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Mental health outlook poorer for rural and remote Australians

Mental Health Australia has welcomed a new report, released by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, highlighting grave differences between the mental health outcomes of those living in rural and remote communities, and their city counterparts.

The report *Mental Health in Remote and Rural Communities* reveals suicide and self-harm rates are higher in remote and rural Australia than in major cities despite no difference in prevalence of mental illness in Australians based on where they live. Residents of very remote areas are twice as likely to die by suicide as city residents.

“All Australians should have the opportunity to access appropriate help and support for their mental health, no matter where they live,” said Mental Health Australia CEO, Frank Quinlan.

“This report demonstrates big differences in access to services based solely on where you live, and will help to identify what needs to change, and quickly,” said Mr Quinlan.

The research identified a range of factors contributing to different outcomes for those in the bush, including poor access to care, limited services, reluctance to seek help, concerns about stigma, distance and cost, and cultural barriers.

“The research makes the case for more mental health resources in the bush. The RFDS is grateful to Government for the support it provides, but more is needed,” said Royal Flying Doctor Service CEO, Martin Lavery.

The findings provide an opportunity to inform the development of evidence-based programs and services to improve the mental health outcomes for rural and remote Australians, when considered alongside data from other providers of mental health services.

“Thanks to research like this the gaps in outcomes are clear – put simply people in the bush are dying unnecessarily. Now we must respond, and improve the outcomes for the 960,000 Australians currently experiencing a mental illness in our rural and remote communities,” said Mr Quinlan.

The research

Read the full report at www.flyingdoctor.org.au/research

The research studied a snapshot of 2,567 country Australians flown by air from different parts of country Australia for emergency mental health care by the Royal Flying Doctor Service from July 2013 to June 2016. The research revealed:

- *Schizophrenic psychosis, depressive disorders, and drug psychosis were the three main reasons for RFDS transfers of people with mental disorders;*
- *61% of people transferred by the RFDS with mental disorders were male;*



- *The age range of people transferred by the RFDS with mental disorders was between four years and 85 years of age, with the mean age being 35-39 years.*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 1.2 times more likely to die from mental disorders than non-Indigenous people, and 1.7 times more likely to be hospitalised. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 12-24 years are three times as likely to be hospitalised with mental illness as non-Indigenous young people.*
- *Mental health disorders are associated with early death from other illness such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and avoidable injury.*

The research also outlines the thirteen specific mental health programs operated by the RFDS in the last financial year. These services range from visiting mental health clinics, 24 hour telehealth services, through to emergency air transfers of people requiring city based acute care.

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