



**Tuesday 18 January 2011**

## **From one extreme to the other:**

### **Flooded rural communities urged to use the 'Mental Health Support for *Drought Affected Communities Initiative*'**

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) says rural communities in QLD, NSW and VIC that are now entering the recovery and re-building phase will be assisted by Community Support Workers through the Commonwealth funded *Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative*.

AGPN Chair, Dr Emil Djakic says the long term impact of trauma on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities particularly, when faced with a disaster on the level of the QLD floods requires all the resources available within the health services sector and this initiative is one of them.

"Despite one of the Network's key mental health initiatives being branded for *drought*-affected communities, the initiative is still underway for rural communities affected by the floods," Dr Djakic said.

"Even though Community Support Workers were originally employed to provide assistance for drought, the skills and networks of these workers enables them to respond to a range of environmentally adverse situations," he said.

"This Commonwealth funded program is critical for rural and regional communities that require coordinated responses to mental health services in their local communities. The initiative enables Community Support Workers to provide crisis counselling resulting from this natural disaster who can then link individuals and communities to further services and support.

"Community Support Workers become a strong link between individuals, GPs and/or Practice Nurses, raise community awareness of mental health including where and when to seek help and provide education and training to enable health workers and community leaders to recognise and respond to the early warning signs of emotional stress.

"This initiative is designed for the longer term support for local communities because mental health and wellbeing takes time to heal, manage and maintain after experiencing such extreme disasters.

"During the immediate crisis health services do their utmost to attend to emergencies and the health care needs of flood victims with Community Support Workers working with local communities in assessing needs and services to help those wanting mental health support services.

"AGPN has sought additional funding for the long term viability of this initiative in preparation for the long term health service needs of rural communities affected by flood," Dr Djakic said.

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