

## **Rural health fronting suicide prevention training all over NZ**

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A national rural organisation is concerned the public may believe nothing is happening in suicide prevention training.

Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHAANZ) says this is just not the case. RHAANZ chair Dr Martin London says RHAANZ and Pasifika community support Le Va are two organisations that have been specifically funded by the Ministry of Health to upskill community groups and health professionals in suicide prevention strategies.

“Our focus is to upskill our rural health professionals and social service workers. We would also like to pay a little kudos to the Ministry of Health.

“In the last year, [RHAANZ](#) provided 50 workshops across regional communities upskilling them in how to talk directly about suicide with people they love and care for. The workshops were a resounding success.

“Feedback from many of the 1300 participants asked for more training and more information about how to provide clinical care for people experiencing mental health crises who could be at risk of suicide.

“In response to this evidence, the Ministry of Health funded RHAANZ to develop and deliver a new advanced workshop, targeting primary and community health and social service professionals, particularly in rural areas where there is often a delay in accessing specialist emergency responses.

“In April this year, after much hard work and the combined efforts and skills of mental health and addiction, primary care, community members, and RHAANZ members, our new workshop, *Safe Hands, Safe Plans*, was ready to roll out.”

Between April and June this year, RHAANZ ran 11 *Safe Hands, Safe Plans* workshops; 251 people participated including 127 nurses and 16 doctors. London says he has been surprised to hear most participants say they had no prior training in this area.

“Through the Ministry of Health over the next year, we will be offering 20 more *Safe Hands Safe Plans* workshops in regional and rural New Zealand free of charge.

“We are also working closely with [Le Va](#) in their development of the national suicide prevention workshops - *LifeKeepers*. Together, we have ensured that these two new workshops complement each other and meet the needs of specific community groups and clinicians.

“Improving rural wellbeing is one of our 5 priorities. We know that healthy and socially connected communities are more productive, more profitable and more sustainable. And they are better able to deal with the extra stressors of isolation and adverse events as well as personal problems.

“Helping to ensure our rural communities know how to look after themselves and each another is important, as is ensuring our rural health and social service professionals are ready to respond when people signal they need help. Both of these activities are overarching goals of our [framework](#) to

*improve mental health and addiction outcomes for rural New Zealanders. Suicide prevention awareness training is an important component of all our work,” London says.*

**For more information contact RHAANZ** chair Dr Martin London on 027 4641191 or Make Lemonade editor-in-chief Kip Brook on 0275 030188.

**Photo:** RHAANZ chair Martin London