



Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership Drought Research Report



2007

Developed by Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership

Participant Acknowledgements

Thank you to all agencies that took part in the drought mapping project

Central Highlands PCP Member agencies

Ballan and District Health and Care

Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative

Ballarat and District Division of General Practice

Ballarat Community Health Centre

Ballarat District Nursing and Health Care

Ballarat Health Services

Ballarat Hospice Care Inc.

Centacare

Central Highlands Division of General Practice

Central Highlands Sports Assembly

Child and Family Services

City of Ballarat

Department of Human Services

Department of Veterans Affairs

Djerriwarrh Health Services

Glastonbury Child and Family Services

Golden Plains Shire Council

Grampians Integrated Cancer Service

Hepburn Health Services

Hepburn Shire Council

Hesse Rural Health Service

Karden Disability Support Foundation

McCallum Disability Service

PINARC

Moorabool Shire Council

Salvation Army Karinya

St John of God Healthcare

UnitingCare

University of Ballarat

Vision Australia Foundation

Women's Health Grampians

Non Member Agencies

Centerlink

Department for Victorian Communities

(now Department of Planning and Community Development)

Rural Financial Counsellors

Relationships Australia

Community Members

Country Women's Association

Department of Primary Industries

Special Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Patty Kinnersly CEO of Women's Health Grampians and Tracey Wilson Manager Population Health & Strategic Planning, Ballarat Health Services, for your involvement in the development and review of the Drought Mapping Survey and report.

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Please note a copy of the compiled surveys results is available upon request.
Please call 5339 4207 or email: staceyn@chpcp.org

CHPCP Drought Mapping Report

Executive Summary

This research project has demonstrated that the drought is having significant impact on rural communities within the Central Highlands Region. Survey's with Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership (CHPCP) member agencies and a number of other key stakeholders (n=40) were conducted across the Central Highlands Region to ascertain the effect of the drought on service providers as well as on those communities that access those services.

The research has clearly indicated that communities are being affected by the drought and this will continue for a significant period of time after the drought breaks. This is further supported by previous research that indicates the implications on health and wellbeing of rural communities in drought. Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership has supported a number of community events and training opportunities that have been successful in the community.

Background

Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership (CHPCP) is an alliance of 31 member agencies working in a variety of fields including health, welfare, government, disability and education. CHPCP covers the four local government areas of Moorabool, Golden Plains, Hepburn and City of Ballarat with all of these local governments (LGA) currently experiencing a prolonged and prolific drought. As a result of this the state government Department of Human Services provided funding under the 'Tackling Mental Health' drought initiatives to PCP's. The funding provided five thousand dollars to non-exceptional circumstances declared (EC) Local Government areas. At the time of funding allocation all Central Highlands Local Government Area's were non-EC declared so Central Highlands PCP received five thousand per Local Government area totalling twenty thousand dollars. Following the announcement all Local Government areas in CHPCP were EC declared but were no further funds were available at that time. Funding was also provided to run Mental Health First Aid Courses which occurred in each LGA during April-June 07

Central Highlands PCP funded a drought mapping project as it was identified by the Full Alliance Committee that there was a work occurring across the Central Highlands region in response to drought but this was not coordinated creating confusion on available initiatives and where to access information.

This project has identified drought related support services on an Australia wide, statewide and regional basis. This was accomplished by asking member agencies to complete a survey and by researching initiatives that are occurring. The survey was also completed with other relevant non-member agencies such as rural financial counsellors, Centrelink, Department of Planning and Community Development (Formerly Department of Victorian Communities) and other organisations as listed in the acknowledgements. This will enable service providers to understand the effects the drought is having on the people that are experiencing it, as well as the impact on service providers. This report gives an overview of the responses to the drought in the CHPCP catchment.

The information from the drought mapping exercise will be utilised by Central Highlands PCP to support the further use of drought related funding and community needs.

Apart from documenting the services that are offered within the region the surveys also asked the responders to give qualitative evidence of the affects of the drought. Many respondents stated that clients and friends were experiencing difficulty which can be directly attributed to the drought. The financial strains of the drought are becoming more prevalent, although the mental health impacts interestingly are not. Many reported that this could be because at the moment although people are suffering from instances of depression they do not actively seek help. People are just trying to survive and hoping for the drought to break. Previous research (Blau,G. 2006: 6) indicates that drought has adverse affects on the physical and mental health of individuals which further reduces the health and wellbeing of families and consequently the health of rural communities. Living in continuous drought will increase stressors such as money, work, home, family and friends. The stressors in this instance are known as determinants of health and have a direct affect on a person' state of health and wellbeing. This report explores the current impacts the drought is having in rural communities within the Central Highlands Region and gives recommendations to address these.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this drought mapping process were to:

- Establish the effects the drought is having on service providers.
- Establish the effects the drought is having on rural communities.
- To develop a drought specific resource that agencies/community members could use as a single point of reference in the Central Highlands Region.
- To contribute to the evidence base specifically in drought related evidence.

Research Methodology

The information that informs this research was gathered through a survey. The survey was developed by a small working party specifically for the drought mapping process. Respondents included men and women and were targeted based on their involvement in the Primary Care Partnership and were representatives from a variety of agencies including: Disability, Health, Welfare, Local and State Government, community members and so forth. The data was collected in a variety of ways via email, by telephone and in face to face interviews the method used to collect the information depended on the participants preference and as such there is no set pattern. Other non member agencies were also asked to complete the survey based in their involvement in drought related issues.

Data Analysis

The methodology used to analyse the data was qualitative thematic analysis. The method identifies all data that relates to already classified patterns this was completed for each question individually in this instance. Responses were classified into sub themes that show the emergence of common responses or patterns. This brings together fragmented responses which may be meaningless when viewed alone but when grouped together show a "common theme" (Aronson: 1994, 1)

N.B.

1. A copy of the survey, which included 7 questions attached in appendices.
2. Please note a list of participant acknowledgements at the beginning of the document.

Results

Common Themes

Some common themes that were uncovered in data analysis:

- The elderly were specifically identified as sustaining injuries by carting buckets of water to try and keep their gardens alive, there was also an added psychological impact encompassed here with leisure time being reduced and not being able to keep gardens alive.
- There is increased strain on relationships and increased instances of depression, which is affecting family dynamics. This is further enhanced with the stoic nature of farmers who do not want to discuss their issues.
- Although services are seeing people who they believe are suffering from depression and relationship issues, people are not accessing services to specifically address these issues. The priority at the moment is to access financial support and advice.
- Transport has become an issue in rural settings with strained finances and the costs of petrol increasing.
- People often leave applications for financial assistance until they are in dire need and forms can take a few weeks to process.
- The drought is not over yet and even though we have had some rain farmers and farming communities will take years before they recover from the impacts
- A common intervention to address the drought issues has been to hold community events, linked to agriculture with health and welfare information available at the event. These have been reasonably successful within local communities.
- Sporting clubs have had significant difficulty in maintenance of their grounds and facilities without water. This has had significant impacts on club financial viability and their capacity to provide sporting and social opportunities in their communities.
- There is a limited perception within some agencies as to which services they offer that support drought affected communities. Sometimes viewed as specialist area.
- Increased staff workloads to cope with increased service demands in some agencies.
- The main forms of communication to the public and to other agencies around the services offered included networks, meetings, paper resources such as brochures, media although this was less common, attendance at community meetings and through the internet on agency websites.
- Employment in the agriculture and related industries are decreasing.
- Successful succession farming is becoming a challenge as farmers have increasing debts and often using their savings in order to stay viable.
- Throughout the survey there were several agencies that did not respond to questions.

Impacts on Service Providers

Drought Specific

- Drought counsellors have not been well utilised. It is believed that the community and service providers are unaware of the eligibility criteria for this service.

- In contrast, there has been a significant increase in demand in rural financial counselling services within the Central Highlands catchment and across the state.

Local Government

- There are differing focuses occur across the Local Governments in CHPCP with some have a health and welfare focus within the community, Others have water/economic impacts.
- Limited capacity to take on increased service provision.
- The way Local Government is addressing drought is unique to the needs of the community and so it is not consistent across the region.
- There needs to be further coordination across government departments in their response to the drought and the potential for CHPCP to assist this process.

Welfare

- There have been increased relationship issues attributed to the drought
- There was no increase in incidence of family violence that was attributed to the drought in this survey.

State Government

Department of Human Services

Have developed Drought Coordinator Positions in the regions, including a Drought Primary Health Coordinator position located centrally. DHS have also provided resources to PCP's in "Tackling Mental Health", additional counsellors in regional areas, with more funding to be allocated in the future.

Department of Victorian Communities (now Department of Planning and Community Development)

There have been a number of grants available for local sporting clubs and swimming pools to conduct projects for sustainable approaches to water, these are applied for through local government. There have been 5 Rural Women in Drought and Climate Change Workers employed in rural regions across the state. In the Grampians the Rural Women in Drought and Climate Change Worker has had a focus on the western end of the region.

Department of Primary Industries

Have been printing a newsletter called "The Break" for farmers, which provides one on one advice for farmers in the most drought affected areas also provide information for feeding stock in drought affected areas, and providing helpful farm information around the drought about water quality, weed control and so forth on properties in drought.

Department of Sustainability and Environment

Have a sustainability focus with regards to the drought as well as securing water supplies in Victoria. The Department has assistance packages for rural water users who are receiving less than 50% of their allocation. Provide a groundwater inquiry line for rural land holders to enquire about the availability of groundwater for stock and domestic purposes. They have also provided a drought employment program, those who are affected by drought are eligible for short term paid work via their catchment management authority.

Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government is supporting drought affected farmers, agriculture reliant businesses through income support, interest rate subsidies and free counselling services. The Commonwealth Government fund Centrelink to provide services such as Rural Service Officers which help farmers to access financial assistance, Social Workers to assist with mental health issues. Other services offered include drought force, drought buses which travel around to rural communities, assistance for small businesses and assistance for industry and irrigators.

Other Issues identified:

There are many other issues that have not come out as a theme from this process, which cannot be discounted. These include:

- Movement and subsequent damage to buildings because of foundations being moved and the inability to claim under insurance as it is classed as a maintenance issue.
- The drought has impacted on road works with the inability to grade gravel roads unless there has been rain.
- There have been some businesses that have found the drought to increase workloads such as abattoir, and tank businesses plumbers and others.
- Businesses that have previously had no need to access welfare eg. spraying businesses do not know where to start to get help.
- Recognition of the need for maintaining resources for positions, such as Drought Counsellors, Rural Service Officers and Rural Financial counsellors.
- The survey was not able to encompass the effects on small businesses due to the time and resource restraints on the project.
- That there is no coordinated point of reference for drought related work, with specific programs being established by government but these are unable to address a range of needs because of their specific nature.
- Responses to the survey did not always identify the range of services that are provided by an agency.

There are many aspects of small communities that are affected by drought these include psychological, financial, relationships and it is important to remember that these will continue to impact post drought.

Discussion:

The research has indicated that agencies identifying the drought as having a significant impact on service provision were primarily rural service providers. This could be attributed to a number of factors.

- There were a number of agencies that identified the drought was having little to no impact on their service provision at this stage and these were largely based within the City of Ballarat further detail is provided below.
- The size and capacity of rural organisations to respond to drought is limited.
- The variance in demographics in Local Government Areas eg in City of Ballarat minimal large land holders, primarily these are in outlying areas and so will be more likely to access services in their local area and reside in a different LGA.
- Primarily drought resources are located in Ballarat such as the drought counsellors, Rural Financial counsellors and Centrelink although all of these services do visit the homes of clients`. Those wishing to access the services may not be aware that home visits are available.

- Some Farmers are in debt for the first time for the day to day running costs of the farm.
- The nature of organisations in Ballarat that took part in the research may not be perceived by the public as providing services to assist in drought.

Research conducted (Blau, G. 2006) indicates that in order for initiatives that deal with drought impacts to be successful there needs to be a level of community trust in the agencies and/or people that are undertaking the initiatives. Communities experiencing drought over prolonged periods of time have differing needs at different times it is imperative when planning events in drought affected communities that you are aware of the current needs of the community. What was appropriate 2 years ago may not be appropriate now.

Recommendations

The following provides recommendations for follow up by CHPCP.

Recommendation 1: That funding for drought specific counselling services continue after the drought has broken.

Proposed Action: CHPCP will provide an avenue for advocacy to State and other governments in order to maintain the stability of resources and ensure the ongoing sustainability of funding.

Recommendation 2: That the specific requirements for drought related services are well advertised in all areas.

Proposed Action: CHPCP inform member agencies of this recommendation and offer to review drafts. Information can also be included in CHPCP newsletter.

Recommendation 3: That agencies increase the promotion of services that may not be drought specific but can still be utilised by those suffering the effects of the drought.

Proposed Action: Letters to be sent to member agencies. Promotion of services in CHPCP newsletter and discussion at Full Alliance and CHPCP committees.

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Recommendation 4: That a similar project be completed with small businesses and other organisations to determine the impact the drought has had on these industries.

Proposed Action: A letter be sent to relevant business representative bodies advising of issues for business identified in mapping exercise. Ensure these organisations are aware of opportunities and links for future mental health training.

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Recommendation 5: That there is increased communication and coordination across sectors in the Central Highlands Region to ensure a coordinated and sustainable drought responses.

Proposed Action: That CHPCP hold a drought forum to inform member and non member agencies of drought initiatives, and foster partnerships in drought initiatives across CHPCP region.

Recommendation 6: CHPCP provide a point of contact for CHPCP member agencies and others to gain information on drought initiatives and services available.

Proposed Action: Drought Support Resource widely distributed. Include information in CHPCP newsletter. CHPCP staff to develop further links to LGA drought committees.

Recommendation 7: That information regarding injuries to the older community members in bucketing recycled water and garden sustainability is provided to local government.

Proposed Action: Education campaign such as “Defying the Dust” provided to Local Government and other agencies as requested. Follow up local government regarding water saving initiatives planned.

Recommendation 8: CHPCP develop a proposal for expenditure of drought related funding and mental health education and training options.

Proposed Action: CHPCP health promotion officer to draft proposal for expenditure.

Recommendation 9: CHPCP develop a proposal for expenditure of drought related funding and mental health education and training options.

Proposed Action: CHPCP provide a resource of drought related funding and training options

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Conclusions:

In conclusion, the findings of this research are further corroborated by previous research indicating that the drought has adverse affects on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and consequently rural communities. Community development initiatives used in recovery of disasters such as flooding, bushfires and drought are proven to be successful.

The findings of this report indicate that the drought is impacting on the health and wellbeing of rural communities across the Central Highlands Region.

Currently the main priority for families has been to seek financial assistance to ensure viability for their family. It is hypothesised that many people are suffering from instances of depression, stress and mental health issues; this cannot be corroborated, as these people are not actively seeking assistance for these issues.

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Relevant Reading

Critical Breaking Point?- A report for the Birchip Cropping Group Prepared by Lauren Rickards June 2007-10-08

Health Impact Assessment of the Drought Social Recovery Strategy in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region by Mary Mahoney and Grace Blau - September 2006

Countering Drought Manual of Creative Community Solutions by Grace Blau December 2006

Appendices

Appendix 1-Drought Mapping Survey

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS PRIMARY CARE PARTNERSHIP

DROUGHT - MAPPING EXERCISE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MEMBER AGENCIES

BACKGROUND

The current prolonged drought has had a range of impacts upon individuals, families, businesses, and communities. The long-term affect will be widespread and the recovery period will be lengthy. Most local organisations have noted a change in service needs and as such are altering their response in an attempt to offset the impact of the drought.

My name is Stacey Newman and my role at the Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership (CHPCP) is Health Promotion Officer. I am undertaking a drought-mapping exercise on behalf of the CHPCP across our catchment to identify the services and supports available and to gain a snapshot of how the drought has impacted upon services and their delivery in real terms. At the conclusion of this exercise the information will be collated into a resource for the Central Highlands region in response to the impact of the drought. The resource will be made available to member agencies to assist in their work. Throughout the process other questions will also be raised which will add dimension to our understanding of the drought issue for our PCP. This may include how the drought has affected services and their delivery; whether there have been any identified gaps to be addressed; and other anecdotal examples of the drought's impact.

PROCESS FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION

My approach to the “information gathering phase” is to meet with State and local government departments. This process is already underway. In the second phase, I will be contacting key representatives from member and non-member agencies across the CHPCP catchment.

To accelerate the second phase of this process the following steps will need to occur:

1. All CHPCP member agencies will receive a list of questions that will form the basis of their agency’s response to be included in the resource document. It is important that these questions reach the range of individuals within your organisation that can together give the best collective response.
2. If your agency could advise me as soon as possible via phone on 03 5339 4207 or e-mail to stacey@chpcp.org as to who your delegated representative/s will be and their contact details.
3. Contact with your agency representatives will be made to schedule an appointment to discuss the questions via a telephone interview, or if preferred to return via email or fax.

Please complete the following:

Agency Name:

Program/Department of respondent:

Role / Title of respondent:

Contact details Phone:

E-mail:

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Please consider the following from your agency’s perspective:

1. What impact has the drought had on your current services and / or service delivery (Eg. reallocation of resources to focus on drought-related issues; changes to internal procedures; impact on staff)

2. What specific drought support and/or services does your agency offer (Eg. financial counselling; emergency relief; counselling services)?
3. How does your agency promote the availability of, and referrals to, these services?
 - To other agencies?
 - To the general public?
4. In what ways has the drought impacted on the individuals that access your services (Eg. financial strain; increase in relationship issues; depression)?
5. Is there anything else that your agency could be doing (Eg. different/extra services; staff training; strengthening networks with other key agencies; community development)?
6. Are the drought responses occurring in your sector effective or adequate? What are the gaps? Do you have any suggestions
 - within your agency context?
 - across the Central Highlands?
7. Do you have any other anecdotal examples of how the drought is impacting, or additional comments?

Thank you for taking the time to consider the impact of drought on our communities.

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