



# Wellbeing for the Bush

## A GUIDE FOR HEALTH WORKERS

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**CRANA**   
improving  
remote  
health **plus**



# Wellbeing for the Bush

## A GUIDE FOR HEALTH WORKERS

The personal and professional demands faced by those working in rural and remote health are significant and unique. In acknowledgment of this, CRANApplus offers mental health and wellbeing support to the workforce through a range of services and resources. This support includes a 24/7 telephone support line, research-based psychological advice through our weekly Mindful Monday newsletter, wellbeing workshops, fliers and posters to share with colleagues or display in your workplace, as well as free eLearning and podcasts.

To learn more or access our resources visit [crana.org.au/support](https://crana.org.au/support)





This booklet provides information on a range of topics to support your wellbeing including managing stress and self-care, workplace relationships, communication, sleep, living and working remotely.

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# Wellbeing for the Bush

## HEALTHY SLEEP

Sleep is essential for health and wellbeing. However, getting enough can be challenging due to the demands of being a rural or remote health worker. Things like night shifts or being on call, insufficient breaks or days off, safety concerns and boundary issues can all make implementing basic sleep hygiene recommendations really tricky.

*You know it's important, but what can you do to make sleep a health priority and create the right conditions? It takes practice to establish a healthy sleep routine.*



Get regular exercise,  
but not too close to  
bedtime



Prepare your  
sleeping area



Avoid napping  
during the day



Turn off screens at  
least an hour before  
bed



Keep it regular – go to  
bed and get up at the  
same time each day



Don't keep tossing and turning;  
get up and do something  
relaxing, then try again when  
you feel sleepy



Develop a relaxing  
pre-bedtime routine



Avoid alcohol, nicotine  
and caffeine

Sleep is essential to our emotional health, as well as for growth and repair within our body, and for normal learning and memory. Long-term lack of sleep has been linked to increased risk of depression, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and reduced lifespan.

## 5 tips for better sleep

### Create a relaxing bedroom environment.



The bedroom should serve as a sleep sanctuary no matter what time you go to bed. This is particularly crucial for people who need to sleep during the day. The ideal sleep environment should be dark, relatively cool, and quiet. Make sure family members, roommates, or other cohabitants know not to disturb you during your allotted sleep time.

### Establish a relaxing pre-bedtime routine.



Your routine may include taking a hot shower, reading a book, doing some stretching or a relaxation exercise. For help, check out apps like 'Smiling Mind' for relaxation activities.

### Put the day to rest.



If necessary, write a list of what is on your mind and decide to think about it tomorrow. Learn a relaxation exercise if you have trouble 'switching off' at night. Practise the exercise before you use it as a sleep aid.

### Try to avoid common disruptors.



Generally, avoid longer napping during the day as it may be difficult to sleep at night. Avoid alcohol, caffeine (including tea and chocolate), exercise and heavy meals in the hours leading up to sleep.

### Synchronise your body clock.



Spending time outdoors (especially morning) may help to synchronise your body clock.

## Tips for shift or on call workers

- As a rural and remote health worker it's not uncommon to work long shifts or be called into work multiple nights in a row. The effects of short-term disturbed sleep can impact memory, concentration, mood and decision making. It's really important to develop strategies to manage this. Find a relaxation technique that works for you and practise it, so you can use it when you need.
- If you normally work a night shift, schedule your sleep time to wake up close to the beginning of your next shift, rather than going to sleep immediately upon returning home. Studies have shown that the "split nap" schedule is also effective. This involves sleeping for a few hours when you get home from work, then staying awake and taking a long nap that ends close to the start of your next shift.
- Attempting to sleep during the day can be difficult due to factors like daylight and outside noise. In addition to dimming the lights, you can block outside light using an eye mask or blackout curtains. If your residence is located in a relatively loud area, try earplugs, a fan or air conditioner or a white noise machine to muffle disruptive sounds.

### More information

Listen to our CRANAcast episode on this topic:  
[crana.org.au/cranacast\\_support](http://crana.org.au/cranacast_support)

Sleep Health Foundation:  
[www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

MHA, Combating Sleep Difficulties For Healthcare:  
[workersmhanational.org/combating-sleep-difficulties-healthcare-workers](http://workersmhanational.org/combating-sleep-difficulties-healthcare-workers)

Black Dog Institute Tip Sheet:  
[Sleep\\_fatigue\\_and\\_stress\\_in\\_health\\_care\\_workers](http://Sleep_fatigue_and_stress_in_health_care_workers)

Health Direct, Sleep for shift workers:  
[healthdirect.gov.au/sleep#shift-work](http://healthdirect.gov.au/sleep#shift-work)

## Wellbeing for the Bush

# LIVING & WORKING REMOTELY

Living and working as a health worker in a remote community can be an extremely rewarding experience. We get to extend our knowledge and experience in our chosen discipline whilst having some of Australia's natural treasures at our doorstep. However, it can also present some challenges, particularly due to the lack of anonymity which we may be accustomed to from living or working in larger regional centres or cities.

*Identifying some of those challenges and providing suggestions on how to navigate these issues will help you make the most of living and working in rural and remote communities.*

### Navigating personal and professional relationships

- There will always be a power differential between the professional's authority and the client's vulnerability. Professional boundaries are there to support the relationship through trust, compassion, mutual respect and empathy.
- Contact or dual relationships with patients/clients are common in rural and remote communities and are often unavoidable due to geographical and social structures (e.g. at the shops, sporting teams, social functions etc). This is commonly known as the "fishbowl" effect.
- There may also be an expectation to answer questions about yourself or behave in a more informal manner than a 'professional' manner of engagement.
- It is important to establish the distinction between personal and professional relationships through good communication with the patient/client and establishing these boundaries together, e.g. where you may see them, what you can (and cannot) talk about in certain spaces.
- Self-disclosure with clients/patients should only occur for therapeutic or clinical needs.
- Maintaining confidentiality is particularly critical as this is often a barrier to people seeking help in small communities.
- Being "emotionally guarded" and opting not to engage in activities where you may come across clients has been used as an effective strategy by some. However, you must ensure you do not become socially isolated.
- Health professionals must reflect on their own behaviour, anticipate conflicts, and proactively maintain boundaries where possible.
- Supervision and consultation with peers in similar situations will help maintain objectivity and address any ethical issues that may arise.
- Take regular breaks out of town and away from seeing clients in community.



## Avoiding social isolation

- Professional and personal isolation are common issues when living and working remotely and can contribute to burnout.
- Look for opportunities to engage and collaborate with other services and organisations, both professionally and socially.
- Actively seek out supervision and consultation within and outside of the community.
- Support from others can make you feel more confident and less stressed. This support can be in the form of:
  - Instrumental support, e.g. adequate equipment, staff, and funding to complete the work
  - Formal support, e.g. formal supervisor and mentoring, including cultural mentoring
  - Informational support, e.g. colleagues who make time to listen, give reassurance, or share humour
  - Accessing continuing professional development
- Keep connected to family and friends outside of the community.
- Engage in volunteering in the community through community organisations or emergency services.

## Ethical considerations

- Sustaining professional distance can be challenging.
- There can be tensions between organisational practices and local expectations. However, these can be negotiated between parties through honest, open communication, local knowledge and networking.
- Always maintain the ethical obligations of your discipline or position, including such things as confidentiality and mandatory reporting.
- Be mindful that there is a risk that your decisions can make you vulnerable to isolation, social pressure or even personal threats so ensure you seek support from peers or supervisors.
- You may feel pressured to undertake tasks outside of your scope of practice due to a lack of services. It's ethically sound to refuse to do so and you should not feel obligated.



### Remember

You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.

# Wellbeing for the Bush

## HEALTHY WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Despite its rewards, remote health practice can pose a number of challenges. Some of these are out of our control, whereas some instances can be mitigated by our actions. Below we discuss factors that might contribute to work stress and what you can do to create healthy workplaces in remote settings.

### Stress at work may look like:

- Constantly feeling tired
- Difficulty concentrating
- Becoming easily frustrated
- Arriving late regularly
- Having negative thoughts and losing confidence
- Increased alcohol or other drug use
- Avoiding colleagues

### Stress may be caused by:

- Factors specific to the job (e.g. safety issues, unmanageable workloads)
- Factors specific to the individual (e.g. poor time management, confusion about responsibilities)
- Career development issues (e.g. lack of job security, being passed over for promotion)
- Relationship issues (e.g. conflict in the workplace, bullying, discrimination or harassment)
- Issues with organisational structure or climate (e.g. poor culture and work practices, office politics)
- External stressors (e.g. lack of sleep, separation, mental/physical illness)

### Strategies

#### Cognitive approach

Changing the way we think and our attitudes can have a large impact on how we feel.

1. Identify the specific situation causing stress ("This project isn't done and it's due tomorrow")
2. Note the thoughts about the situation ("I'm terrible")
3. Develop objective alternatives to these thoughts ("I've faced this before and it turned out ok")
4. Observe the reduction in stress symptoms from using the more helpful thoughts
5. Develop strategies to notice the warning signs of stress in the future and rehearse

#### Improve time management

- Begin the day by reviewing the day's events, including breaks
- Keep a 'to do' list and prioritise tasks
- Minimise distractions and interruptions
- Learn to say 'No' to requests outside your immediate work responsibilities

## Seek collegial support within the workplace

Ask others in the workplace who feel more confident about their stress-management abilities to support you. This can be:

- Instrumental support (adequate staff, equipment)
- Emotional support (listening, reassuring, sharing humour)
- Informational support (career mentoring, sharing advice)

## Tips to manage conflict

- Manage conflict in a timely and positive manner – don't avoid it!
- Adopt an open, good faith approach
- Acknowledge your emotions, and theirs
- Attempt to understand the interests of each party
- Open yourself to the other person's needs and perspectives
- Be prepared to explore your own interests, feelings and actions
- Brainstorm a number of options that address mutual interests of both parties
- Compromise when feasible and appropriate to do so

For more information, refer to our 'Workplace Conflict' resource.

## Assertive communication and problem solving

- Stay focused on your own tasks and outcomes
- Express your needs and opinions respectfully and clearly. Use the Assertiveness Statement:
  - "When you...(name the behaviour)"
  - "I feel... (name your feelings)"
  - "What I want/need from you is... (be specific about what you require)"
- Don't gossip or complain about the other person; try to be reasonable and polite
- Appreciate that others have different opinions that are as valid as yours

## Change your lifestyle behaviours/undertake self-care strategies

- Practise relaxation/mindfulness/progressive muscle relaxation/guided imagery
- Meditation
- Physical exercise – run, walk, swim, ride a bike
- Spend more time outdoors
- Look at ways to relax – taking baths, cooking, having a massage, listening to music
- Improve your eating habits and nutrition
- Reduce risk behaviours such as smoking or alcohol/other drug use
- Try and get good quality sleep
- Refer to CRANaplus Self-Care Strategies handout to plan these activities



# Wellbeing for the Bush

## WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Workplace conflict can occur when there is a personality clash, a misunderstanding, or a misalignment of values. Conflict will always be present in a workplace. However, it's important to seek a resolution and not just bottle things up and let them fester away. Learning to effectively handle conflicts in a productive and healthy way is essential - especially in rural and remote health workplaces.

### Types of workplace conflict



#### Relationship conflict

Arises from differences in personality, style, matters of taste, and even conflict styles. In remote health workplaces, people who would not ordinarily meet in real life are often thrown together in a close environment and must try to get along. It's no surprise, then, that relationship conflict can be common.



#### Value conflict

Can arise from fundamental differences in identities and values, which can include differences in politics, religion, ethics, norms, and other deeply held beliefs. Although discussion of politics and religion is often taboo in workplaces, disputes about values can arise in the context of work decisions and policies, for example, providing birth control to underage youth.



#### Interest conflict

Can occur when a person's desired outcome conflicts with another person or group's interest. This can be challenging in small remote workplaces as there are often overlapping relationships. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality of information, reporting a concern about a staff member who is also a friend, or working with someone who has close family or relationships within the organisation can present challenges.

*This advice is provided as general information regarding day to day workplace conflict. It is not meant to address issues relating to bullying and harassment or impacts on psychological safety. If you are experiencing these issues seek support through your organisation, professional body or appropriate employee assistance provider. Support is also available 24 hours a day via the Bush Support Line on 1800 805 391.*

## So, what should I do?



### Don't ignore it.

Workplace conflict is unlikely to go away on its own, and, in most cases, ignoring it can make things worse.



### Hold others accountable for their behaviours or actions.

Without coming across as aggressive, name what happened that upset you. For example, "In the team meeting, when you said my idea was a waste of time and would never work and proceeded to list several other 'ideas' I've suggested that you didn't like, I felt (and name the feeling, for example, hurt, upset, ashamed) ..."



### Check in with your own behaviour.

We need to reflect on our own behaviours and hold ourselves accountable for disruptive ones, such as taking sides, splitting or character assassination.



### Invite open and honest conversation.

Approach the other person from a calm and non-judgemental but assertive place.



### Solve the problem that started the conflict.

Find a resolution. This may mean both parties taking some time out to think and ponder, before coming back together to discuss it further.



### Focus on the problem at hand, not past issues.

Stay on track with the issue at hand. It is very easy to get bogged down in historical problems and conflict, which tend to make the current conflict worse.



### Agree on a way forward.

Identify what you expect from each other going forward.

## Prevent and manage workplace conflict<sup>1</sup>

- **Be a good communicator** - Respectful and professional communication of information in the right forum can help ease the number and severity of conflicts that occur.
- **Be the change you want to see** - Set the proper workplace standards. Never underestimate the role you can play in setting examples for professional, respectful practice. It starts with you!
- **Document the conflict and get help** - If it's above-the-line behaviour and serious and unacceptable conflict, ensure you document the conflict, report it and seek support sooner rather than later.
- **Call out bad behaviour** - We're responsible and accountable for our practice so we cannot be bystanders when it happens. We need to make it clearly known that it won't be tolerated.

1. 5 ways to deal with workplace conflict [https://www.anmfsa.org.au/Web/News/2020/5\\_ways\\_to\\_deal\\_with\\_workplace\\_conflict.aspx](https://www.anmfsa.org.au/Web/News/2020/5_ways_to_deal_with_workplace_conflict.aspx)



# Wellbeing for the Bush

## IDENTIFYING & MANAGING STRESS

Have you ever considered: 'what actually is stress?' In this resource we define what it is, both the good and the bad; explore how it may present; look at the risks it poses to health care workers; and provide simple strategies to identify, manage and reduce its impact on your wellbeing.

*'Stress is often described as feeling overloaded, wound-up, tense and worried, and occurs when we face a situation, we feel we can't cope with'<sup>1</sup>*

- Not all stress is bad
- Stress can be helpful and can be an appropriate reaction
- When stress becomes excessive and too much (e.g. long-term, chronic stress) this can impact on both our mental and physical health<sup>2</sup>

### Symptoms of stress can include:

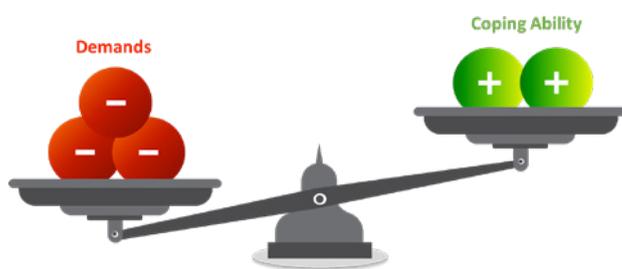
- **Physical:** headaches or other aches and pains, fatigue, upset stomach/diarrhoea, weakened immune system, muscle tension.
- **Emotional:** anxiety, worry, irritability, depressed/sadness, feeling overwhelmed and out of control, feeling moody and tearful.
- **Behaviourally:** avoiding situations/people, increased drug and alcohol use, outbursts of anger, overeating or undereating and relationship problems.
- **Sleep:** poor sleep, bad dreams.
- **Impairment:** decreased attention span, poor memory and decreased concentration.

### There are risks to 'helpers' during periods of prolonged stress:

- When you are helper/carer during periods of prolonged stress – your body is denied the chance to rest and recover and replenish reserves which are vital to your health.
- Empathy and connection with others can increase vulnerability to personal distress.
- Direct or indirect exposure to traumatic material can increase stress.
- Living in the area, being invested in the community can increase the risk of prolonged stress.



Stress can occur when the demands of your internal and external environment exceed your perceived ability to cope



### Stress balance: strategies to manage stress demands

- When helping others, self-monitoring and self-care are necessary to manage risks and demands
- Leisure and pleasure are useful to break the cycle and to allow rest, recovery and re-establish the internal and external balance
- Find out what “recharges” you and do it regularly

### Self-care - an everyday essential

- What is your self-care strategy for the start of the day?
- Check in with yourself each morning and after work
- Consider strategies for prevention or escalation e.g., humour, reflection
- Post stressor – listen, debrief, reflect, let go

### Establish work life balance as a life goal.

It is important to:

- Take breaks at work and away from work
- Debrief - know who to contact when you need to debrief
- Set realistic goals and standards
- Say ‘no’, politely but assertively; practise saying ‘no’
- Separate interests, social support outside work
- Share experience with trusted people
- Use services like Lifeline and the CRANaplus Bush Support Line

### Where to from here?

#### Self-care takes practice and planning

- Consider completing a self-care plan (check out our Self-Care Plan at [crana.org.au/self-care-plan](http://crana.org.au/self-care-plan) for an example)
- Relaxation/meditation/mindfulness
- Go outside – exercise or get into nature
- Social connections – hobbies, groups, family and friends
- Consider your eating, nutrition and sleep

1 [www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress](http://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress)

2 [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress)

# Wellbeing for the Bush

## RESILIENCE

Resilience is a necessary skill that helps us to manage the ups and downs of life, a skill that health workers draw on to navigate stressful situations that may arise throughout the day. This resource defines resilience and provides simple techniques to guide you to strengthen 'your resilience muscle'.

*Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves “bouncing back” from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth.<sup>1</sup>*

### Building resilience is like building a muscle; it takes time and intentionality through focusing on these 4 elements:

- **Build Your Connections** - Connecting with empathetic and understanding people can remind you that you're not alone in the midst of difficulties. Feeling overwhelmed and stressed can lead some people to isolate themselves, but it's important to accept help and support from those who care about you.
- **Foster Wellness** - Take care of your body (sleep, nutrition, physical activity); practise mindfulness; and avoid negative outlets like drugs and alcohol.
- **Embrace Healthy Thinking** - Try to keep things in perspective; accept that change is a part of life; maintain a hopeful outlook; and learn from past experiences.
- **Find Purpose** - Help others; move toward your goals; look for opportunities for self discovery.<sup>2</sup>

Being psychologically prepared for an adverse event is like a “stress inoculation” when it happens.

### 4 steps to psychological preparedness: The AIME approach

#### A

Anticipate that it will be stressful and that you will be feeling anxious or worried. If you understand how you usually react, you can manage stressors better when they occur (Q. How do you usually react to stress?)

#### I

Identify specific thoughts or feelings. Notice your physical symptoms of arousal such as racing heart, shortness of breath. Notice how those feelings can trigger stressful thoughts.

#### M

Manage your responses through self-talk (“I can handle this” etc.) and breathing.

#### E

Engage with a trusted person. By connecting you can feel supported and less alone.

Remember to reflect on what strengths you already have, how you have dealt with adversity in the past and what worked for you: draw on this in times of stress.<sup>2</sup>



### Practice GEM every day to promote resilience:

- **Gratitude:** an appreciation for the good things that happen in life. (e.g. Gratitude journal or jar, or telling someone you're glad they're in your life)
- **Empathy:** the ability to understand and share the feelings of another (Curiosity about strangers, challenging prejudices, listening actively when someone is talking)
- **Mindfulness:** being present in the here and now, without judgement (Mindfulness of the breath, in your morning routine, doing domestic chores)<sup>3,4</sup>

### Including self-care as a part of your daily routine helps build resilience

For a self-care plan template head to: [crana.org.au/self-care-plan](http://crana.org.au/self-care-plan)

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### What do I do for self-care?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Get plenty of sleep            |  Tidy   |
|  Enjoy sunshine                 |  Read   |
|  Cook                           |  Read about people whose lives are more complicated |
|  Write or draw (think out loud) |  Garden   |
|  Talk to myself                 |  Get a hug   |
|  Cuddle cats                    |  Talk to select people                               |
|  Walk or bike (esp. in a park)  |  |

1 [www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress](http://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress)

2 [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress)

3 Cuylenburg, H. (2019). Finding Happiness Through Gratitude, Empathy and Mindfulness.

4 Voci, A., Veneziani, C. A., & Fuochi, G. (2019). Relating mindfulness, heartfulness, and psychological well-being: the role of self-compassion and gratitude. *Mindfulness*, 10(2), 339-351.

5 [healthpsych.com/kind-four-ways-practice-self-care/](http://healthpsych.com/kind-four-ways-practice-self-care/) and [www.positivediscipline.com/articles/self-care-teachers](http://www.positivediscipline.com/articles/self-care-teachers)

# Wellbeing for the Bush

## SELF-CARE

As a health worker, it may be challenging to find the time to put yourself first but it's important to remind yourself that you cannot pour from an empty cup. This resource defines self-care, and provides some ideas for simple activities or practices that you can use regularly to help to reduce stress and enhance your overall health and wellbeing.

*As health workers we are used to caring for others, but sometimes the last person we care for is ourselves. It's often the first thing to go when we are busy and under stress, but self-care is essential to helping us stay healthy.<sup>1</sup>*



### What is self-care?

- Self-care refers to the activities that we do on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing.

### Why should we do it?

- Self-care gives your body and mind time to rest, reset and rejuvenate
- Self-care helps prevent stress and anxiety
- Looking after yourself helps you to be more effective in all aspects of your life
- Self-care prevents burnout/compassion fatigue

### 5 Pillars of Self-Care

The 5 Pillars of Self-Care are relaxation; social; exercise; eating and nutrition; and sleep. Considering each pillar can assist in the prevention of and recovery from reduced wellbeing. Remember, everyone has different ideas and strategies for what each pillar looks like for them.



### Where to from here?

- Complete a Self-Care Plan (see overpage for an example)
- Access the CRANaplus Bush Support Line if needed

## Self-Care Plan

This planner can help you to identify your own personal signs of stress and plan strategies that may help you to manage your own stress and emotions.

<p><b>What are your personal signs of stress?</b> What are the signs that might tell you that you need to take some time to care for yourself? (E.g. irritability, decreased concentration, withdrawing from friends/activities)</p>	<p>My personal signs that might tell me I am becoming stressed or finding it difficult to manage are:</p>
<p><b>What strategies can you use to manage stress?</b> Be as specific as possible. (E.g. practise abdominal breathing for 10 minutes, talk to a partner, go for a run)</p>	<p>The strategies I would be able to use to manage stress include:</p>
<p><b>Who can you call upon for support?</b> Try and identify multiple people in different areas (e.g. family, friends, colleagues)</p>	<p>If I need extra support, I can ask/talk to:</p>
<p><b>What enjoyable activities can you include in your routine over the next month? When?</b> Try to make a list of various activities (big and small). Then schedule them into a 'Pleasant Events Schedule' available on the Emerging Minds website.</p>	<p>The activities that I will try to include in my routine (and stick to!) are:</p>

**Emerging  
Minds.**

This resource was developed by Emerging Minds as part of the Community Trauma Toolkit. More resources are available at [emergingminds.com.au](http://emergingminds.com.au)

## Wellbeing for the Bush

# LISTENING & COMMUNICATING

This resource is a first step or a reminder of effective ways of listening and communicating with someone who may need support. We can all be affected by personal distress at some point in our lives. *This is not a clinical intervention. These are the conversations you have with your neighbour, work colleague, or friend.*



**1. Prepare**



**2. Ask**



**3. Listen**



**4. Support**

### 1. Prepare

There are a couple of ways to prepare for a conversation. It is important to feel as though you have some basic knowledge about mental health and the resources and supports that are available.

When you plan to have a conversation with someone you are concerned about, before having the conversation, ask yourself a couple of questions:

- Are you prepared?
- Do you feel ready?
- How do you feel today?
- Are you the right person to have the conversation?

It is okay to feel anxious – conversations can be difficult.

### 2. Ask

It is understandable to feel nervous before asking someone about their wellbeing. Not wanting to say the wrong thing or make things worse is a common worry.

It can be challenging to know how to start a conversation with someone you are concerned about.

The following are some examples of conversation starters.

- “I have noticed ....(name what you have noticed that is different). Is everything okay?”
- “You haven’t seemed yourself lately. Is everything okay?”
- “It’s been a really tough time lately. How are you coping with everything?”

Below are some simple tips for talking with someone.

- Use open-ended questions that don’t require yes or no answers
- Keep it simple – “How can I help?”
- Help them see they are not alone
- Try not to use jargon or platitudes (e.g. look on the bright side!)
- Don’t judge their experiences or reactions but acknowledge that things seem tough for them
- Be aware of non-verbal cues and body language

## What to say next

Below are some suggestions for continuing the conversation once you have asked how they are going.

- “Just take your time, there is no rush. I know talking about this can be difficult.”
- “I can hear that the last few months have been really terrible for you. Please tell me more about it.”
- “Can I just check that I have understood you correctly?”
- “What’s that like for you?”

## 3. Listen

As health workers we often try to jump in and “fix” things, sometimes we need to step back and allow the person to talk and for us to just listen.

There are many occasions when being listened to is all that is required to help people through a difficult time.

Silence and pauses are okay.

## 4. Support

Whether it’s a friend, family, colleague or client/patient that you are supporting, you can play a significant role.

During the listening step, you will get an understanding of the issues they are experiencing, what support they have, and things that might help. Below are some key tips for supporting someone:

- It’s important that you reassure them they are not alone and there is hope that things can get better.
- Check your understanding of the situation and what you can do to help. Ask “what do you think I can do to support you?”

## Planning your own self-care:

- Remember to look after yourself as well
- Don’t forget your own self care



*Early intervention from a colleague, friend, or compassionate health provider could make a real difference to saving lives. Everyone has the capacity to help and to do so safely.*

## When is extra professional help needed?

- If the person is not feeling better or improving
- The symptoms are interfering with daily life and affecting ability to function
- They are isolating from friends and family
- They have a sense of ongoing hopelessness, lack of pleasure
- There is evidence of risk-taking, thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Avoidance

### More information

Access CRANApus’ free online course ‘Critical Conversations’: [crana.org.au/critical-conversations](https://crana.org.au/critical-conversations)

Black Dog Institute: [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/How-to-help-when-youre-worried-about-someones-mental-health.pdf](https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/How-to-help-when-youre-worried-about-someones-mental-health.pdf)

RUOK: <https://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask>

# Wellbeing for the Bush FIRST PEOPLES HEALTH WORKFORCE

To all the deadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers out there in rural and remote communities - this is for you. Many of you have extraordinary resilience and strength in the face of difficult and challenging times. This is a reminder that everyone needs to take time for themselves to maintain their own wellbeing.

As a health worker it can be challenging to balance the demands of your role, with the demands of family, community and kinship. Sometimes the last person we care for is ourselves. Self-care is often the first thing to go when we are busy and under stress, but it's essential to helping us stay well.

**It is an incredibly rewarding job working as a First Peoples Health Worker.**

## Rewarding aspects

- Connecting to community and building relationships;
- Giving and receiving knowledge;
- Speaking up for communities; and
- Being part of the solutions to improve Indigenous health and access to services.



There can also be many stressors that can take their toll...

## Sources of stress

- Workloads – high and demanding workloads
- Expectations – managing complex family/community obligations and expectations
- Recognition, respect and support – workers may lack support and feel isolated
- Boundaries – managing personal and professional boundaries
- Racism – coworkers, mainstream community and systems you work in
- Complex personal circumstances
- Loss, grief, Sorry Business – coworkers and managers may not recognise the impact of loss, grief and the importance of Sorry Business
- Culturally safe ways of working – mainstream colleagues and managers may not understand Indigenous ways of working
- Working conditions – can be challenging in rural and remote settings
- Funding, job security and salaries.



## 7 areas to consider

- **Social Support:** Social support and your mob can keep you healthier and happier, creating a buffer against stress. Surround yourself with people who understand how you feel. Friends and family can pick you up when you're down, burnt out and tired.
- **Sleep:** We all know how important sleep is but sometimes we fail to make it a priority
- **Exercise:** A walk, a swim – get back in nature and feel the earth between your toes
- **Food:** Healthy food is fuel for your body
- **Fun:** What do you love to do? Painting, sport, walking, swimming with your kids, calling a cuz to catch-up? Do something fun and just for you every week.
- **Care for your health,** remember women's and men's business and don't forget to see your doctor.
- **Quiet time to unplug:** Create and visit special places and spaces in your days or weeks where you unplug from everything.

## What can you do?

There are two main ways to prevent and reduce stress as a First Peoples Health Worker.

1. The first way is for health agencies to provide support for you as a worker. This can include supervision and mentoring, debriefing, flexible work arrangements, role clarity, and culturally safe practices including cultural supervision.
2. The second way is for you to do things that reduce your own stress.
  - Connect to community and culture
  - Laughter
  - Have realistic expectations
  - Prioritise tasks
  - Maintain a balance between work and other aspects of your life
  - Enjoy the successes
  - Have a yarn and debrief with someone you trust
  - Set up systems to be able to check in regularly with mentors/supervisors
  - Use services like the Bush Support Line

### More information

Keep yourself healed: Self-care for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJu07iAYN\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJu07iAYN_0)

Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly: Indigenous Worker Wellbeing. [nceta.flinders.edu.au/workforce/indigenous-aod-workforce/feeling-deadly-working-deadly-indigenous-worker-wellbeing](https://nceta.flinders.edu.au/workforce/indigenous-aod-workforce/feeling-deadly-working-deadly-indigenous-worker-wellbeing)

# Wellbeing for the Bush

## 5 SENSES TECHNIQUE

Firstly, give yourself a moment to become mindful of your breathing. Take a few long, slow, deep breaths to return to a calmer state. Once you find your breath, go through the following steps to help ground yourself:



### What are 5 things you can see?

It could be a tree, a spot on the ceiling, or any aspect of your surroundings. You can say what you see out loud, in your head, or even write it down (it's a personal choice). Take your time to pay attention to what you are really seeing, including details like the colours and textures.



### What are 4 things you can feel?

Maybe it's the sensation of clothing on your body, how your neck muscles are feeling, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. You may want to pick up an object and think about how it feels in terms of weight, texture, and other characteristics.



### What are 3 things you can hear?

Pay attention to the sounds your mind has blocked out. Perhaps you can hear a clock ticking, a dog barking, or the wind blowing through the trees.



### What are 2 things you can smell?

This one might be hard if you are not in a stimulating environment. If you cannot sniff something out where you are, walk nearby to find a scent. Maybe you walk to a bathroom to smell soap or outside to smell something in nature, such as gum leaves.



### What is 1 thing you can taste?

What does the inside of your mouth taste like? Toothpaste, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch? Focus on your mouth and take in what you can taste.

**Lastly, don't forget to breathe.**

Congratulations. By doing this activity you have taken some time to calm your mind and body. You can do this activity anywhere and anytime you need help to return to a calmer state.

## Wellbeing for the Bush

# BODY AWARENESS TECHNIQUE

This exercise will help bring you into the present by directing your attention to various parts of your body. You may want to do this while sitting, lying down or even while walking.



### 1. Take 5 long, deep breaths.

Ensure you are taking each breath through your nose, and exhaling through your mouth with your lips puckered.

### 2. Notice your feet.

Put both feet flat on the floor and wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times, while paying close attention to what you are feeling in your feet.

### 3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times.

Hone in on the feelings in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.

### 4. Clench your hands into tight fists, then release.

Repeat this 8-10 times.

### 5. Press your palms together, first gently, then more firmly.

Hold for 15-20 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.

### 6. Rub your palms together briskly.

Notice the sound and the feeling of warmth.

### 7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky.

Do this for five seconds, then bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.

### 8. Breathe again.

Take five more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

## Great job on taking a few moments for you.

The more you practise the easier it will become to return to this calmer state. And remember, you can practise this technique anytime and anywhere.

## Wellbeing for the Bush

# TAKE A BREATHING BREAK

Complete this activity several times a day to help refresh you, replenish your energy, let go of distractions, and increase your focus. You can practise this simple, two-step activity anywhere and anytime you wish to return to a calmer state.

### Step 1

Stand and take a deep breath whilst raising your arms slowly over your head.

### Step 2

Exhale as you lower your arms. Repeat this exercise three times.



**Well done for doing something today to support your wellbeing.**

Why not share the Take a Breathing Break technique with a friend or work colleague? For more wellbeing exercises and resources to support your wellbeing, visit [crana.org.au/support](https://crana.org.au/support)

## Bush Support Line 1800 805 391

- A free, confidential 24/7 telephone support line
- Available every day of the year
- For people working in the current and emerging remote and rural health workforce and their families (including nurses, midwives, aged care workers, health students, doctors, allied health etc.)
- Staffed by psychologists with remote and cross-cultural experience
- Available from anywhere in Australia

## Wellbeing for the Bush

# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

We've curated a list of support lines, counselling services, mental health resources and self-care guides as a quick go to for when you're needing a little extra support. A digital version of this resource with clickable links is available to download at [crana.org.au/helpful-resources](https://crana.org.au/helpful-resources)

### Support Lines and Counselling Services for Health Workers

-  **CRANApplus** — Our Bush Support Line provides high-quality, free, confidential, 24/7 telephone support for the current and emerging rural and remote health workforce, and their families. Phone 1800 805 391 [crana.org.au/bushsupportline](https://crana.org.au/bushsupportline)
-  **Nurse & Midwife Support** — 24/7 support for nurses and midwives. Phone 1800 667 877 [nmsupport.org.au](https://nmsupport.org.au)
-  **DRS4DRS** — 24 hour crisis support for doctors and medical students. Phone 1300 374 377 [drs4drs.com.au](https://drs4drs.com.au)
-  **RACGP GP Support Program** — 24/7 support for GPs for traumatic incidents or crisis counselling. Face-to-face counselling also available. Phone 1300 361 008 [racgp.org.au](https://racgp.org.au)
-  **Pharmacists' Support Service** — A free service run by pharmacists for pharmacists. Every day from 8am to 11pm AEST. Phone 1300 244 910 [supportforpharmacists.org.au](https://supportforpharmacists.org.au)

### National Crisis and Support Lines

-  **Beyond Blue** — Call 24/7 to talk with a trained mental health professional. Phone 1300 224 636 [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au)
-  **13YARN** — Culturally safe, confidential, one-on-one yarning opportunity for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. Available 24/7. Phone 13 92 76 [13yarn.org.au](https://13yarn.org.au)
-  **Health Direct** — Registered nurses are available 24/7 to provide health advice when you're not sure what to do. Phone 1800 022 222 [healthdirect.gov.au](https://healthdirect.gov.au)
-  **Lifeline** — 24/7 confidential support from a trained Lifeline crisis supporter. Phone 13 11 14 [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)
-  **Suicide Call Back Service** — A nationwide service providing 24/7 telephone and online counselling to people affected by suicide. Phone 1300 659 467 [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

*"Ask for help not  
because you're weak,  
but because you want  
to remain strong."  
- Les Brown*

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources and Information

**CRANaplus** has developed a series of resources, information and tools to support the mental health and wellbeing of the remote and rural health workforce. [crana.org.au/wellbeingresources](http://crana.org.au/wellbeingresources)

**WellMob** produces social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. [wellmob.org.au](http://wellmob.org.au)

**eMHprac** connects health professionals to online programs, resources, primary care information and digital mental health resources. [emhprac.org.au](http://emhprac.org.au)

**Black Dog Institute** provides research-informed mental health resources and support tools that are recommended by professionals. The associated TEN (The Essential Networks for Health Professionals) helps healthcare workers find resources and support to manage burnout and maintain good mental health. [blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au) & [blackdoginstitute.org.au/the-essential-network](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au/the-essential-network)

**Australian Psychological Society** provides information and resources on varied psychology topics. [psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics](http://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics)

**Beyond Blue** provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live. [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

**This Way Up** provides a suite of tailored online treatment courses. [thiswayup.org.au](http://thiswayup.org.au)

**Phoenix Australia** is the Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health. They provide a range of resources, online training, and treatment guidelines for health practitioners. [phoenixaustralia.org](http://phoenixaustralia.org)

**Emerging Minds** helps health professionals to connect with better mental health support and approaches for infants, children and families. [emergingminds.com.au](http://emergingminds.com.au)

**Head to Health** offers over 500 digital mental health resources from trusted service providers to support your wellbeing and mental health. [headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au)

**Sleep Health Foundation** has prepared a number of fact sheets about sleep-related topics. [sleephealthfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets.html](http://sleephealthfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets.html)

## Self-Care for Health Workers

**Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW** – Self-care Toolkit [ahmrc.org.au/publication/self-care-toolkit](http://ahmrc.org.au/publication/self-care-toolkit)

**Australian Indigenous Health Info Net** – Taking Care of Yourself [healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/health-professionals/health-workers/taking-care-of-yourself](http://healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/health-professionals/health-workers/taking-care-of-yourself)

**Beyond Blue** – Self-care Resources [beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/topics/self-care](http://beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/topics/self-care)

**NSW Rural Doctors Network** – #RuralHealthTogether provides self-care support & wellbeing information [ruralhealthtogether.info](http://ruralhealthtogether.info)

**CRANaplus** – Wellbeing for the Bush resources [crana.org.au/selfcaretips](http://crana.org.au/selfcaretips) and Self-Care During Placement Online [crana.org.au/selfcarecourse](http://crana.org.au/selfcarecourse)

**NCETA** – Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly [nceta.flinders.edu.au/workforce/indigenous-aod-workforce/feeling-deadly-working-deadly-indigenous-worker-wellbeing](http://nceta.flinders.edu.au/workforce/indigenous-aod-workforce/feeling-deadly-working-deadly-indigenous-worker-wellbeing)

**Life in Mind** – A Guide to Self-Care [lifeinmind.org.au/research/self-care](http://lifeinmind.org.au/research/self-care)

### Feedback

We'd love to hear from you! Scan the QR code or head to [bit.ly/3CED55y](http://bit.ly/3CED55y) to complete our short survey, or email your feedback to [wellbeing@crana.org.au](mailto:wellbeing@crana.org.au)





CRANApplus acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land, waters and sky, and respects their enduring spiritual connection to Country. We acknowledge the sorrow of the past and our hope and belief that we can move to a place of equity, partnership and justice together. We acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging, and pay our respects to the cultural authority of First Peoples.

#### Head Office

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**Phone** 07 4047 6400

**Email** [wellbeing@crana.org.au](mailto:wellbeing@crana.org.au)

#### Bush Support Line

1800 805 391

#### Social Media

[Facebook.com/CRANApplus](https://www.facebook.com/CRANApplus)

[Twitter.com/CRANApplus](https://twitter.com/CRANApplus)

[Instagram.com/CRANApplus](https://www.instagram.com/CRANApplus)

[Linkedin.com/company/CRANApplus](https://www.linkedin.com/company/CRANApplus)

