"Making a difference to farmers’ lives"
The National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) is a partnership between Western District Health Service and Deakin University and is based in Hamilton, Western Victoria. Established in 2008, by the Victorian Government and the Helen and Geoff Handbury Trust, the Centre encompasses university research, service delivery and education that provides leadership in improving the health, wellbeing and safety of farm men and women, their families and rural communities across Australia and globally.

Focussing on prevention and early identification of risk factors associated with farming populations, the NCFH develops timely, appropriate, effective and popular interventions. Often working in partnership with industry, rural organisations and academia.

The NCFH team includes professionals from the health, agricultural, social sciences and information technology disciplines who have a proven capacity to deliver in the areas of education, training, applied research and community engagement.

We hope this summary of our team’s work inspires you to join us in making a difference to farmers’ lives.

Dr Susan Brumby RN, Dip Farm M’ment, MHM, PhD - Director

"Making a difference to farmers’ lives"
Health & Lifestyle Assessments

The NCFH has been providing Health and Lifestyle Assessments to farm men, women and agricultural workers at field days, education workshops and farmer gatherings for over a decade.

Our farmer Health and Lifestyle Assessments are a 20-minute health assessment and include a lifestyle survey covering health behaviours, farm practices and social and emotional wellbeing. The assessment includes cholesterol, blood glucose and blood pressure readings along with diabetes risk, BMI, % body fat and eyesight testing.

The aims and objectives of the Health and Lifestyle Assessments are:

• To identify health and wellbeing risk factors in agricultural producers, farm workers and associated industries.
• To provide knowledge and skills to assist rural people to enhance their health, wellbeing and safety practices.
• To identify health indicators in agricultural regions of Australia to better target future research and service delivery.

Industry Perspective

“Very important service for farmers ... good idea and concept that ticks all the boxes of health ... much needed for the industry ... I appreciate the time given ... the health assessment was good, and care and empathy shown by all the staff.”
Grain Farmer, Victoria

“I found it useful ... it was a good wake-up call ... I only went to the doctor if I was sick, but to get a check-up at a Field Day opened my eyes to some other (mental health) issues.”
Ag Advisor, Tasmania

At a deeper level we have developed the AgriSafe Australia™ program which focuses on occupational health, wellbeing and safety specifically designed for farm men, women and agricultural workers.

This program allows for the opportunity to meet with trained agricultural health clinicians for a comprehensive assessment. The focus is to identify risk factors for poor health and prevent serious agricultural related injuries by enhancing farmers’ knowledge and skills.

The program includes assessment of physical health, wellbeing and farm safety. Recommendations are given on personal protection equipment and farm hazard minimisation. If further review is necessary, written referrals are provided.

An AgriSafe™ program includes the following assessments:

• Blood glucose testing
• Lipid studies
• Blood pressure
• Body mass index
• PiKo - 6 respiratory testing
• Hearing screening (optional)
• Skin examination
• Vision testing
• Urinalysis
• Cholinesterase testing and pesticide exposure assessment (optional)
• Occupational safety and risk assessment
• Testing for correct fit of a mask or respirator

At a deeper level we have developed the AgriSafe Australia™ program which focuses on occupational health, wellbeing and safety specifically designed for farm men, women and agricultural workers.

Agriculture is consistently ranked as one of the top three most hazardous industries in Australia. Agriculture, forestry and fishing had a rate of 16.5 fatalities per 100,000 workers in 2017. This rate has not changed significantly over the last decade and was the highest industry fatality rate in 2017.

Sustainable Farm Families™

A multi-award winning program has been delivered across Australia and was developed to bring better health, wellbeing and safety to people on the land. It is a practical program of straightforward health assessments, education and advice that has proved life-changing and life-saving for many participants.

Better health
Each of the three workshops include complete health assessments. Measuring fasting glucose and cholesterol levels, eyesight, height, weight, body mass, blood pressure and respiratory testing.

Better understanding
During the program health and wellbeing topics covering cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, stress, women and men’s health issues, nutrition, physical activity, anxiety and depression as well as farm safety are delivered. The information is presented in a practical way including group discussions tailored to the farming family and family business.

Better business
The program is designed to enhance the farming business providing practical information incorporating how health and business connect.

NCFH strongly encourages health services to deliver Sustainable Farm Families™ within their communities. Delivered by SFF™ trained health professionals and facilitators, the program fits well in the community and primary health portfolio by:
• Integrating health promotion with improved outcomes for the farming community.
• Creating supportive environments for health as a result of personal skills development and strengthened community action.
• Expanding service options and access to information to support self-management.
• Growing expertise of local health professionals and delivering to often hard to reach communities.
• Valuing the participation of farm families in the continuous improvement of the program.

Sustainable Farm Families™ International
SFF has been successfully repeated and transferred to over 2600 farmers in Australia and 1000 farmers in Alberta, Canada in partnership with the Farm Safety Centre, Raymond. See www.farmerhealth.org.au/sustainable-farm-families/international

“100% practical, 100% applicable and 100% understandable.”
Sugarcane farmer, Queensland
Training & Education

Education is one of the primary aims of the NCFH. It is of key importance to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of farm men, women and children and requires a multidiscipline, and cross-sectoral approach.

Our Centre provides a range of unique education and training opportunities focussing on agricultural medicine, health and safety. These include:

• Australia’s only Graduate Certificate in Agricultural Health and Medicine, specifically designed for health and rural professionals through the Deakin School of Medicine, and can be studied online, making access easy
• Tertiary placements available for longer term students
• Higher degrees by research such as Honours, Masters and PhD
• Specially designed workshops to build rural workforce knowledge on farmer health
• Industry workshops developed to your needs such as “Managing people in stressful situations”
• Teaching tools for university and secondary schools

The NCFH offers two specific Agricultural Health and Medicine units through Deakin’s School of Medicine. These units aim to develop the next generation of rural and agricultural health leaders and are the core units for the Graduate Certificate of Agricultural Health and Medicine qualification. This professional qualification is of great benefit to both health and rural professionals who work closely with agricultural workers, rural communities and those developing rural policy. Students have been drawn from across Australia and internationally.

“This is a well-organised multidisciplinary blended learning course in Agricultural Health and Medicine.”
Occupational Physician, Prof. Gert van der Laan, University of Milan

“Studying with people from a range of backgrounds has strengthened my understanding of what makes a farmer tick: a healthy farmer will make better decisions.” Agronomist, Birchip Cropping Group, Ag Health & Medicine 2016

“Great session, information on a confronting issue, well facilitated.”
Finance Professional, Adelaide, Industry workshop participant
Research Projects

The NCFH is involved in a broad range of rural health research. These projects respond directly to the needs of farming communities and are developed in collaboration with farmers, the agricultural industry and relevant partner organisations.

Some examples of recent research projects include:

The Ripple Effect

“It’s made me stronger and more tolerant and accepting of all mental health issues. I find it has helped me understand other people’s struggles and relate to their battles which has helped me help them.”

The Ripple Effect is an Australia-wide rural suicide prevention research project designed to address the stigma associated with an experience of rural suicide. The research has a focus on rural males, aged 30-64 years. However, given the broad impact of suicide, all rural adults are invited to provide their insights and information about how they have been affected by suicide via www.therippleeffect.com.au website. By contributing to the website, participants will support their own and other’s wellbeing and help planners, researchers and government better understand rural suicide and work towards preventing suicide and improve support for all those affected.

In-field Personalised Cholinesterase Assessment Project (PCAP)

Organophosphates have been associated with chronic neurological diseases such as Parkinson’s. In-field PCAP research forms the basis of a database of cholinesterase activity (an enzyme inhibited by organophosphate pesticides) from farmers exposed to agricultural pesticides in their workplace. This research also aims to integrate and evaluate cholinesterase monitoring within routine agricultural health clinics as well in the field. By monitoring agrichemical use and exposure, researchers and clinical staff are providing farming people with a link between their individual cholinesterase activity and their household and agrichemical use.

From Inside the Farm Gate

From Inside the Farm Gate uses digital storytelling to highlight the experiences and give voice to rural women who have managed tough times. This project benefits the storytellers—through personal reflection, building self-confidence and social connection—and those viewing the stories, through increased empathy, knowledge and understanding.

“This has been an amazing process of sharing stories but also of sharing friendship and conquests over adversity. The support from staff and participants in the project has been exemplary and a joy to be part of. I think there is much to be gained by sharing this as an experience but I see great value to any one who will view the works outside of the participants group.” (FITFG participant)

International Research

Our multidisciplinary team are proud of our research projects and our collaborations. We recently formed a partnership with Centurion University, India to help them address and understand health, wellbeing and safety issues of their village farmers. In 2018 a pilot study has commenced to engage 1000 farmers and work with their university students.
Contact us

Phone: 03 5551 8533
Email: ncfh@wdhs.net

PO Box 283
Hamilton VIC 3300
Australia

Find us on  

www.farmerhealth.org.au
HONcode accredited

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians, the Gunditjmara peoples; pay my respect to all Aboriginal community Elders past and present who have been an integral part of this region’s history.