved by suicide now offers both online and face-to-face counselling services	HNZ – Hauora Māori Services Group
Strengthen specialist services	Funding Agency
Specialist services for mental health and addiction needs for people experiencing moderate-to-severe mental health concerns are available nationally with some regional variation. There is some provision of mobile outreach support and digital options for rural communities.	Health NZ

Appendix B: Additional information on mental health resources and supports (from the 'Scarlati' report)

Information resources

B+LNZ resilience resources	Provides a range of wellbeing and mental health resources such as videos, podcasts, pamphlets, and links to other providers. These can be found on the B+LNZ Knowledge Hub and 'Mental health support and resources available' article.
DairyNZ Farmer Wellbeing webpage	Provides stories, tips, information and podcasts on how farmers can look after their health so they can enjoy what they do and perform at their best.
Depression.org.nz	Details stories of people who have had mental health struggles, encourages people to reach out to others by providing them with ideas of how they could find support, and links to other organisations that support rural people.
Farmstrong	Promotes mental wellbeing stories, tools and programmes aimed at farmers, growers and rural communities to help them live well and farm well.
KYND wellness app	Measures employee health and wellness via a traffic light system, then provides the right tools to improve it, such as working with a clinician to obtain tailored, one-on-one plans for employees and organisations.
NZ Logger – Worker Wellness webpage(s)	Provides forestry workers with various wellbeing related articles applicable to them and their jobs.
Rural Employee Support Hub	Links out to existing services to provide people with easy access to help with their legal, employment, wellbeing, mental health, stress, nutrition, sleep and exercise needs.
Safetree – wellbeing webpage	Connects people to organisations that they can contact if they need help with their mental health and wellbeing.
Small Steps	Provides a series of micro-tools to help maintain and regain wellbeing.
Tools for the Top Paddock	Details New Zealand farmer Kane Briscoe's experiences that made him almost quit farming, along with the simple methods he used for dealing with the mental and physical strains of life on the land.
Triple P Online	Helps parents understand how to support their children and teenagers in coping with life's ups and downs and promote wellbeing.
Will to Live Game Changers	Shares videos about New Zealand farmers who have suffered from and beaten mental illness, sharing advice and encouraging others to speak up.
Worksafe – mental health page	Provides people with articles on how to be mentally healthy at work.

Support services

FirstMate	Supports the health and wellbeing of people across the commercial seafood sector through an 0800 line and support navigators.
Headstrong	Provides a chatbot platform to support young people to maintain and regain mental wellbeing
Heartlands Services	Provides people who live in rural Aotearoa with information and access to government services. Enables people to meet face-to-face, in their community with a government agency representative. Agencies involved include ACC, Kāinga Ora, Work and Income, and more.
National telehealth services (Lifeline, etc.)	Provide access to health information, advice and support from trained health professionals via phone calls or text messages.
Regional Councils' wellbeing initiatives	Provides rural people with regional based wellbeing initiatives. These initiatives vary between councils.

RuralChange	Delivers three private counselling / psychologist sessions to farmers that enables them to enhance and improve their health, happiness and wellbeing.
Rural Employee Support Hub Helpline	Enables rural employees to seek advice and support by speaking directly with someone or submitting an online query.
Rural Support Trust	Provides rural people with support to help them get through challenges in the form of networks, resources and training.
Safetree Toroawhi	Supports the forestry sector by giving workers a voice in the development of health, safety and wellness programmes. This is being supported in Taupo and Gisborne areas and led by the Forest Industry Safety Council.

Groups to join

Dairy Women's Network	Provides communities with informative and relevant knowledge to enhance themselves, their business and the dairy sector
Farming Mums NZ (online)	Encourages farming Mums to share their experiences, photos, questions and thoughts, allowing others in similar positions to help where they can.
Federated Farmers	Helps and supports members to build better businesses and represents their needs at local and national levels.
NZ Young Farmers	Connects, nurtures and empowers young people throughout rural communities by enabling them to develop leadership skills, network with like-minded people and make friends.
Rural Women NZ	Connects rural women and is an authoritative voice on health services, education, environment and social issues in the rural sector. Member groups across Aotearoa meet to network, create friendships, focus on education and facilitate training days and workshops.
Sector association groups	Allows people to join associations respective of the sector they work in. Sector associations allow farmers, growers and fishers to network with others in their sectors.
Surfing for Farmers	Enables farmers to connect and surf with each other. Available in 21 locations across Aotearoa.
Wairoa Farmers on Skis	Encourages farmers to take some time out and catch up with other local farmers whilst water skiing or wake boarding.

Assessment tools

B+LNZ's FarmSalus	Measures and monitors farm success through the lens of farmer health and wellbeing by encouraging wellbeing focused conversations.
DairyNZ's NZ Farmer Wellbeing Assessment Tool	Assesses farmers' wellbeing and explores whether the farm is negatively affecting farmers' wellbeing. There are length options, depending on how in-depth people would like the assessment to be.
Te Whare Tapa Wha check ins	Enables people to assess and reflect on their four dimensions of health. Though not normally pitched as a tool, the Te Whare Tapa Wha framework can be a useful wellbeing assessment tool.

Hon Mark Patterson

Minister for Rural Communities
Associate Minister of Agriculture
Associate Minister for Regional Development



MIN24-0493

Hon Nicola Grigg
Associate Minister of Agriculture (Horticulture)
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 June regarding the mental health of drought-affected farmers.

I would first like to acknowledge the impact the continued drought conditions are having on the mental health and wellbeing of farmers and local communities across New Zealand and specifically the Hurunui District.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) regional staff have been actively monitoring the situation and engaging with local farmers and groups to identify impacted areas and where support is required.

On 21 March 2024, following advice from MPI, Hon Todd McClay, Minister of Agriculture, expanded the adverse event classification for drought to include the Canterbury Region and provided \$20,000 in support to the North Canterbury Rural Support Trust.

We recognise the valuable role the Rural Supports Trusts play in rural communities and the additional demands they have been facing. We are also assisting Rural Support Trusts to provide more support to farmers and growers by boosting its core funding by \$250,000 to \$767,000 a year.

Towards the end of the 2014 to 2017 drought, the Hurunui Mayoral Fund was allocated \$125,000 to help farmers deal with drought conditions and recovery. We believe approximately \$40,000 was still available at the beginning of the current drought, which may be an avenue for extra funding.

The classification of a medium-scale adverse event also opens additional assistance options from other government departments, including Inland Revenue (IRD) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). Although this support is not directly tied to mental health it may provide some support to the added financial stress farmers and growers are experiencing due to the continued drought conditions.

IRD has opened the income equalisation scheme to farmers across the Canterbury region affected by drought. The income equalisation scheme allows farming, fishing, and forestry businesses to even out income fluctuations across multiple years by depositing money into a low-interest account for up to five years.

On a case-by-case basis for affected farmers, IRD also has options available for:

- suspending KiwiSaver contributions, or withdrawal due to hardship;
- Working for Families tax credits and child support entitlements or payments;
- removing interest that has been charged; and
- paying outstanding tax in instalments, or applications to write-off outstanding tax for serious hardship.

Farmers and growers impacted by drought can access assistance options available through IRD by discussing their situation with an accountant or contacting IRD directly.

MSD has requested the activation of Rural Assistance Payments (RAPs) for regions classified as a medium-scale adverse event. RAPs help farmers with essential living costs following adverse events, including drought.

Farmers who find it difficult to meet essential living costs, and where the farm is their main source of income, are eligible for RAPs. The following requirements must be met:

- household or combined income of less than \$160 a week (before tax). Income higher than this may still receive RAPs, but at a lower rate; and
- cash or off-farm assets less than \$1,338.90 for a single person, or \$2,230.96 for couples.

Payments are equivalent to the current Jobseeker Support benefit at the time of the event and are generally paid as a lump sum covering four weeks and can continue to be applied for this event until November 2024.

Thank you for bringing this issue to my attention. I look forward to continuing to advocate for our rural communities with you.

Yours sincerely,

Hon Mark Patterson
Minister for Rural Communities

cc. Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health