



MEDIA JOURNALISM ENTRY

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ORGANISATION: The Land, ACM Agri

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Demographic details

Life on the land in NSW is never easy and it is widely recognised our farmers need mental health support.

Farmers and other people living and working in regional and rural sectors of NSW often endure tough seasonal conditions due to a lack of rain, or too much rain, a lack of feed and water for livestock, lower than average grain crops or, in some cases, nothing produced at all.

These factors, combined with a tightening of finance availability, also hits town business people as the “trickle down” effect takes hold. Add isolation to the equation and the level of stress and depression in the bush is heightened.

The award-winning [The Rural Guide to a Healthy Mind](#), has been published by *The Land* for the past three years on the first Thursday during October, Mental Health Month.

The Rural Guide to a Healthy Mind liftout was inserted into *The Land* on October 6, 2022, and is available online at: https://specialpubs.austcommunitymedia.com.au/e-mags/2022/TL5/1006_01/

Like its precursor *The Glove Box Guide to Mental Health*, which won two international awards - notably the TheMHS MEDAL for Mental Health in 2019, the [Rural Guide](#) is pitched to appeal to *The Land's* farmer readership*. It is free with a copy of *The Land* or throughout the year at field days and shows.

The 32-page gloss, quarterfold edition is packed full of useful information on suicide prevention, ways to improve and maintain mental wellbeing, and personal stories of lived experience.

The highly informative special publication gives families a closer insight into what signs to look for, how to recognise them early, and what assistance is available for consultation. It features plenty of advice on managing stress, decision-making, finding support networks, and pathways to mental wellbeing, as well as a useful section on help services and emergency contacts.

Copies are distributed to RAMHP staff based around the state to add to their portfolio of advice and assistance material to the general public in regional and rural communities. Extra

copies are freely available throughout the year as demand has increased from private businesses wanting copies for their staff.

The feedback has been overwhelming, from general practitioners/doctors surgeries, libraries, specialist assistance authorities and organisations, plus mental health specialists throughout NSW.

Often, readers keep all back issues of the guide.

The guide is edited by Robyn Ainsworth, a seasoned editor, journalist and trainer, having worked across metro, community, regional and rural publications for more than 30 years.

She is National Agricultural Features Editor for ACM Agri, whose print and digital mastheads include *The Land*, *Queensland Country Life*, *North Queensland Register*, *Stock & Land*, *Stock Journal*, *Australian Dairy Farmer*, *Good Fruit & Vegetables*, *Farmonline* and *Farm Weekly*.

Robyn was editor of the multi-award-winning *The Land's The Glove Box Guide to Mental Health* for five of its eight editions, and has edited *The Rural Guide to a Healthy Mind* for its first three editions.

In 2022, *The Rural Guide* won the ACME Award for Magazine of the Year. It was up against all publications in the ACM stable, including *The Canberra Times* and *Newcastle Herald*.

Planning is under way for the 2023 edition of the guide.

**The Land* reaches reaches 87% of NSW primary producers every month. Acknowledged as Australia's leading rural weekly newspaper, and one of the world's great farming publications, *The Land* has achieved prime position with NSW farmers since its launch in 1911. It has become the standard of excellence for all other publications due to its blend of on-farm material, market reporting, analysis and hard-hitting comments. It takes its role as an influencer in the farming community seriously.





Former international cricketer Brad Hogg at AgQuip Field days in August. Picture: Robyn Ainsworth

Brad goes the whole Hogg for farmer mates

By Robyn Ainsworth

WHO better to capture the attention of a bunch of farmers at a field day than a great Aussie bloke with a good cricketing yarn?

It turns out that Big Bash hero Brad Hogg is not just a left-arm wrist spinner with a wrong 'un, but a natural yarn spinner as well.

He has been regaling farmers across the country with his tales as a youngster growing up on his family's sheep farm in Williams, Western Australia, and dreaming of becoming an international cricketer.

He debuted in 1996 on a tour of India to replace an injured Shane Warne and played international one-dayers for a period then was dropped.

For seven long years he waited in grade and state cricket while Warne held the limelight, then made his comeback in 2003 - again with the late Warne injured then banned for a period.

Mr Hogg had some impressive bowling performances - including dismissing the great West Indian batsman Brian Lara twice - before retiring in 2008.

Regretting retirement, Mr Hogg says he went through 18 months of angst.

A painful divorce ensued and his wife "took the kids".

In 2010 Mr Hogg was deeply depressed and contemplated taking his life.

"I became a heavy drinker, argumentative, unemployable - unemployed," he admits.

At rock bottom, Mr Hogg admits to driving drunk, then waking up embarrassed.

He looked in the mirror and realised he had a "50/50 chance at life".

"The cogs were working overtime. There was a small spark and I told myself 'I want more from you'."

So he made a list of the 13 things he needed or wanted to do in life.

A few weeks later he met a nice woman, then landed a job in radio and later remarried.

He returned to cricket in 2011 with the Perth Scorchers in the Big Bash League and was soon picked for Australia's Twenty20 team.

Mr Hogg later played in the Indian Premier League and switched to the Melbourne Renegades after five years before finally retiring.

Despite the fame of being an overnight sensation a few times over, Mr Hogg says he is nobody special.

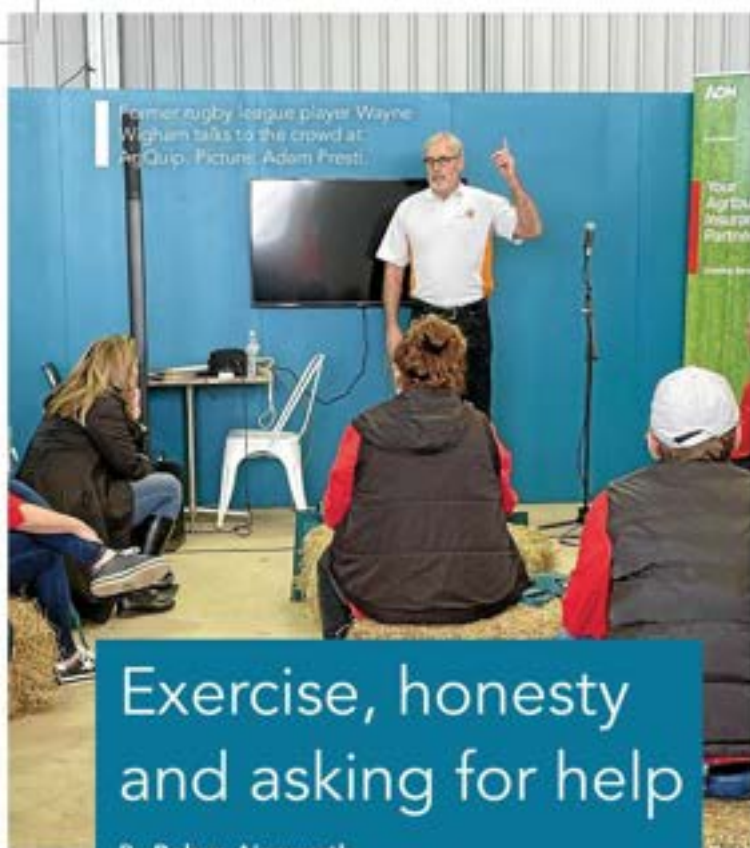
"I was in a bad marriage and was driven to despair," he said.

"These days I find small, positive things to get me through. That's how we are going to keep this country going - and by checking on our mates.

"We want people to know that they're never alone, and that help is always a phone call away if they need it.

"It's all about starting conversations that will make a positive change and help save lives."

Brad Hogg is now a proud Lifeline ambassador and has been touring major agricultural field days across the country as part of his role in Grain Producers Australia's mental health initiative.



Exercise, honesty and asking for help

By Robyn Ainsworth

SWEAT is one of nature's antidepressants." So says rugby league player-turned-mental health advocate Wayne Wigham.

Being active is one of the best things a person feeling low can do.

"Daily exercise burns cortisol, the primary stress hormone," he said.

Mr Wigham played 167 first grade games for Balmain, North Sydney and Western Suburbs in the 1970s and '80s, then became a professional firefighter for 10 years, so he knows a few things about exercise.

It was when he stopped exercising and became a recluse for a few years that he got "a bit wobbly".

"Even things like taking a shower were like climbing Mt Everest," he said.

"I was self-medicating with alcohol. I was a drug addict and had a gambling addiction.

"I was having suicidal thoughts. I would have saved a lot of

relationships if I put my hand up to being sick."

Seventeen years ago he attempted suicide.

"I have bipolar, which was great with the highs, but I would self-medicate with the lows to fix the things I had done on a high," he said.

"The proudest thing I have ever done was to put my hand up. Life's much better straight. I am disciplined and do exercise. I have gratitude, purpose and meaning in my life.

"If I have a bad thought in the wide super highway of my brain, I force two good ones into a narrow lane."

Mr Wigham shared his mental health journey with farmers at AgQuip Field Days in Gunnedah in August, at the invitation of major sponsor AON.

He spoke to the farmers about depression and the importance of maintaining connections.

"Life is like a game of rugby league and everyone gets smashed," he said.

"We've all been smashed the last few years - in our bodies and our minds. If you are wobbly and floundering, put your hand up. If I stand on one leg, I get wobbly, but if I have a friend on either side of me, I can stand.

"In rugby league, we all 'cuddle' each other when we get injured. Life is harder than being a professional athlete. Life is tougher than rugby league.

"You have to learn to love yourself. Athletes understand the need to look after yourself.

"We have to think about what we love and appreciate about ourselves."

People are like sheep, he told the crowd.

"When sheep are sick they will leave the flock but if they return, they have a much better chance of recovery," he said.

"If your friends leave the flock, call or text once every two weeks or once a month. This is the best thing to do.

"You cannot make people worse if you talk to them."

The Black Dog Institute representative has been talking to people in rural and remote country towns for 15 years.

Mr Wigham said people in small towns often don't seek help for mental ill health because they think people will know who they are and will talk about them.

"It is against the law for Employee Assistance Program (EAP) workers and other professionals to tell someone's personal story."

He advised people needing help to seek a long GP assessment time and "bleed your heart out".

"Five per cent of people have chemical depression and 95pc of it is circumstantial. The correct diagnosis is important," Mr Wigham said.

"You might need medication for six to eight months but don't come off the medication just because you feel better."

The Black Dog Institute has a depression self-test, which is a great place to start your recovery.



How to ask for help

If you're worried about your mental health and thinking of talking to a professional, it can be overwhelming to learn how many services are out there.

Here are a few details about some common mental health professionals to get you started...

GPs

General practitioners (GPs) are a good place to start if you're worried about your mental health. They look at both your mental and physical health, can talk with you, prescribe medications, develop a Mental Health Treatment Plan and refer you on to other specialised health professionals.

They all have a medical degree, and some have extra training.

Anyone can see a GP, you simply call up and book an appointment. These usually last 10 to 15 minutes, but you can request a long appointment which will last for 20 to 30 minutes.

Costs start at \$40 per session, but depending on the GP, some or all of the fee will be covered by Medicare.

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If you're worried about costs, you can ask around or call the GP practice to ask about payment options.

Psychologists

Psychologists provide talking therapies, which can include cognitive behavioural therapies and other evidencebased therapies, to help you work through mental health concerns.

They have a psychology degree as well as clinical training.

The best way to access a psychologist is to see a GP first. The GP can develop a Mental Health Treatment Plan with you, which may include a referral to a psychologist. That way, some or all of the psychologist's fee will be covered by Medicare.

You can make appointments directly with psychologists, without a GP referral, but costs will start at \$100 per session.

Occupational therapists and social workers

Occupational therapists (OTs) and social workers can provide a range of support depending on their personal qualifications.

Some specialise in mental health. They have degrees and you can access them through a referral from a GP or psychiatrist, or through a hospital or community service. Appointments with OTs

and social workers are free in public services, and with a GP referral and Mental Health Treatment Plan some are partly covered by Medicare.

Mental health nurses

Mental health nurses can assist with medication and provide practical support and counselling. They have degrees in nursing and some have extra mental health training. You can access a mental health nurse through a referral from a GP or psychiatrist, but you will usually see them through a hospital or community service.

Counsellors

Counsellors can provide listening, support and some talking therapies. They may be trained in counselling, social work, psychology or specialised areas, such as grief counselling. You can make an appointment with a counsellor directly. Private counsellor costs start from \$50 per session, however counselling is provided free by some organisations which receive government or charitable funding.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists can prescribe medications, diagnose mental health conditions and provide talking therapies. They have a medical degree with additional psychiatric training.

You can access them through a hospital or a referral from a GP. With a GP referral, your appointment will be partly covered by Medicare.

It is possible to make appointments directly, with costs starting at \$200 per session, however, it is usually best to have a Mental Health Treatment Plan developed with your GP beforehand.

Remember, there may be limited options in regional and rural areas. Sometimes, finding the person you feel comfortable with, who works best with you may be more important than their particular qualifications or profession.

You can find out what is available in your area by asking your GP, asking someone you know who has sought help for a mental health concern, or searching online.

Information supplied by RAMHP (the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program) and Grand Pacific Health.



HUMANS are susceptible to many different infectious diseases, including coronavirus (COVID-19).

Worrying about diseases is a normal reaction. But, excessive worrying about infectious diseases can affect both our physical and our mental health.

Here are some practical psychological skills to help you cope with anxiety and worry about infectious diseases.

1. Get informed with the right information

We are 'hard-wired' to react to possible threats to ourselves, our families and our communities. These reactions can keep us safe from possible threats. But at times, our reactions may also be excessive and unhelpful, and may cause significant stress and worry. Relying on news from mainstream media or social media, which may sensationalise or exaggerate issues, can further increase our stress and anxiety.

One way to manage our reactions is to access the 'right information', that is, information we can trust. Consider only accessing trusted sources of information (e.g., ABC Radio, Australian government health department website, World Health Organisation website, etc).

2. Understand history

Events like infectious diseases often follow a predictable course. In the past 50 years there have been multiple national and international health concerns. Initially, there is often skepticism, followed by attention, followed by panic, followed by reality, followed by a return to

normality. Reminding yourself of these patterns can help you to understand the course and plan for the future.

3. Get organised

A good antidote to stress and worry is to get active and organised. If you are worried about something, then do something. Make plans and write your list of what you need to buy, organise, or set-up, and get on with doing it. Tick off each item and turn your 'To Do' list into a 'Ta-Da' list. Whenever you recognise you are getting stressed, ask yourself, 'What do I need to do to help manage this situation?'. Talk with family and friends about your plans, and if possible, help them to get organised.

4. Balance your thoughts

When we get stressed about our health or risks of infection our thoughts can become dark, but they don't help us. Remember, our thoughts are not always true or helpful. Challenge your negative thoughts by asking yourself what a friend would say in the same situation, or ask yourself what evidence do you have that you 'won't cope or can't cope'? Whenever you recognise a negative thought, balance it with a realistic thought.

5. Shut down the noise

Stress is infectious, and often unhelpful. People tend to talk about things they are worried about; this creates lots of 'noise', which can create even more stress. Give yourself permission to switch off 'noise' such as social media, news, or even radio for most of each day. Also give yourself permission to excuse yourself from people who are creating

stress. Replace the noise with music, entertainment, games, or even meditation.

6. Remember who you are

Most people are good, kind, and sensible. They care for others and the environment. Stressful times can make it challenging to act in the way that is aligned with our values. But, even when feeling stressed, remember who you are, and what you believe in. Remember, other people are probably as stressed and worried as you are. By reaching out and supporting others you will help them, and feel good about yourself.

7. Keep healthy routines

Our emotional health is strongly affected by regular routines; these routines give us a sense of achievement and accomplishment. Some of our routines involve other people, who also benefit from them. Spend some time thinking about the routines important to you, and find safe ways to keep up these routines or create new ones.

8. Stay engaged

Staying connected and engaged with people and activities that are meaningful is good for wellbeing. Schedule time in your routine to keep doing them. You might have to modify how you stay connected. Remember that people really appreciate engaging with others, even if this hasn't been planned.

9. Do the things that you enjoy and that are good for you

When we are stressed we tend to avoid doing things that we normally do. We all have activities and hobbies which we enjoy and which give us pleasure. It is essential we make time and effort to do things that we find valuable and meaningful and fun. If possible, try and do these with others.

10. Keep looking forward

Things will return to normal. While maintaining your long-term goals, think about things that you will do each day and week, which you can and will enjoy. Again, try and bring others into your plans; they might also benefit from thinking about the future.

This information has been produced by Head to Health in collaboration with the MindSpot Clinic.