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Addressing rural depression

The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHĀNZ) applauds the announcement of a \$500,000 funding boost to support mental health initiatives for rural communities.

"RHĀNZ members have for a long time identified mental health and wellbeing outcomes as one of the major disparities between people in rural and urban communities" says RHĀNZ chairperson, Dr Jo Scott-Jones.

"This funding offers an opportunity to significantly improve access to services through national and regional initiatives.

"RHĀNZ has been advocating for a similar level of focus to address depression and mental health issues as is given to combatting health and safety issues in the rural sector, and this funding is a great response."

Michelle Thompson, Chief Executive of RHĀNZ, said it was reassuring to see the Ministry of Health and the Primary Industries Minister collaborating on these issues.

"A joined up approach between the policy makers, the health providers and the rural communities will be the ultimate success factor of these initiatives.

"We know periods of reduced farm income, increased stress from the environment and drought cause spikes in mental health problems for people living in rural areas. We also know mental health is a major issue affecting the workload of rural health services. We need people to come in and talk through issues at an early stage rather than waiting until everything collapses and there is a crisis. Having said this, we are also acutely aware of the health workforce shortages in rural communities.

"The solutions lie in training and education, along with service development. It is essential that people are aware and can see the signs of pressure and to know when to seek help. We need to build community resilience, and enable appropriate access to high quality health services within rural communities," she said.

"RHĀNZ members will be excited to see how this moves forward and welcome the opportunity to be involved - there is a sense of urgency about this in the sector and we are all ready to start working on solutions," Dr Scott-Jones said.

For more information contact Dr Jo Scott-Jones 027 475 0488

Note to Editors:

The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand was established in May 2012 and represents a united voice from across multiple rural sector organisations. Its aim is to provide solutions and influence policy affecting the health and wellbeing of rural communities www.rhaanz.org.nz.

Current members: <http://www.rhaanz.org.nz/membership/current-members/>

Several new members have been signed up this week. Announcements coming.