

Rural Health and Research Congress

#RHRC2019

Discussion: The role of rural health teams in addressing drought

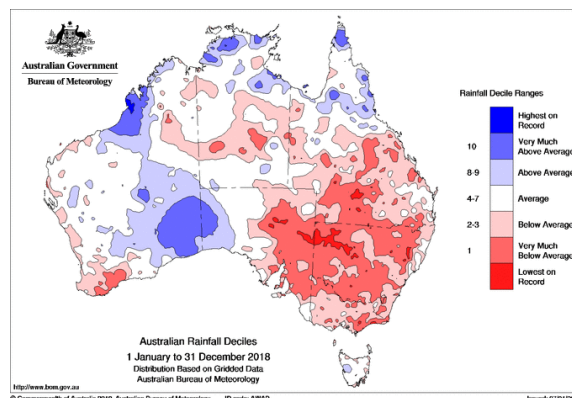
Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP Rural



1

Drought in Australia

- *Recurring disaster*
- *Eastern states most affected*
- *2018 third hottest year on record*
- *Long term, more indirect health implications*
- *GPs and rural health teams on the frontline*



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2

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Mental health the top issue for patients



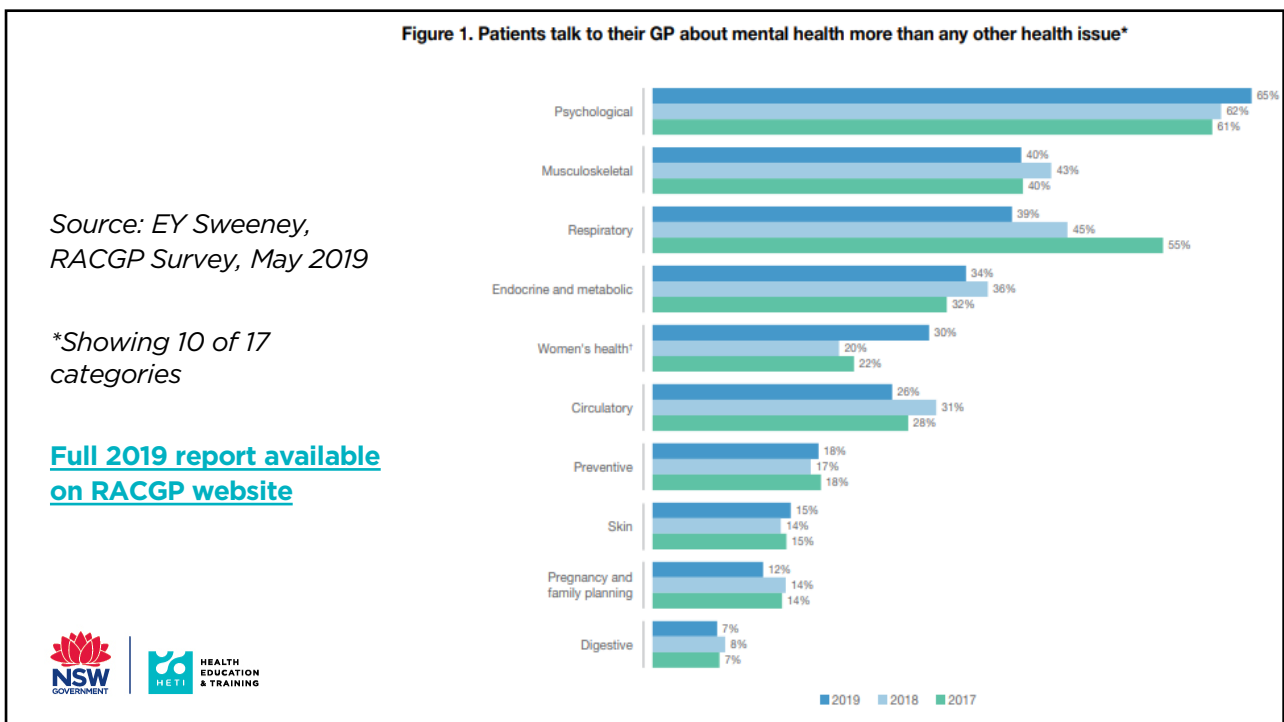
- Psychological issues (eg depression, mood disorders, anxiety) again appear as the most common health issue managed by GPs
- Results consistent with the 2017 and 2018 General Practice: Health of the Nation reports, which featured similar findings




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3



4

What is the role of rural health teams?

- *Limited availability of mental health services increases reliance on GPs as key responders*
- *GPs should have a leading role in developing health assessments with community and key partners*
- *Ongoing engagement through non-drought periods is essential*



What strategies are you using in your communities?

NSW case studies

Information nights

- Host formal health talks
- Spark community discussion
- Start the conversation
- Peak interest and involvement for patients in their health and wellbeing
- Outline coping strategies



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7

NSW case studies

Field day pitstop clinic

- Reach farmers in thick of action
- Conduct health and lifestyle assessments in mobile clinic
- Cover emotional wellbeing and general health checks
- Identify need for formal appointments and longer term care
- Spark vital conversations around mental health
- Provide links to helplines/ initiatives



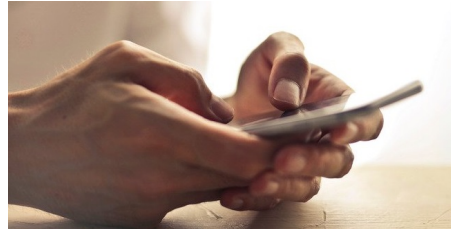
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8

Telehealth

- 2018 Medicare boost by Federal Minister for Health
- Up to 10 videoconferences available for eligible patients with Mental Health Treatment Plan in MMM 4-7 areas
- GPs can deliver focused psychological strategy consultations under Medicare Better Access Initiative
- Six new MBS items in drought declared councils under the Drought Communities Program (DCP) or MM 4-7 areas to provide general mental health and well-being support access via telehealth.



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9

Online training and tools

- Mental health skills training essential for GPs in medically underserved communities
- RACGP Rural offers online Focussed Psychological Strategies Skills Training (FPS ST) with 4 intakes per year
- [Emergency response planning tool \(ERPT\)](#) by RACGP



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10

Conclusion

Rural health teams play a key role in coordination and continuity of care:

- *Screening and early intervention included in standard consultation*
- *Ability to develop public health vulnerability assessments to identify who needs more help*
- *Telehealth and e-health supplement core patient GP relationship*
- *Leading role in mitigation and health planning measures to manage drought and health impacts*

What will you take away and do in your community?



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11

Thank you

RACGP Rural

Australia's largest representative body of rural GPs with more than 19,000 members and more than 8,500 GPs in rural and remote Australia.

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12