

# Ensuring an integrated workforce approach to mental health care in rural and remote towns

The Mental Health Commission of NSW (the Commission) supports rural and remote communities 'growing their own' workforces as a viable solution to significant mental health workforce shortages.

In *Living Well in Focus 2020 – 2024*, the Commission committed to 'undertake a project to develop and test an integrated workforce approach to identify options to address the rural, remote and regional workforce shortage' (Action 21). The project aligns with priority area 3 in the 2020-21 Minister's Charter letter.

## Project aim

To develop a new model for providing adequate workforce to deliver mental health support in small rural towns.

## Model development

Human Capital Alliance (International) Pty Ltd, who are conducting this major project for the Commission has developed a process for assessing and prioritising mental health support needs and for assessing mental health competencies in a small town.

In Bourke NSW, participants identified the town's mental health workforce challenges and identified community resources and strengths. A key challenge identified was the need for better coordination to improve outcomes for people, using available resources more optimally.



Artwork by John Leary, former Local Health District Mental Health Director



## Key findings

- 1** Mental health support needs are well understood by communities but not well articulated at a town or system level and therefore not appropriately prioritised. Communities tend to identify structural and community mental health support priorities whereas service providers tend to prioritise individual support needs.
- 2** Currently most mental health support provision is focused on individual needs and siloed within different agencies each try to addressing one piece of a complex picture.
- 3** The work presents a challenge for how workforce competencies are understood, interpreted and applied as well as how to organise the community to approach their mental health support needs strategically and to mobilise and deploy community resources. An emerging solution internationally has been to create place-based alliances.



## Next steps

- 1** The Commission has approved a next stage of the project that continues to support Bourke stakeholders to coordinate and deliver priority mental health supports for the town.
- 2** Town consultations will focus on co-designing a mechanism that allows the resources held within a small town to be effectively coordinated to create appropriately competent integrated care/support teams on a case by case basis, with resources able to be used across organisational boundaries.
- 3** The potential for this project has been recognised by Western NSW Local Health District, the Western NSW Primary Health Network, and other key agencies. Agencies are supportive of a further stage of work in two more Western NSW towns. Outcomes may be generalisable to other place based solutions in NSW.