

Mental health support locally grown in Meekatharra

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The community of Meekatharra will have better access to culturally sensitive mental health support thanks to an innovative mental health training initiative.

Eighteen people from Meekatharra are currently enrolled in Grow Local, a Certificate IV in Mental Health, which is being provided free of charge to interested community members.

The program has been funded by WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA), after a need for this particular expertise in Meekatharra was identified.

Federal Member for Durack, Ms Melissa Price, said the community is often a great resource who can provide support to those in need – with the right support and training.

“Providing the local community with the skills and knowledge they need to support friends, family and colleagues is essential given Meekatharra is one of the key hotspot areas in the Midwest for mental health issues.

“Grow Local is a fantastic initiative. I look forward to seeing the positive impact this program has on the town of Meekatharra and surrounds,” Ms Price said.

WAPHA’s Regional Manager, Jodie Green, said where possible, suicide prevention and mental health support programs are more effective when they are led by the local community who have a good understanding of the cultural sensitivities of the area.

“It is difficult to find culturally appropriate mental health workers in regions such as Meekatharra. Growing the local workforce and developing skills in the community to support existing mental health workers will make a significant difference to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Grow Local Meekatharra course participant, Pamela Hodder said she chose to complete the course to gain a better insight into how emotional wellbeing can influence others and to learn how she can help others, particularly her family and the local community, through tough times and any mental health issues that may arise.

“Meekatharra will really benefit from community members completing the course. We’re willing to listen and understand what the community needs and want to develop the right skills to support people in times of need. Even if we can only help a few, it’s worthwhile,” Ms Hodder said.

WAPHA has engaged the Australian Medical Association WA (AMA) training division to deliver the training to Meekatharra community members. The program has been developed following community consultation and customised to meet the needs of the local community, and is based on a similar program that was developed in 2016-2017 and delivered in Kalgoorlie, Leonora and Norseman.

AMA (WA) Health and Community Services Director, Noelle Jones said it is great to see the program and the learnings from the Goldfields training being expanded into the Midwest.

“To meet the skill needs of the community and obtain nationally accredited training qualifications delivered locally in Meekatharra is an opportunity that is rarely available.

“This is an exciting time for the community and the Grow Local initiative. We look forward to working with WAPHA and the Meekatharra community in delivering this training during 2018,” Ms Jones said.

WAPHA has worked closely with the Meekatharra Aboriginal Reference Group to ensure the course would be suitable for Aboriginal community members, and has secured partnership from the Meekatharra Shire and support from Mission Australia to ensure this is a united training opportunity.

When the participants graduate in May 2019, they will strengthen the region’s existing WAPHA funded mental health workforce, including a mental health support coordinator through Mission Australia, an Aboriginal Services Officer in the Mental Health & Community Alcohol & Drug Service and the mental health portal service in the Midwest delivered by 360 Health + Community.

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Image Caption: AMA Trainer, Christine (standing); works with the group on their practical skills. (Seated L-R) Katie, Pamela, Eryan, Adelle and David.

About WAPHA: 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