



5 July 2019

Commission Panel  
Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System  
PO Box 12079  
A'Beckett Street  
VICTORIA 8006

Dear Commissioner

### **Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System**

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into this important issue impacting all Victorians, but shed light on the issues facing those living in rural and regional Victoria.

Regional communities, in particular the farming community, tend to be at a higher risk of mental health issues and suicide. There can be many factors that lead to farmers encountering mental hardship; they include natural disasters, season failure; financial difficulty and relationship breakdowns. There still continues to be barriers prohibiting farmers from accessing much needed mental health care.

There are a limited amount of mental health care professionals located across regional Victoria. A concerted effort from government needs to be undertaken to attract and retain professionals in regional centres. The requirement to visit the local General Practitioner (GP) to meet the set criteria to access the mental health plan is prohibitive for many within the farming community. Not all regional towns have a local GP, often requiring farmers to travel in an effort to access health care. While a farmer may be feeling a sense of isolation or helplessness, this barrier may prevent the farmer from seeking the assistance required.

Additionally, for those centres that have a GP, there are concerns surrounding anonymity. Farmers often get a sense that by having a personal relationship with the GP, or small towns often knowing personal details of residents, that farmers may not visit the GP for fear their circumstances may be public or become gossip. The VFF would like the commission to explore telephone or internet pathways that can be accessed by rural communities while satisfying the requirements of the subsidised health care plans.

The VFF would like to work with the Victorian State Government to increase the roll out and reach of the '*look over the farm gate*' program. The program can be used to further reduce the stigma of masculinity enshrined in mental health within some areas of the farming community. The program is a valuable resource that can be taken into regional and rural Victoria to offer much needed information and awareness.

If the commission would like additional information about mental health in rural Victoria, I would welcome the opportunity to meet and have further discussions.

Yours sincerely



**David Jochinke**  
President  
Victorian Farmers Federation



**Victorian  
Farmers  
Federation**