

Case Study Report



mental illness
fellowship victoria

Enabling Resilience with Mental Illness Fellowship

An output of the Rural
People; Resilient
Futures Project



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Images

Courtesy of Benjamin Rhook and Brett Lynch

Disclaimer

The views expressed herein do not represent those of the Victorian Government. They are the views of the report authors.

This case study report is a co-developed research output of the Rural People; Resilient Futures project, funded through the Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership Grant Scheme, through the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries. This report was co-written by MI Fellowship, the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership, as well as researchers from RMIT University. Chapter 4 of this report outlines information gathered through consultations undertaken throughout the project and the report captures the views of the project partners and the researchers involved.

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1 About us

MI Fellowship™ is a not-for profit membership based organisation and is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Our primary purpose is to support people with mental illness and other psychosocial disabilities, their families and their friends.

MI Fellowship Victoria offers a wide range of community-based services and programs to people with mental illness, and the families, friends and carers of people with mental illness. We work in partnership to create pathways for people to connect with education and employment opportunities, to find and create homes for themselves, to build links within their communities, and to develop supportive relationships with families and friends.

MI Fellowship holds a strong advocacy position and will advocate on behalf of people with a mental illness and to educate the wider community in relation to the stigma attached to mental illness and its impact on the individual

Our programs are informed by the evidence on mental illness and recovery. Recovery from mental illness is best described as a process, defined and led by the person with a mental illness, through which they achieve independence, self-esteem and a meaningful life in the community.

Our services are located across Victoria with offices in Hamilton, Portland, Warrnambool, Ballarat, Camperdown Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula, Geelong, Gippsland, Shepparton region, Seymour and Wallan. We also have services in the ACT (Australian Capital Territory).

The MI Fellowship Helpline is available nationally.

2 The Rural People; Resilient Futures Project

Our organisation is a member agency of the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership (PCP in the following), who has been involved in a project funded by the Victorian government through the Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership Grant Scheme. The project entitled '*Rural People; Resilient Futures*' (RPRF in the following) has been conducted to investigate the nature of vulnerability in a rural shire, understand how this will vary under the impacts of climate change, and how the capacity of these groups can be increased and who can help.

The project is a collaborative endeavour between the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Shire (the Shire in the following), the PCP and researchers from RMIT University. Eight member agencies of the PCP, and various other stakeholders were involved in all phases of the project, and facilitated engagement with community members throughout the Shire.

2.1 The process

The RPRF project involved four phases, over a 12 month period. Key member agency engagement was facilitated through one-on-one consultations with the PCP and researchers, as well as workshops throughout all phases of the project. The project phases are outlined below:

Phase 1:

Baseline Understanding
What does vulnerability look like in SGSC.

Phase 2:

How does climate change complicate this vulnerability?

Phase 3:

What can we do locally?
Focus on integration into plans and policies

Phase 4:

Information sharing to inform community and stakeholders

3 Getting started

3.1 Why we wanted to participate

MI Fellowship recognised the additional benefits of this project and identified the possible implications of climate change to individuals in the community and also service delivery. Our organisation was interested in learning more about how we can plan for extreme weather and climate change and work collaboratively with other available resources and services in our rural communities.

MI Fellow values family, the individual and community.

MI Fellowship also recognises the importance of identifying and engaging individuals and their families to keep them well informed. We identify the need for developing trusting relationships and awareness between participants and their local community services / emergency services for preparation to natural disaster events.

Through our experience in recent heatwaves we provide support for participants and families to maintain safe living environments, access to transport, fresh food and water, management of side effects of medications that is exacerbated by extreme heat and many other factors that can affect daily living.

MI Fellowship have processes within our organisation to increase community resilience and we wanted to share our experience and learn from other organisations in the community. At the time of expressing an interest in the project, work had been carried out to implement a Vulnerable Persons List within the Department of Human Services and also within our organisation. An increase in volunteer's to utilise transport for participants and arrange activities in appropriate venues dependent on weather are also additions to service delivery.

4 Engagement in the Process

4.1 Initial consultations - Phase 1

We initially engaged with the SGGPCP for this project in 2014 through to 2015. MI Fellowship Program Worker Vanessa Slattery (Hamilton) directed the Project with the support from Frances Kelly, MI Fellowship Portland and Hamilton Coordinator. During this meeting, SGGPCP representatives engaged with us on the following questions:

- Who do you work with?
- What makes life tough for community members?
- What are community members doing to make life easier?
- What happened during the last heatwave?
- How can we make life easier?

Our key response to these questions outlined:

- Everyday life and motivation coupled with lack of social connection makes life tough for our clients
- People are experiencing financial stress, housing issues and difficulty accessing transport (particularly in a rural setting)
- We can make life easier by providing more opportunities for clients to have their say and to facilitate opportunities for social connection.
- During extreme heatwave events we can link participants to “cool” activities such as attending the cinema, library or swimming pool. Free passes assist to promote access to these settings.

Heatwave

MI Fellowship has previously cancelled outdoor activities during extreme heat or arranged alternative activities (such as going to the cinema). MI Fellowship encourages participants to visit the centre so they can stay cool, receive water and be reminded of appropriate dress / behaviours during hot weather (dress cool, do not walk in the heat of the day).

Participants may access toiletries / products from the centre for personal hygiene needs. MI Fellowship keeps water bottles for participants and can assist with access to the food bank.

MI Fellowship runs supported housing through Department of Human services and has a program called 'Doorway Housing and Support' which supports participants to gain private rental properties in quiet neighbourhoods and positive environments. This program is currently running across larger cities but may be considered for roll out in rural locations. Participants receive greater quality houses in the private rental market, resulting in lower utility costs and lower maintenance. This program assists participants who are on a waiting list for Department of Housing or enables participants increased choice and the chance to move away from cluster housing.

During phase 1, an informal community consultation workshop was undertaken at Hamilton Community House as well as a Stakeholder workshop where we were invited to discuss means to manage the complexity of vulnerability in rural Victoria. The purpose of these workshops was to understand what vulnerability really means in the Shire from the perspective of the community.

Simultaneously, the researchers from RMIT University undertook a literature review to understand what the academic and grey literature said about vulnerability. This was presented to our team through a workshop in Phase 2.

We worked with the PCP to complete a climate and vulnerability workbook produced by the research team, to help understand what our organisation, service delivery and participants may be vulnerable to already.

From this process, we understood that currently, we are most vulnerable to:

- Bush fires
- Grass fires
- Heatwave
- Extreme wind across the region including coastal winds.
- Sheet rain between Warrnambool and Hamilton.
- Black ice on the roads following flooding.
- To consider narrow country roads with black spots and tree lined roads that can result in fallen branches and limited vision.
- Limited access to some areas with road closures caused by landslides in the Grampians and to understand some roads are dry weather roads only.
- Safety plans should be inclusive of isolated locations with one road access and ensure methods of phone coverage for emergency alert.



What does climate change mean for your community service organisation?

Activity Book

Rural People; Resilient Futures Project
Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership
Southern Grampians Shire Council
RMIT University

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Purpose: to determine the impacts of climate change on your service delivery and clients' vulnerability, and what can be done to manage this.¹

The Adaptation Process²

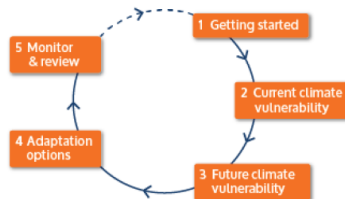


FIGURE 2. THE CLIMATE AND VULNERABILITY WORKBOOK

¹ Workbook adapted from: NHS – 'Adaptation to Climate Change for Health and Social Care Organisation UKCIP - Local Climate Impacts Profile: how to do an LCIP UKCIP – Adaptation Wizard Notepad

² UKCIP Adaptation Wizard, <http://www.ukcip.org.uk/wizard/>

4.2 The impact of climate change – Phase 2

During this phase, the RMIT Researchers and the PCP ran a workshop to understand how climate impacts may affect our organisation, service delivery and participants. We were taken through a climate impacts table¹, which PCP representatives later met with us to complete.

The table demonstrated what impacts are likely to occur to 2070, highlighting specific events and how they might increase in intensity or frequency. The table then investigated the 'Receptor: thing being affected', the 'Consequences', the 'Threats: negative impacts' and 'Opportunities: positive impacts' that may occur as a result of each climate impact.

At the end of the workshop, we ran through two possible scenarios that could affect our organisation and the shire; heatwave combined with bushfire, and an extreme rainfall and flood event, illustrating a critical disaster point. We then worked back through time, over six months, two years, and five years to brainstorm adaptation actions that would have helped us to avoid the disaster in the first place. These formed the basis of our adaptation action planning and highlighted things that we are already doing to increase resilience.

We also took the time to consider our actions to a number of climatic driven events. The following section outlines how climate events have impacted us historically and how we are addressing them.

Bushfire

MI Fellowship has government housing in bush/grass fire risk areas. Participants living rurally may be at risk during bush fire season. Factors

¹ UKCIP – Local Climate Impacts Profile

that put participants at risk include limited financial resources where not all participants will have petrol in their cars to leave the area. Participants experiencing residual positive symptoms may also suffer poor judgement and decision-making processes during extreme events.

MI Fellowship works with clients in Southern Grampians Shire and Glenelg Shire with Office locations in Hamilton and Portland and provide outreach to outlying areas (such as Branxholme, Casterton, Cavendish, Coleraine, Dunkeld, Dartmoor, Heywood and Penshurst).

Floods

MI Fellowship has not experienced the impact of floods in the Great South Coast region as yet. However staff have are often required to analyse whether to travel to meetings during extreme wind / rain along with black ice on roads in winter. Staff will follow OHS guidelines when making decisions - and utilise 'Weather Apps' on their phones. Coastal areas such as Cape Bridge Water have experienced high tidal surges resulting in the need for sand bagging buildings and 100km winds.

Other

MI Fellowship has been supporting a participant who was required to move his family off their property as the wind farm was exacerbating his mental illness. Research is continuing on the long term impacts of wind farms, and the high / low frequency experienced when living close to the turbines.

There have been many reforms in Mental Health over the past few years with Mental Health Matters and the introduction of the NDIS. MI Fellowship staff also use the Department of Human Services SCTT [tool's to assist with assessments](#)

This tool asks about personal emergency plans and smoke alarms.

How well did your organisation cope with the recent weather events?

MI Fellowship have identified participants to be included on the DHS 'Vulnerable Persons List' that do not have family or friend support and could be at risk in an extreme weather event. There is also a more informal process using participant knowledge and relationships to further support participants that may not specifically fit requirements for the vulnerability register.

As a result MI Fellowship also has their own (in-house) list of vulnerable people who they believe have limited coping skills / limited decision making skills and require support during an extreme event.

The centre plans activities for participant to keep cool during extreme heat, such as trips to the movies, library etc. The service develops a list of participants who medications make them particularly vulnerable to weather i.e: participants who take mood stabilizers are vulnerable to dehydration and other medications are impacted by sun light.

MI Fellowship has increased the usage of volunteer drivers to transport participants. Volunteers are from outside the centre, and are previous participants who have completed the 'Recovery and Rehabilitation Program' and now wish to volunteer at MI Fellowship. Previously there have been no official policies or guidelines to help determine travel on high-risk days but these are determined on a daily basis.

Lack of transport and access creates a large amount of difficulties for participants, particularly for those in outreach areas who wish to participate in programs. Participants are aware of available Community Transport Service but are reluctant to use it due to cost. Many participants do not own private vehicles due to the expense or for medical reasons do not drive. MI Fellowship will provide transport when possible. Many participants receive disability support pensions but this resource is often exhausted very soon in the week.

Participants cope as well as they can during extreme events, however changes to the Disability Pension and New Start supports are causing

added emotional and financial stress. Staff at MI Fellowship are noticing increasing anxiety among participant in response to media around budget cuts and access to support pensions etc. Climate Change impacts could bring on similar levels of anxiety.

Although not an extreme weather event, MI Fellowship have participated in the Pass the Parcel Project with SGGPCP to increase energy efficiency in the home. During both hot and cold weather extremes, participants have been more likely to conserve energy by not using heating or cooling and often live in low income housing. The Pass the Parcel project enabled a chance for participants to understand the comfort levels of their home and learn useful tips to be more energy efficient.

During this workshop, we participated in a film on the project.



FIGURE 3. PREPAREDNESS PACK DEVELOPED WITH CLIENTS

4.3 Current adaptation actions

Through the process, we understood that we are already undertaking actions that aid in building resilience within our community.

Preparation:

Client focused support for wellbeing and personal safety via planning for such events and liaising with appropriate organisations to implement personal safety plans coming into fire/flood seasons. Developing trusting relationships and awareness between participants and their local community services / emergency services to prepare for natural disaster events.

Response to Vulnerable and High Risk Participants:

MI fellowship hold a up-to-date List of Vulnerable persons registered with Department of Human Services along with a list of people who are at risk due to isolation or limited services support due to such issues of Black spots, one way access to farms or properties or high forestation.

Follow up:

To provide support following the event and its impacts with essential needs such as; access to food, water, resources to follow up with family and friends, electricity and emergency relief funds.

Organisations Response to Staff Family and Community Needs:

Support to enable staff to protect their own properties and address family needs such as collecting their children from bush schools in high risk areas. Provide follow up support following events for work related stress. Acknowledge and adhere to mandated protocols and obligations allowing staff to fulfil community volunteer commitments for the protection of community. i.e.: Volunteer CFA, Volunteer Community Ambulance Officers, Volunteer Wildlife and RSPCA attendees, SES volunteers.

We identified what should integrate into adaptation plan for staff members and the organisation?

[An example of Planning and Preparedness for risk events is located in appendix 1](#)

Following the supported workshops and attendance MI Fellowship have continued to review Policies and Procedures within the organisation along with regularly looking at this topic collaboratively across the team to identify issues faced within the service. Staff have been involved in region collaboration from the Department of Health to strengthen community service support in such events.

4.4 New adaptation actions – Phase 3

In October, the project team ran a workshop to demonstrate some adaptation action case studies that were relevant to our organisation. We then participated in a facilitated brainstorming session to decide on what actions we would commit to including in our existing practices.

We committed to:

- Developing organisational adaptation and response plan for preparation and management of such events.
- Reviewing policies and procedures across the organisation.
- Developing adaptation plans which can be utilised across all regions.
- Support ongoing developments and collaboration in the community to address impacts to vulnerable communities.

5 Outcomes of the process. What did we learn?

Throughout the project MI Fellowship learnt about the inherent resilience in the local community and processes already achieved within the region which decreases the impacts on vulnerable communities. We learnt how to better prepare our service and consumers for the impacts of natural disasters in the Great South Coast and additional resources available to assist in such events.

5.1 What was challenging?

MI Fellowship invited the SGGPCP to understand the impacts from individuals who live with a Mental Illness. Initially MI Fellowship found it challenging from participants and an organisation to focus on the vulnerability from a 'climate change' perspective.

Allocation of time to participate in the project was difficult due to organisation workload and the SGGPCP were very adaptable and understanding with these difficulties.

5.2 What has changed during this process?

MI Fellowship across the Great South Coast has identified the need to review policies and procedures to ensure adaptive management in accordance with recent organisation changes. Adaptation planning has also become a topic within the regional team meeting.

5.3 What was most important for us?

MI Fellowship believed in the ability and opportunity to reduce the vulnerability of our community in climate change and build community resilience.

We connected with the value of building relationships of support services and collaboration across the member agencies in the project, along with the ability to utilise a model, which can be applied across the entire organisation.

6 What next? Moving forward.

We made a commitment to the following actions over the stipulated timeframes.

6 months:

- Improved awareness of existing policies and procedures for staff (e.g. leave workplace to fight for home and protect family)
- Plan how to keep workforce working – business continuity planning
- Bringing in critical services – integrated planning
 - o Natural support networks – improving awareness of who and what services are available when, and co-ordinating them = integrated planning (it's not until you run a scenario with them all together that you understand who and what needs to be where, when)
- Care plans – Vulnerable persons list, Reviewing individuals care plans
- Education with clients and staff – building the capacity of the organisation is most important at this point in time
- Pre-prepared 'emergency packs' for clients to have in their household and improve use and awareness of these as part of service delivery to clients
- Increasing staff knowledge and relationships in community safety and resilience committee
- Information interaction and networks – continuing this work builds resilience in itself

2 years:

- Understanding a co-ordinated plan within the organisation relating to community networks
 - o Who can help

- Where do services sit in a disaster plan
- What will happen when and what can help?
- New policies and procedures
- Building community resilience and connections – what platforms do we need to do this? What existing platforms can we use?
- Define roles and responsibilities to improve co-ordination and integrated planning
- Learning from communities and models that work well – e.g. Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre
- Utilise Local Knowledge
- Regularly review and audits and to utilise current scenarios to help test situations safely

5 years:

- Build and maintain Partnerships – who needs to be involved?
- Education and training to build long term capacity
- Utilise local scenario planning - Look at the history and see what we've experienced and see how this will change in the future.
- Review infrastructure requirements and its integrity.

MI Fellowship will; continue to maintain an ongoing relationship with Southern Grampians Primary Care Partnership through holding a position on the executive and participating in ongoing projects in the region. This publication is targeted towards aiding professionals to prepare participant plans in such an event and identify future practice and infrastructure needs.

Appendix 1

Planning and Preparation for Risk events

- Identify vulnerable persons list- Criteria for people who are isolated and don't have support networks to check on them.
- Create vulnerable persons list plan with the individual/family. Criteria: understanding of medications and impact from weather ie: mood stabilisers and dehydration, access to medications as well as essential items.
- Identify vulnerable people ie: those who live in town (eg; Hamilton) but remain exposed to heat wave.
- Individualised crisis plan.
- Addressing demographics and access to resources to evacuate.
- 'Cheat sheet' for staff to support clients with a range of relevant questions to participants that need to be asked around understanding and awareness of community access and support available. A list of example actions to be undertaken over a series of days in the 'Cheat Sheet' has been outlined below, as well as organisational-based responsibilities and factors to consider on following days.

Day 1: Cheat Sheet

The below are prompts for staff members to facilitate a discussion with participants:

- What are you doing today?
- Are you able to keep yourself cool?
- Are you aware if the service you require is running? ie; bus, home help.
- Do you need to change your routine?
- Are you feeling ok?
- Do you have access to fresh adequate water and essential items ie; Medications?
- Are your appliances working effectively? ie: Fridge, Air conditioner.
- Do you have an exit plan in case of a fire/flood?
- Review Fuel/Transport costs for affected individuals in escape plan.

Day 2: Cheat Sheet

- Where is your evacuation plan? Review this relevant to the situation.
- Are you receiving updated information on the situation?
- Are you listening to the radio/tv?
- Is your phone on/charged?
- Do you understand exit points in your region?
- Telephone calls to participants to understand effects experienced?
- Review location of participant and possible supports around?
- Do you have somewhere to go if required?

Organisational Based Responsibilities

Managers: Managers receive emergency updates. Required to contact DHS in regard to vulnerable persons list and to coordinate information to essential services.
Provide direction to the appropriate responses.
Access provisional plans
Guide staff through organisational policies and procedures.

Coordinators: Inform all levels of organisation and advise management of information regarding vulnerable persons in area

Program Workers: Review cheat sheet and respond to coordinators and management.

Day 3: Factors:

- Become aware of Local Road Closures
- What are the Emergency housing/Emergency Options resourced and Emergency Centres available in the area?
- Understand Stress responses and Triggers to PTSD
- Mindful of other participants still experiencing heatwave, dehydration and other related Health issues ie: high blood pressure, symptoms of Mental Illness
- Limited Staff and Families available to services due to volunteer commitments and/or family duties ie; looking after children due to school closures, protecting own and/or families properties and moving livestock.

- No access to some community services ie; Community Bus
- Local School closures

Day 4: Factors:

- Fatigue to staff and services
- Limited food and food security due to power outages, limited travel and heat spoilage.
- Rural communities face local water access only available by tank water due to town water access cut off.
- Limited fuel available in some communities.
- Heightened anxiety/ Stress of individuals and communities
- No access to emergency contacts for individuals without phone/phone service due to power outages and service overload resulting in delayed messages.

Day 5: Factors:

- Aware of confusing message media messages because of service overload, Phone calls and text messages are compromised.
- Due to overuse of electrical appliances increased cost of electricity bills resulting in heightened fear and stress causing some individuals to cease utilising cooling appliances and suffering in the experienced temperatures.
- Break down of electricity appliances.
- Increased food cost and access due to limited supplies.
- Limited ability for some individuals to implement fire safety plan
- Limited ability for some to make informed decisions about leaving and/or staying is compromised by emotions and stress responses.
- Services not available to support over weekends

Day 6: Factors:

- Water supply cut and possibly 2 week delay for connection and contamination causing further delay.
- Individuals are required to continue to rely on carting water and experiencing increase costs related to this.
- Contamination to water may cause possible health issues.
- Asthma related health issues experienced across the region
- Homes containing heat and heat wave still occurring
- Dealing with Grief and Loss due to loss of properties, stock, homes and or family