

Media Release

Locally grown mental health support

19 October 2017

The Goldfields region can look forward to better access to culturally sensitive mental health support, thanks to a new mental health training program.

Forty-five people from around the Goldfields are currently enrolled in *Grow Local*, a Certificate IV in Mental Health, which is being provided free of charge.

Federal Member for O'Connor, Mr Rick Wilson, says *Grow Local* will increase the number of mental health workers locally and encourage more people to access the services given their sense of cultural safety.

"Recruiting and retaining culturally appropriate mental health workers in the Goldfields is challenging, and it's great that we have come up with a local initiative to solve a local problem. I look forward to seeing the positive impact this initiative has on the region," Mr Wilson said.

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) recognised the gap in existing mental health services and the need for this particular expertise.

According to WAPHA regional manager Tralee Cable, while the number of locally-based mental health professionals has increased overall since July 2017, it was acknowledged that a complimentary grassroots approach was needed.

"It's critical to train local people who understand the unique conditions, environment and family dynamics in the region. There's a strong demand for locally provided training and the commitment participants have shown to the course is fantastic.

"This initiative strengthens the suicide prevention work currently being undertaken in these communities – community led, driven, and championed," Ms Cable said.

The \$100,000 program is jointly funded by WAPHA and the University of Western Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project.

UWA Professor Indigenous Studies Pat Dudgeon said the university was proud to support the *Grow Local* training, as we know from our research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities - and this would be appropriate for all communities - that where possible suicide prevention and mental programs need to be led by the local community.

"The community are also a resource who are best placed to provide support to those in need - with support and training.

“The outcomes of a trained and supported community of mental health workers is powerful. Not only are communities empowered, but the perceptions about mental wellbeing, that it is fine to help seek and so on, become a normal part of human experience in our society,” Professor Dudgeon said.

WAPHA engaged the Australian Medical Association WA (AMA) training division to design and deliver the training in Kalgoorlie, Leonora and Norseman.

AMA (WA) Health and Community Services Director, Noelle Jones said it is great to see the course participants embrace the opportunity to equip themselves with the skills to support their own community at a front-line level.

“This is an exciting time for the region and the *Grow Local* initiative,” Ms Jones said.

When the participants graduate in July 2018, they will strengthen the region’s existing WAPHA funded mental health workforce, comprising two experienced, full-time psychologists who are supported by a network of 14 counsellors operating out of Kalgoorlie, Esperance and the Northern Goldfields.

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About WAHPA: WAPHA oversees the strategic commissioning functions of the Perth North, Perth South and Country WA Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The WA PHNs are three of 31 PHNs established by the Australian Government nationally to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. We work across the WA healthcare system with doctors, allied health professionals, Area Health Services and service providers to improve the coordination of care for people who are at risk of poor health outcomes. For more information, visit www.wapha.org.au