

Mental health services are available to help rural youth



Growing up in today's world isn't always easy. Social media creates pressure to look and act a certain way, while online activity means we're communicating more from devices and less in person.

Add to that the isolation and challenges of living in a country area and it's possible to see how this can affect your mental health.

Fortunately, there are services available to youth aged 16-25 if you or a loved one are feeling overwhelmed and are not coping.

What are the issues facing youth in regional areas?

Many of the issues facing youth in regional areas are similar to those affecting youth in city areas, according to Chorus Lead Regional Services Bunbury Jerry Caruana.

Social Isolation

With the advent of social media, young people are increasingly hiding behind their screens rather than socialising face-to-face.

The effect of this is people: "lose confidence, face-to-face social skills and they become increasingly anxious about going out and being in social situations or going for job interviews," Mr Caruana said.

Anxiety

As a result of not getting out of the house enough and relying on digital devices for social interaction, young people are developing social anxiety.

Mr Caruana said people aren't as socially connected as they used to be and the result is they're not equipped with basic and necessary life skills such as making calls to get a job interview or visiting the bank for a loan application.

"They start getting all these stories in their heads about how life might be out there in the world and then that becomes too hard, so they sit there and stay on Facebook," he said.

Depression

If you're not socialising and feeling connected to a group, then you can start to feel depressed. Likewise, a lack of physical activity from too much screen time can impact your mental health. After all, the endorphins you get from exercise are good for you.

Why are youth in regional areas experiencing mental health challenges?

Mr Caruana said part of the problem is a lack of support services in many rural areas.

"The more rural you go, the less support services there are," he said. "There's quite a few support centres in regional areas, but not so many in the rural areas."

And while some factors affecting mental health are the same regardless of geography, some areas experience added challenges.

Mr Caruana said Bunbury, for example, has a high rate of methamphetamine use, which is damaging for a number of reasons, including people's mental health.

"There is limited access to step-up, step-down facilities, although one is being built now, and there's also limited access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities," he said. "That can make it very hard on rural areas when someone has made a decision to give up drug use but there's nothing available."

What services can youth access to support their mental health?

If you're seeking help for a mental health condition, there are a range of services available, with many of them operating 24/7:

- Consult with your GP and set up a mental health plan
- Contact **Rurallink** on 1800 552 002 for after-hours mental health support for rural communities
- Contact the **Kids Helpline** on 1800 55 1800
- Contact **Lifeline WA** on 13 11 14 for 24/7 crisis support
- Contact the **Suicide Call Back Service** on 1300 659 467
- Contact **Beyond Blue** on 1300 22 4636 for support and advice on depression and anxiety
- Contact the **Centre for Clinical Interventions**.

Mr Caruana said he encourages people to use the internet in a constructive and positive way, such as accessing motivational talks on YouTube.

How can Chorus help?

Chorus has two key programs that rural youth can access for help with their mental health.

- **Personal Helpers and Mentors Program**
This is a one-on-one personal-recovery program for people with severe mental illness, operating from our Bunbury, Albany and Mandurah offices. Chorus works with you to identify your goals and supports you to achieve them.
- **National Psychosocial Support (NPS) measure**
This Federal Government-funded program started in February and operates from the Bunbury, Albany, Mandurah and Northam offices. It's tailored for people who have episodic mental illness and typically includes brief intervention followed by ongoing support through group and other activities.

Our team of mental health recovery workers are available to help you. For more information, get in touch at **1800 264 268** or **chorus.org.au**.

