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New data on mental health is a wake-up call for urgent reform

New data from Mental Health Australia and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling at the University of Canberra released today, World Mental Health Day, shows alarming disparities in the distribution of mental health services across Australia, with severe inadequacies in rural, regional and remote areas.

The National Rural Health Alliance (the Alliance) calls for increased investment and systemic mental health reform to rectify the disparities shown in the [Mapping Mental Health Care research project](#) for people living and working in rural Australia.

“The federal and state governments need to show more commitment to engage with stakeholders to relieve rural communities of the barriers to accessing mental health services,” said Susi Tegen, Chief Executive of the Alliance.

“We know mental illness in rural and remote Australia appears more prevalent than in major cities and tragically, rates of self-harm and suicide increase with remoteness. Yet, these communities are the most underserved compared to major cities,” said Ms Tegen.

Rural and remote communities experience a range of stressors unique to living outside major cities. They also have the triple disadvantage of poorer health, larger distances to travel and less access to health and medical care providers. Indeed, they also face natural disasters through fire, flood and drought. Lower employment opportunities and less financial stability coupled with housing stress also lead to increased mental ill health. Despite Medicare-subsidised mental health services in regional and remote areas, the data shows a clear pattern of lower use in regional and remote areas.

“We need to address the unique problems faced by rural, regional and remote communities and attend to them with innovative, place-based, flexible models of mental health care and funding.

“The latest data is a wake-up call on World Mental Health Day, to take urgent action to provide care every day for people living outside cities. We have a social contract to do so,” said Ms Tegen.

The Alliance has published the following help sheet on rural mental health services for those needing mental health support: <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-rural-mental-health-services-help-sheet-2023.pdf>

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