

Empowering rural communities through social media

Alison Fairleigh¹

¹Mental Illness Fellowship of NQ Inc

People in rural and remote Australia are finding their voice and social media is responsible. The growth and popularity of social media over the past few years has transformed the way we communicate and has been instrumental in challenging rural stereotypes. Nationally, Facebook still dominates, with over 11.7 million users, but Twitter has also been a powerful tool, reaching over 2.2 million active users in Australia every month. Harnessing this power, people in rural and remote areas are creating online communities and orchestrating change. As such, social media presents an undeniable opportunity to help improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural and remote Australia.

Social media is an equaliser. The multi-directional nature of Web 2.0 technology enables rural people to interact and contribute content on social, environmental, political and economic conditions that impact on their health. The traditional, top-down approach to information sharing has become irrelevant within the context of social media: people in remote settings now have the capacity to engage and participate. This undoubtedly can lead to more effective health promotion in rural and remote areas and ultimately, a more socially responsible health care system in which rural communities are given due consideration.