

Enabling Australian farmers to thrive: 2026 mental health update

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Farmers face additional mental health challenges to other Australians

General population mental health risks: social isolation, substance abuse, chronic stress, early trauma, financial stress, relationship stress

Extra risks for rural populations: Poorer access to support services, greater exposure to natural hazards

Extra risks for farmers & agricultural workers: Occupation-specific risks - variable climatic and market conditions, high risk tasks; geographic isolation; really poor access to services, stoic culture...

Despite higher mental health risks than the general population, 10 years of data from the University of Canberra's Regional Wellbeing Survey show the majority of farmers have good mental health.

This reflects the high resilience of farmers.

However, growing demands are being made on farmer's resilience.

Regional Wellbeing Survey

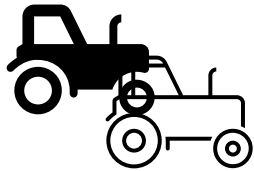
Annual survey founded in 2013, with 13 years of data



How many & which Australian residents have high wellbeing and resilience?



Do our communities support good wellbeing for all? Do they provide a good quality of life - social connection, safety, amenity, services, infrastructure, environmental health, economic opportunity?



How is farmer wellbeing changing – and what affects it?
Farming conditions, challenges, markets, work health and safety, natural resource management



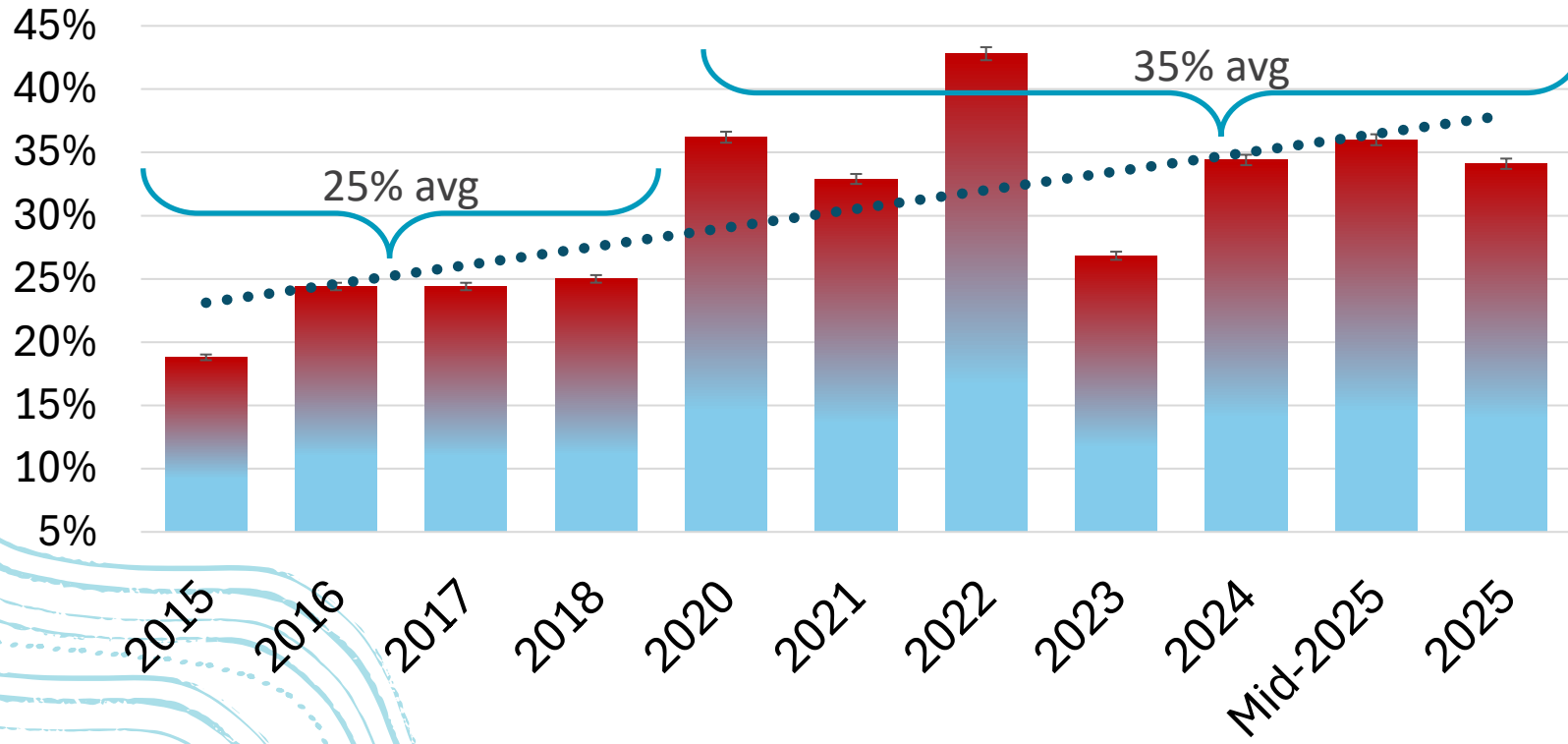
How is wellbeing affected by experience of natural hazards (drought, flood, bushfire, storm...)? Are we maintaining resilience and our ability to cope and recover across multiple events?

Shape regional and rural Australia



2015-2025 saw significant growth in % Aus farmers experiencing psychological distress

% Australian farmers with moderate and high psychological distress levels



Average % farmers with levels of psychological distress indicating likely presence of a diagnosable mental health condition

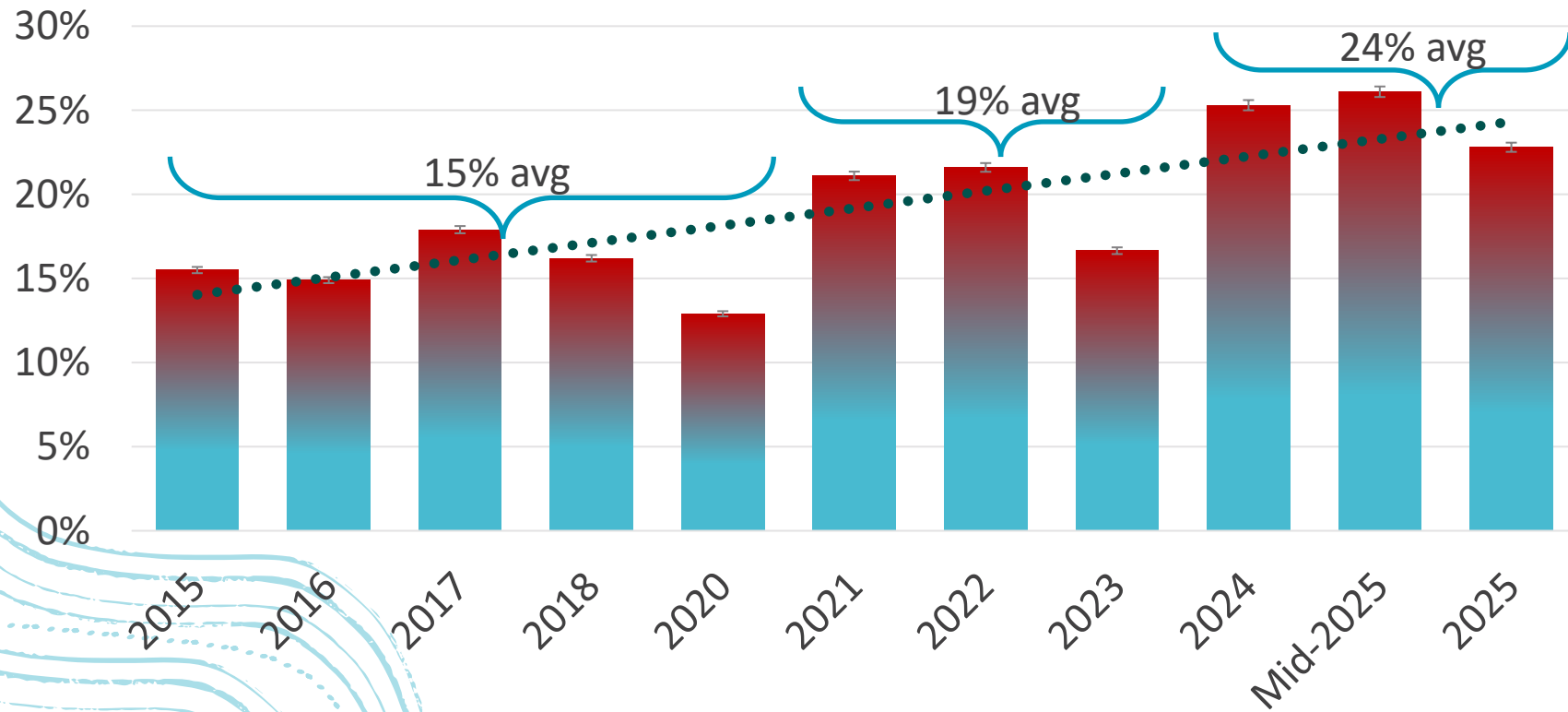
< 2020: **25%**

2020-2025: **35%**

Data source: University of Canberra Regional Wellbeing Survey; annual farmer sample size ranges from 1400-3500. Shows Kessler 6 Psychological Distress Scale which asks how often a person felt nervous, hopeless, restless or fidgety, so depressed nothing could cheer them up, everything was an effort, or worthless in the last 30 days; scores of 13+ indicate moderate-high distress.

Between 2015 and 2025, the rate of low wellbeing amongst Australian farmers grew by two thirds

% Australian farmers with low wellbeing



Average % farmers with unhealthily low wellbeing – a key indicator of mental health challenges:

2015-2020: 15%

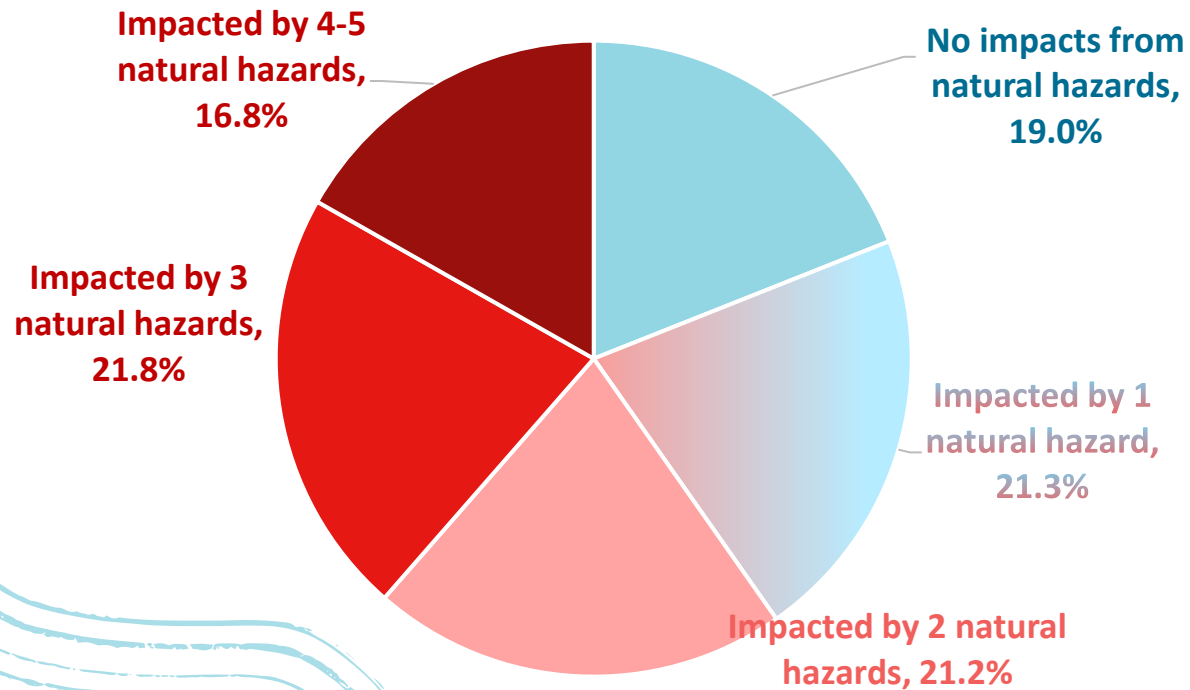
2021-2023: 19%

2024-2025: 24%

Data source: University of Canberra Regional Wellbeing Survey; annual farmer sample size ranges from 1400-3500

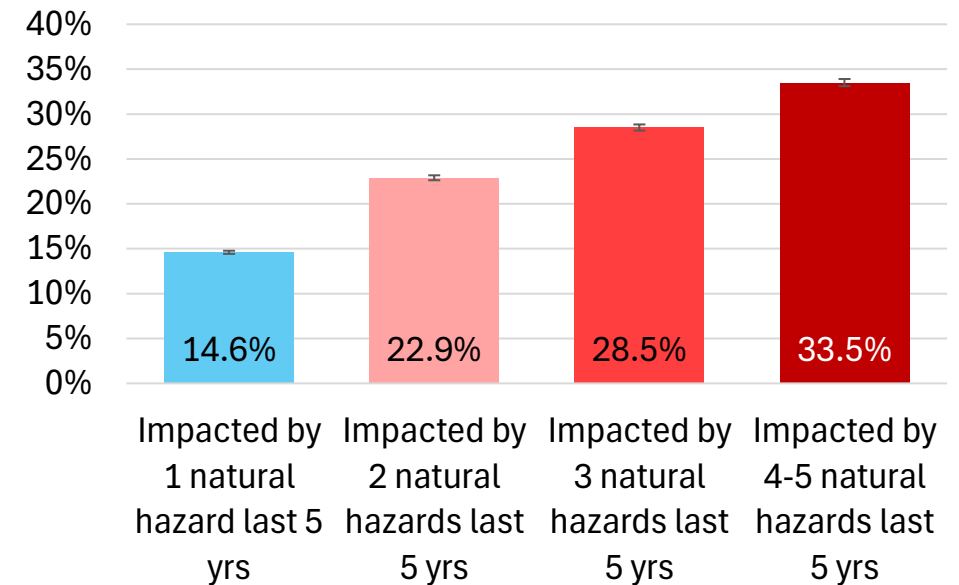
Farmers have to be resilient to more challenges, more often

Number of natural hazards causing farm impacts in last five years, 2025
(drought, flood, bushfire, storm, heatwave)



60% of Australian farmers were impacted by two or more major natural hazard events in the last 5 years

% farmers with low wellbeing, 2025



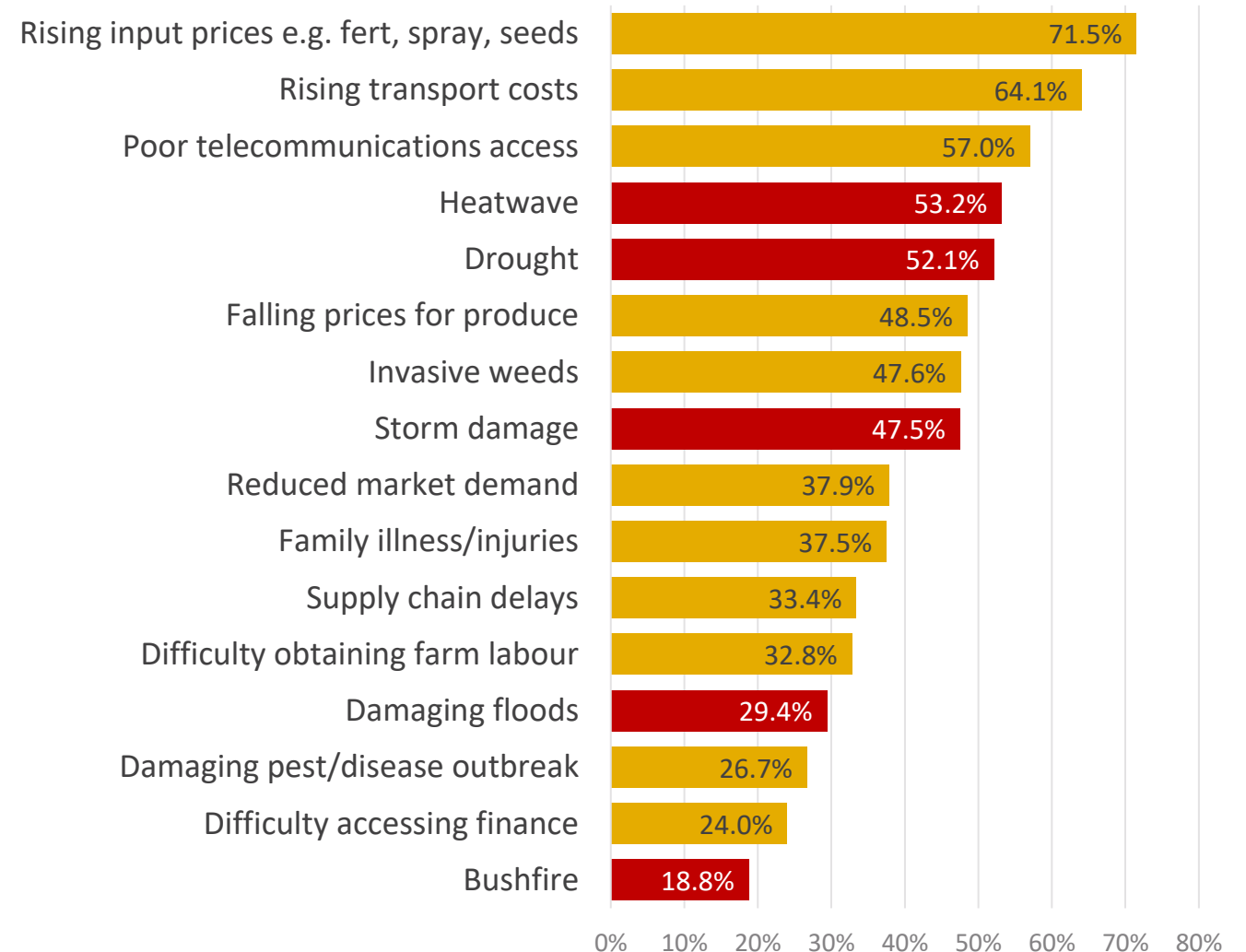
↑ natural hazard exposure ⇨ ↓ wellbeing

Farmers have to be resilient to more challenges, more often

For many farmers, increasing natural hazards are occurring alongside significant market, supply chain and other farm business challenges

Before the 2026 fuel & fertiliser crisis, **71.5%** reported rising input prices and **64.1%** rising transport costs as a significant challenge for their farm business.

% Australian farms impacted between 2021 and 2025 by...

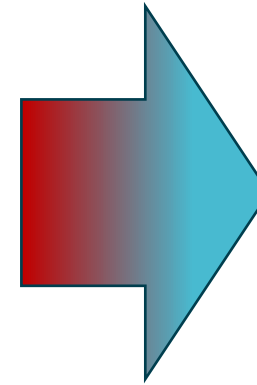


We can support farmer mental health by removing barriers to building farm business resilience

Only **50%** of Australian farmers can easily access the expertise and support they need to help them navigate drought & challenges

Only **39%** of Australian farmers have been able to implement most actions that could reduce impacts of drought on their farm
(common challenges: finance, time, regulatory barriers, availability of tradies & materials)

Only **23%** of Australian farmers are confident their farm business can survive impacts of events like bushfire, flood, and severe storms



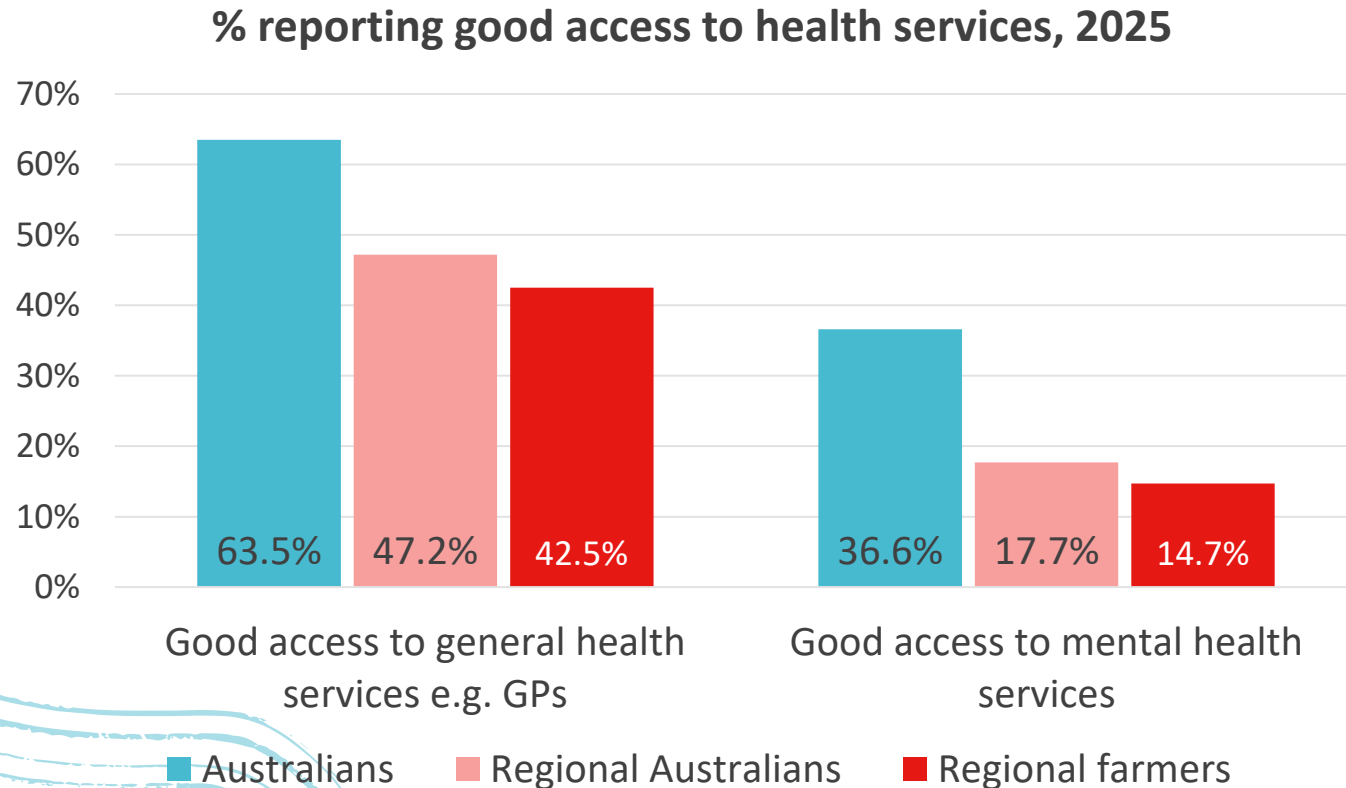
Those who have been able to identify & implement actions to reduce impacts of natural hazards have **significantly better mental health and wellbeing** than other farmers

To build farmer mental health...

✗ Don't tell farmers to 'be more resilient'

- ✓ Do ask what barriers they are facing to implementing action to build farm resilience
- ✓ Ensure farming and mental health supports are consistently available (not constantly 'stood up' and 'stood down' in response to each challenge)

Farmers lack access to health services – and need health services tailored to their needs



When farmers reach out for help, it's often not there

- Only 2 in 5 farmers report good access to basic health services
- <15% have good access to mental health services

Too often, services can't meet needs

- For many farmers, even basic health services are not rapidly accessible in times of need
- Mental health issues escalate as farmers experience delays in support
- Available services often not tailored to unique mental health needs of farmers

We need more services, and services tailored to those in agriculture

Supporting farmer mental health

- **Acknowledge and celebrate** the high resilience of Australian farmers – whose wellbeing is often high despite navigating multiple challenges
 - **Recognise** that what happens on the farm profoundly influences mental health
 - **Reduce the barriers** preventing farmers from growing resilience of their farm business and **make support available more consistently**
 - **Increase** quantity and quality of **health services** available to farmers
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