

Organising a community event to build solidarity.

Events are a positive way to connect with community members, inform people about mental health and wellbeing and show that community, peer support and services care and are ready to help farmers.

Prepare for an event

It is imperative that all people who attend an event for community suicide prevention feel safe. This is why many SPGs (Suicide Prevention Groups) hold barbeques at sporting or community events. There are other resources that can be distributed at these events, such as coasters and pamphlets or a keynote speaker about mental wellbeing could be invited.

Ask these question

- Who is the target audience is (who is the event for)? Will it be a farming men only group or a farming women only group or mixed?
- Where is the most geographically accessible site and where will most people feel at ease?
- How can other community groups help your suicide prevention/wellbeing group?
- Can you link into industry focused groups and share the hosting of an event?
- Can the local council provide their boardroom for meetings or provide photos of the area that could go into a printed resource like a calendar or cookbook?
- Can costs be shared; for example printing costs?

What is the purpose of your event?

There are many ways to host an event. The event you create will be based on your SPGs ability to know what kind of event will have the most impact on farmers. Ask these questions:

- There may be more than one purpose. Is it to raise awareness of mental health issues for everyone?
- Is it to bring attention to farmer wellbeing in your community?
- Is to direct people to support networks or create community support?
- Is your event about sharing stories about distress, help seeking and recovery?
- Is your event about raising funds for mental health and wellbeing initiatives?
- Is your event about learning about how to talk to someone who is distressed and support services to refer them to?
- Is your event about connecting with others during challenging times?

Event examples:

1. Gatherings

A music event or festival, barbeque, or family fun day may raise awareness of mental health as a place for social connectivity. It is a relaxed space where mental health is not at the forefront of the event, making people more likely to come and feel comfortable.

Ben has held a very successful music festival. Listen to our podcast and you'll get many insights on how to plan events as successful as his.

www.takingstock.community/library/podcast/ben-brooksby

2. Speaker events

Keynote speaker

A farmer speaking about their lived experience provides an avenue to understand someone's experience and relate to it. There may be someone in your group who would like to share their experience, or you may know of farmers who regularly speak at SPGs across your region or Australia. Use a podcast or video of farmers speaking about their lived experience from the Taking Stock online library. The film in our library of Riverina farmers speaking about distress is an excellent resource to hear about the experiences of other farmers. Or refer to our printed stories about Farmer Joe — read out loud to prompt questions and discussion.

Show a film from the Taking Stock online library and then have the keynote speaker (a health professional or a member of the SPG) invite the audience to speak in small groups or a larger group depending on size, about:

- a) how the film made them feel; what they might do if they had similar feelings and experiences — where might they go for help?
 - b) how might they help others?
 - c) what information and tools/training do they need to provide peer support?
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A panel discussion

Show a film or listen to a podcast from the Taking Stock online library and afterwards, have a panel consisting of a health care provider, farmer and, say, a stock agent discuss the film. Then open the floor to questions and feedback from the audience. Again you could use films or podcasts from the Taking Stock library. A panel discussion is a useful way to bring multiple perspectives and experiences in relation to health, support and recovery. It also enables the audience to direct questions to people with particular experiences and expertise.

Invited speakers

Many SPGs have invited speakers like Ben Brooksby, 'The Naked Farmer' or Mary O'Brien from 'Are you Bogged Mate?'. Contact SPGs near you to consider sharing the cost of a guest speaker.

Different ways to structure events

There are so many different ways to structure events and ideas can be sourced from country arts projects, country men's sheds, community centres, local council project officers or other SPGs.

Consider if it is best that the event is held during a Field Day? Or is it better that the group be smaller to help build social connectivity and give people space to talk and support each other? Arts based activities or activities involving building/fixing community spaces provide an opportunity for people to work together and talk.

Communication and assistance at the event

Organise for pamphlets, coasters with QR codes, calendars, local service directories or any other materials to be handed out at the event. People who hand out information should have some basic training in peer support. Speak to your local GP, a local mental health service provider or an organisation like *Beyond Blue* on how to run a session for volunteers about starting a conversation and responding to conversations about mental health.

Wherever possible, link a local service provider, a GP, a rural financial counsellor or a mental health counsellor to the event. Have them introduce themselves and their services.

Ask local service providers to leave pamphlets and telephone numbers or type some up and have them available. This will mean information is readily at hand after someone leaves an event so they can call if they are distressed or want to talk about how they are feeling.

Communication after the event

Collect attendees contact details and follow up with them within a week after an event. Depending on the number of people, do a ring around and ask for feedback on how the event went and give people space to open up to you about how they are feeling.
