

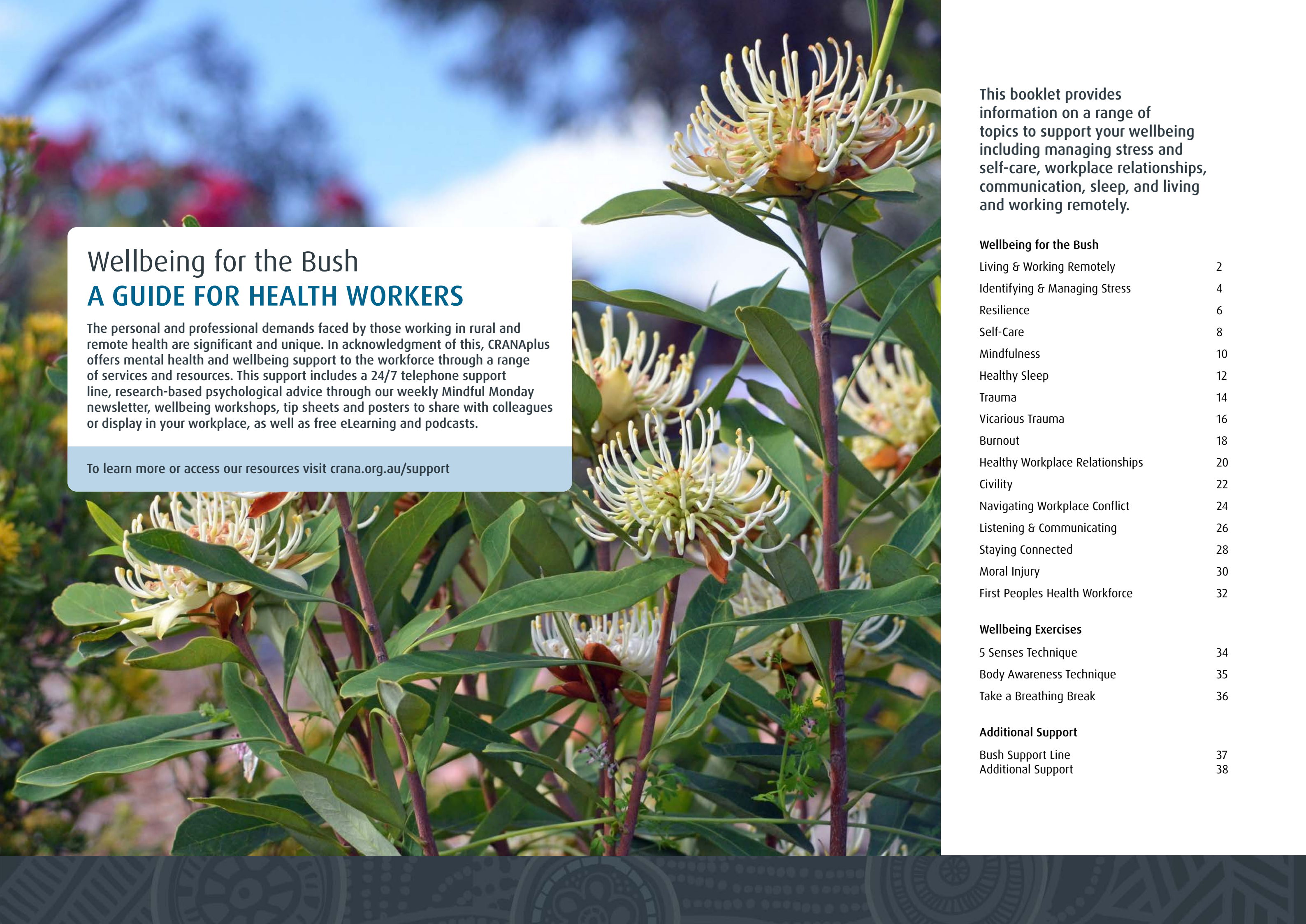


Wellbeing for the Bush

A GUIDE FOR HEALTH WORKERS



Bush Support Line 1800 805 391 | crana.org.au | wellbeing@crana.org.au



Wellbeing for the Bush

A GUIDE FOR HEALTH WORKERS

The personal and professional demands faced by those working in rural and remote health are significant and unique. In acknowledgment of this, CRANApplus offers mental health and wellbeing support to the workforce through a range of services and resources. This support includes a 24/7 telephone support line, research-based psychological advice through our weekly Mindful Monday newsletter, wellbeing workshops, tip sheets and posters to share with colleagues or display in your workplace, as well as free eLearning and podcasts.

To learn more or access our resources visit crana.org.au/support

This booklet provides information on a range of topics to support your wellbeing including managing stress and self-care, workplace relationships, communication, sleep, and living and working remotely.

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Wellbeing for the Bush

LIVING & WORKING REMOTELY

Living and working as a health worker in a rural or remote community can be an extremely rewarding and enriching experience. We get to extend our knowledge and expertise in our chosen discipline whilst having some of Australia's natural treasures at our doorstep. However, it can also present some challenges, mainly due to the lack of anonymity, which we may be accustomed to when living or working in larger regional centres or cities.

Identifying some of those challenges and providing suggestions on how to navigate these issues will help you make the most of living and working in rural and remote communities.

Navigating personal and professional relationships

- As health workers, we will always be in a position of power and trust. Professional boundaries are there to support the relationship between yourself and the community. Working within your scope of practice and maintaining compassion, respect, and empathy will assist you.
- In rural and remote communities, we often live in what is commonly known as the 'fishbowl'. We see patients/clients in our everyday lives, for example, at the shops, sporting clubs, and social functions, which is often unavoidable. Maintaining professional boundaries in such situations is tricky but necessary.
- Take your time to get to know people in the community and at work. Sometimes, we can be quick to want to connect, but when working remotely, it is good practice to navigate relationships slowly, as living in a 'fishbowl' can prove challenging to get out of. Share information about yourself that you feel comfortable with and within your professional and personal boundaries.
- It is essential to establish the distinction between personal and professional relationships through good communication with the patient/client and establishing these boundaries together, e.g. where you may see them and what you can (and cannot) talk about in certain spaces. For example, you won't discuss test results out in public or even acknowledge them publicly unless they say hello first.
- Self-disclosure with clients/patients should only occur for therapeutic or clinical needs.
- Maintaining confidentiality is always critical. Do not share information you do not have patient/client permission to share or that is outside your professional guidelines. Breaching patient/client confidentiality violates your ethical guidelines and can be a barrier to people coming to you or another professional for help in small communities.
- Self-reflection and some forward-thinking can be really helpful. Anticipating conflicts and proactively maintaining boundaries where possible can prevent adverse outcomes.
- Clinical Reflective Supervision, mentoring and consultation with peers in similar situations will help maintain objectivity and address any ethical issues that may arise. Information about the CRANAplus LINKS Mentoring Program for all health disciplines is available at crana.org.au/LINKS
- Taking regular breaks out of town and away from seeing patients/clients in the community helps to keep your cup filled or your batteries charged.



Avoiding social isolation

- Doing what is 'right' over what is fun can be challenging. Sometimes, choosing not to engage in social activities where you may encounter patients or clients is an effective strategy. However, be mindful that you do not socially isolate yourself. Review your boundaries or organise some social events that you feel are more appropriate.
- Look for opportunities to engage and collaborate professionally and socially with other services and organisations. Networking is great for everyone.



- Maintaining relationships with friends/family/partners outside of the community can be challenging but necessary. Schedule regular times to stay connected, e.g. virtual coffee dates, text messages, or virtual movies.
- Connecting with others can help you feel more confident and less stressed. Some ways of connecting can be through:
 - Formal support, e.g. accessing and providing formal supervision/mentoring, including connecting with a cultural mentor
 - Instrumental support, e.g. adequate equipment, staff, and funding to complete the work
 - Informational support, e.g. colleagues who make the time and space to listen, share humour and give reassurance
 - Professional development can be a helpful way to connect with others.
- Engage in volunteering in the community through community organisations or emergency services.

Ethical considerations

- Sustaining professional distance can be challenging in small communities.
- Tensions between organisational practices and local expectations can exist. However, these can be negotiated between parties through honest, open communication, local knowledge, and networking.
- Always maintain the ethical obligations of your discipline or position, including confidentiality and mandatory reporting. Remember, maintaining your ethical obligations keeps you registered and employed.
- Be mindful that your decisions may make you vulnerable to isolation, social pressure, or even personal threats, so ensure you seek support from peers or supervisors.
- You may feel pressured to undertake tasks outside your scope of practice due to a lack of services. It's ethically sound to refuse, and you should not feel obligated. It would be appropriate to say, "Sorry, that is not in my scope of practice," or, "Sorry, I can not do that, but I can do..."

Wellbeing for the Bush

IDENTIFYING & MANAGING STRESS

Have you ever considered: “What actually is stress?” In this resource we define what it is, both the good and the bad; explore how it may present; look at the risks it poses to health care workers; and provide simple strategies to identify, manage and reduce its impact on your wellbeing.

“Stress is often described as feeling overloaded, wound-up, tense and worried, and occurs when we face a situation we feel we can’t cope with.”¹

- Not all stress is bad
- Stress can be helpful and can be an appropriate reaction
- When stress becomes excessive and too much (e.g. long-term, chronic stress) this can impact on both our mental and physical health.²

Symptoms of stress can include:

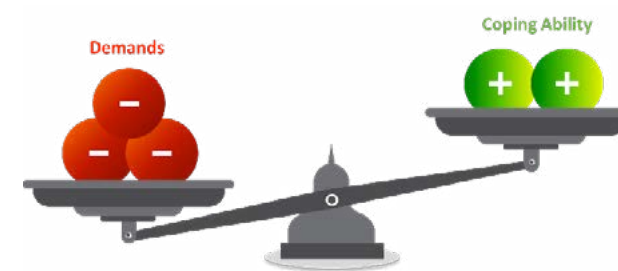
- **Physical:** headaches or other aches and pains, fatigue, upset stomach/diarrhoea, weakened immune system, muscle tension
- **Emotional:** anxiety, worry, irritability, depression/sadness, feeling overwhelmed and out of control, feeling moody and tearful
- **Behaviourally:** avoiding situations/people, increased drug and alcohol use, outbursts of anger, overeating or undereating and relationship problems
- **Sleep:** poor sleep, bad dreams
- **Impairment:** decreased attention span, poor memory and decreased concentration.

There are risks to ‘helpers’ during periods of prolonged stress:

- When you are helper/carer during periods of prolonged stress, your body is denied the chance to rest and recover and replenish reserves which are vital to your health
- Empathy and connection with others can increase vulnerability to personal distress
- Direct or indirect exposure to traumatic material can increase stress
- Living in the area, being invested in the community can increase the risk of prolonged stress.



Stress can occur when the demands of your internal and external environment exceed your perceived ability to cope



Stress balance: strategies to manage stress demands

- When helping others, self-monitoring and self-care are necessary to manage risks and demands
- Leisure and pleasure are useful to break the cycle and to allow rest, recovery and re-establish the internal and external balance
- Find out what “recharges” you and do it regularly.

Self-care - an everyday essential

- What is your self-care strategy for the start of the day?
- Check in with yourself each morning and after work
- Consider strategies for prevention or escalation e.g. humour, reflection
- Post stressor – listen, debrief, reflect, let go.

Establish work life balance as a life goal.

It is important to:

- Take breaks at work and away from work
- Debrief - know who to contact when you need to debrief
- Set realistic goals and standards
- Say “No”, politely but assertively; practise saying “No”
- Separate interests, social support outside work
- Share experience with trusted people
- Use services like Lifeline and the CRANAplus Bush Support Line.

Where to from here?

Self-care takes practice and planning

- Consider completing a self-care plan (check out our Self-Care Plan at crana.org.au/self-care-plan for an example)
- Relaxation/meditation/mindfulness
- Go outside – exercise or get into nature
- Social connections – hobbies, groups, family and friends
- Consider your eating, nutrition and sleep.

1. www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress
2. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress

Wellbeing for the Bush RESILIENCE

Resilience is a necessary skill that helps us to manage the ups and downs of life, a skill that health workers draw on to navigate stressful situations that may arise throughout the day. This resource defines resilience and provides simple techniques to guide you to strengthen 'your resilience muscle'.

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves “bouncing back” from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth.¹

Building resilience is like building a muscle; it takes time and intentionality through focusing on these 4 elements:

- **Build your connections:** Connecting with empathetic and understanding people can remind you that you're not alone in the midst of difficulties. Feeling overwhelmed and stressed can lead some people to isolate themselves, but it's important to accept help and support from those who care about you.
- **Foster wellness:** Take care of your body (sleep, nutrition, physical activity); practise mindfulness; and avoid negative outlets like drugs and alcohol.
- **Embrace healthy thinking:** Try to keep things in perspective; accept that change is a part of life; maintain a hopeful outlook; and learn from past experiences.
- **Find purpose:** Help others; move toward your goals; look for opportunities for self discovery.²

Being psychologically prepared for an adverse event is like a “stress inoculation” when it happens.

4 steps to psychological preparedness: The AIME approach

A

Anticipate that it will be stressful and that you will be feeling anxious or worried. If you understand how you usually react, you can manage stressors better when they occur (Q. How do you usually react to stress?).

I

Identify specific thoughts or feelings. Notice your physical symptoms of arousal such as racing heart, shortness of breath. Notice how those feelings can trigger stressful thoughts.

M

Manage your responses through self-talk (“I can handle this” etc.) and breathing.

E

Engage with a trusted person. By connecting you can feel supported and less alone.

Remember to reflect on what strengths you already have, how you have dealt with adversity in the past and what worked for you: draw on this in times of stress.²



Practice GEM every day to promote resilience:

- **Gratitude:** an appreciation for the good things that happen in life (e.g. gratitude journal or jar, or telling someone you're glad they're in your life)
- **Empathy:** the ability to understand and share the feelings of another (curiosity about strangers, challenging prejudices, listening actively when someone is talking)
- **Mindfulness:** being present in the here and now, without judgement (mindfulness of the breath, in your morning routine, doing domestic chores).^{3,4}

Including self-care as a part of your daily routine helps build resilience

For a self-care plan template head to: crana.org.au/self-care-plan

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What do I do for self-care?

- | | |
|--|--|
|  Get plenty of sleep |  Tidy |
|  Enjoy sunshine |  Read |
|  Cook |  Read about people whose lives are more complicated |
|  Write or draw (think out loud) |  Garden |
|  Talk to myself |  Get a hug |
|  Cuddle cats |  Talk to select people |
|  Walk or bike (esp. in a park) | |

1. www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress

2. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress

3. Cuylenburg, H. (2019). Finding Happiness Through Gratitude, Empathy and Mindfulness.

4. Voci, A., Veneziani, C. A., & Fuochi, G. (2019). Relating mindfulness, heartfulness, and psychological well-being: the role of selfcompassion and gratitude. *Mindfulness*, 10(2), 339-351.

5. healthypsych.com/kind-four-ways-practice-self-care/ and www.positivediscipline.com/articles/self-care-teachers

Wellbeing for the Bush SELF-CARE

As health workers, we are used to caring for others, but sometimes, the last person we care for is ourselves. Self-care is often the first thing to go when we are busy and under stress, but it is essential to helping us stay healthy.¹

What is self-care?

Self-care is the practice of taking regular, deliberate actions to maintain and improve your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

Why should we do it?

- Self-care gives your body and mind time to rest, reset and rejuvenate.
- Self-care helps prevent stress and anxiety.
- Looking after yourself helps you to be more effective in all aspects of your life.
- Self-care prevents burnout and compassion fatigue.



Self-care is unique to everyone, and there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Walsh developed the 'Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes' model, which identified eight specific lifestyle changes that can be integrated into our daily lives²:



Where to from here?

- Complete a self-care plan. The CRANaplus Self-care Plan is available on the next page. Alternatively, you can download it in printable and digital formats at crana.org.au/helpful-resources
- Schedule your self-care, so it becomes part of your daily or weekly routine (not something you only do if you have time). Don't be afraid to say "no" to people or activities that overfill your schedule, adding stress or overwhelming you. Remember, self-care is smart, not selfish. The more you look after yourself, the more capacity you have to support and care for others.

Self-care Plan

This planner can help you to identify your personal signs of stress and plan strategies that may help you to manage your own stress and emotions.

Self-care Plan
A reminder of ways that you as a rural and remote health worker can maintain and enhance your wellbeing.

What are my personal signs of stress?
E.g. I stop finding enjoyment in music

How can I manage my stress?
E.g. Daily breathing breaks

Who can I call for support?
E.g. Facetime with my sister on Sundays, The Bush Support Line - free call 24/7

What activities can I include in my day to maintain my wellbeing?
E.g. Eating breakfast outside in the morning

REMINDERS
E.g. Pre make nutritious snacks/meals for when I am busy or stressed

CRANA+plus
improving remote health

For further support phone our free 24/7 Bush Support Line 1800 805 391

1. Lewis S, Willis K, Bismark M, Smallwood N. A time for self-care? Frontline health workers' strategies for managing mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. SSM Ment Health. 2022.

2. Walsh, R. Lifestyle and Mental Health; American Psychologist, Vol 66(7), Oct 2011.

Wellbeing for the Bush MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is about bringing awareness to yourself and the environment around you, choosing to accept the things that fall outside of your control (such as other people's emotions, incurable illness and failures) and committing to changing the things you can through maintaining awareness, living in the present and noticing all the meaningful and rich moments around you. Participating in mindful practices can help reduce stress, rumination, and the effects of mental health challenges from anxiety and depression. It can also improve focus and help you live your best life.



*Mindfulness has been described as "the awareness that arises through paying attention, non-judgmentally, on purpose, in the present moment."*¹

Principles of mindfulness

These principles are not a set of instructions to follow; they are a way of 'being' and looking at life, experiences, and situations. Mindfulness practice makes life more vibrant, in which colours, tastes, smells, sights, sounds, connections and experiences become richer and more meaningful.

1. Beginner's mind

Think about how children live in the moment and so often are seeing things for the first time. Try to recreate that experience for yourself and notice the little details of what we see as the ordinary. When you look at an object, mindfully notice the shape, colours, markings, etc.

2. Patience

This refers to being patient with the process of mindfulness and being patient with yourself. Learning to be patient takes time and will only be learnt through repetition: the more you practise patience, the better at it you become. For example, you may notice your mind wandering to thoughts at work, such as, "What do I have to do next?" or "What's for dinner?" When you notice this, bring yourself back to the here and now, and remember that you are strengthening this new habit every time you do it.

3. Non-judging

Take notice of how often you judge your experiences as good, bad, or neutral. In mindfulness, we try to take the stance of an impartial witness of our own experience. Rather than judging it, we take a step back, pay attention to it with compassion and kindness, and notice how we relate to the experience. We are often our own worst critics, so rather than scold yourself for making a mistake, notice that you did something and that perhaps it could have been done differently.

4. Trust

Develop both trust in yourself and your feelings. If something doesn't feel right, honour that feeling or intuition. Listen to that 'gut feeling' when you're experiencing it, and take the time to reflect on what that may mean for you. We may make mistakes along the way, but it is better than constantly looking outside ourselves for guidance and validation.

5. Non-striving

Consider how much time and energy we put into 'purpose' or the need to achieve a goal by competing and comparing. When we do this, we judge ourselves and our actions by other people's standards (which also feeds into the principle of non-judging) and stop focusing on ourselves. There is no need to be 'the best'; being 'average' is just fine as most of the population fits into this category (think of a bell curve).

6. Acceptance

This refers to allowing things to be as they are without wishing they were different or trying to change them. Some things just 'are', and it is helpful to come to terms with this. Often, this acceptance is preceded by emotion-filled periods of denial and anger. Still, these periods of discord are sometimes required to 'shift' us to a place of being more conscious of how we are responding. One of the most well-known examples of this is the cycle of grief, whereby we often feel painful and uncomfortable feelings before we reach acceptance that someone or something is no longer with us.

7. Letting go

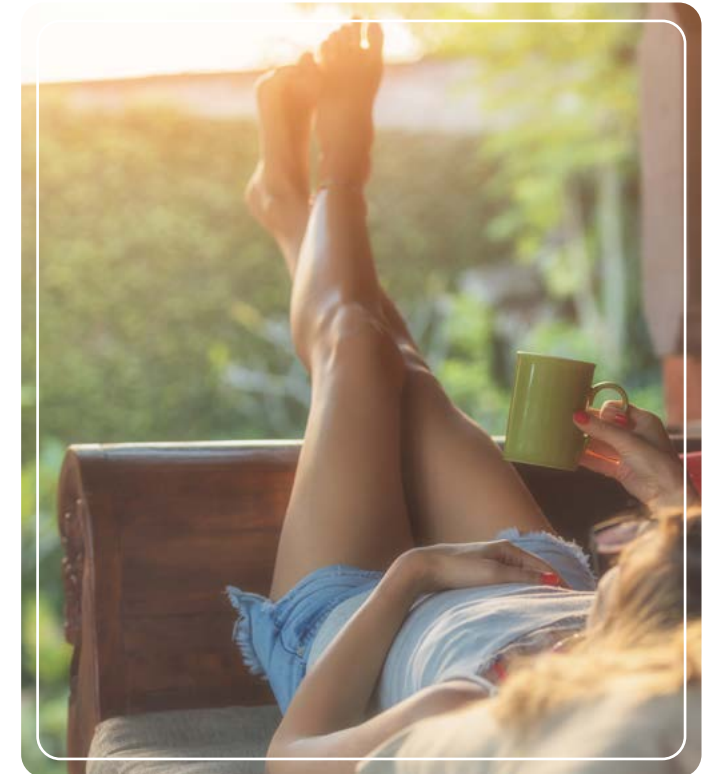
Some thoughts are helpful; others are not so helpful. Our minds can 'hook' us into getting caught up in our thoughts and stories about challenging events, which can lead to unhelpful behaviours, such as ruminating about them. By letting go of unhelpful thoughts and choosing not to buy into their stories, we 'unhook' ourselves from these thoughts and their associated behaviours.

8. Gratitude

We need to notice and be thankful for all the little things, as well as the big gestures. Having an attitude that includes gratitude can increase objective measures of physical health and increase our sense of subjective wellbeing.

9. Generosity

When we give our attention and time to others, it expands our sense of connectedness. However, this gift of generosity needs to start with ourselves. Be generous when it comes to giving yourself gifts such as self-acceptance, time for self-care and patience.



More information

9 Attitudes of Mindfulness with leading voice on Mindfulness Jon Kabat Zinn <https://youtu.be/2n7FOBFMvXg>

20 simple ways to practice Mindfulness and Awareness in everyday life <https://pleasantbuddhism.com/simple-ways-to-practice-mindfulness/>

Key principles for mindfulness practice. <https://www.catalyst14.co.uk/blog/key-principles-for-mindfulness-practice>

¹Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future. Clinical psychology science and practice, 10(2), 144-156

Wellbeing for the Bush

HEALTHY SLEEP

Sleep is essential for health and wellbeing. However, getting enough can be challenging due to the demands of being a rural or remote health worker. Things like night shifts or being on call, insufficient breaks or days off, safety concerns and boundary issues can all make implementing basic sleep hygiene recommendations really tricky.

You know it's important, but what can you do to make sleep a health priority and create the right conditions? It takes practice to establish a healthy sleep routine.



Sleep is essential to our emotional health, as well as for growth and repair within our body, and for normal learning and memory. Long-term lack of sleep has been linked to increased risk of depression, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and reduced lifespan.

5 tips for better sleep

Create a relaxing bedroom environment.



The bedroom should serve as a sleep sanctuary no matter what time you go to bed. This is particularly crucial for people who need to sleep during the day. The ideal sleep environment should be dark, relatively cool, and quiet. Make sure family members, roommates, or other cohabitants know not to disturb you during your allotted sleep time.

Establish a relaxing pre-bedtime routine.



Your routine may include taking a hot shower, reading a book, doing some stretching or a relaxation exercise. For help, check out apps like 'Smiling Mind' for relaxation activities.

Put the day to rest.



If necessary, write a list of what is on your mind and decide to think about it tomorrow. Learn a relaxation exercise if you have trouble 'switching off' at night. Practise the exercise before you use it as a sleep aid.

Try to avoid common disruptors.



Generally, avoid longer napping during the day as it may be difficult to sleep at night. Avoid alcohol, caffeine (including tea and chocolate), exercise and heavy meals in the hours leading up to sleep.

Synchronise your body clock.



Spending time outdoors (especially morning) may help to synchronise your body clock.

Tips for shift or on call workers

- As a rural and remote health worker it's not uncommon to work long shifts or be called into work multiple nights in a row. The effects of short-term disturbed sleep can impact memory, concentration, mood and decision making. It's really important to develop strategies to manage this. Find a relaxation technique that works for you and practise it, so you can use it when you need.
- If you normally work a night shift, schedule your sleep time to wake up close to the beginning of your next shift, rather than going to sleep immediately upon returning home. Studies have shown that the "split nap" schedule is also effective. This involves sleeping for a few hours when you get home from work, then staying awake and taking a long nap that ends close to the start of your next shift.
- Attempting to sleep during the day can be difficult due to factors like daylight and outside noise. In addition to dimming the lights, you can block outside light using an eye mask or blackout curtains. If your residence is located in a relatively loud area, try earplugs, a fan or air conditioner or a white noise machine to muffle disruptive sounds.

More information

Listen to our CRANAcas episode on this topic:
crana.org.au/cranacast_support

Sleep Health Foundation:
www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

MHA, Combating Sleep Difficulties For Healthcare:
workersmhanational.org/combating-sleep-difficulties-healthcare-workers

Black Dog Institute Tip Sheet:
[Sleep, fatigue and stress in health care workers](https://sleep.fatigueandstressinhealthcareworkers.org)

Health Direct, Sleep for shift workers:
healthdirect.gov.au/sleep#shift-work

Wellbeing for the Bush TRAUMA

It is normal to have strong emotional (or physical) reactions after experiencing a traumatic event. It's important to remember though that these reactions are a part of the body's natural healing and recovery process and will most likely subside after a few days or weeks. As a rural and remote health worker, you will likely be exposed to potentially traumatic events. Such events can be a "moment in life that tests us, that challenges our understanding of the world and our sense of safety".¹

Traumatic events in the rural and remote health context could include:

- Experiencing/first responder to serious accidents, physical or sexual assault or abuse
- Exposure to people who are seriously injured
- Repeated or unexpected exposure to a deceased person
- Witnessing or hearing about events occurring to colleagues, friends or their family members
- Listening to disclosures from patients or clients about such events.

Experiencing some level of psychological stress or distress following exposure to a traumatic event can be considered a normal response to abnormal events. However, not everyone exposed to the same event will be emotionally affected in the same way.



It's normal to experience some of these things after a traumatic event:

- Feeling anxious, scared, irritable, angry, sad, guilty or numb
- Changes to sleep patterns and/or eating behaviours
- Having nightmares or intrusive thoughts about the event
- Blaming yourself for the trauma and thinking you should have handled things differently
- Constantly being on guard, watchful or easily startled
- Denial - behaving as though it hasn't happened
- Avoiding situations, people or places that remind you of the event or trying not to think about it
- Experiencing poor memory, concentration or difficulty making decisions
- Lack of interest in the things you usually enjoy
- Not engaging in your usual regular behaviours as you did before the event, for example, not walking the dog or calling your partner daily, or showering less often.

You may also find yourself trying to make sense of the event, for example, questioning why the event occurred or why/how you were involved.

1. Phoenix Australia <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/your-recovery/>



Helping yourself after a traumatic event

Most people who experience a traumatic event will recover by themselves using their own internal and external strengths, coping strategies, resilience and support. To encourage your healing, here are some strategies to support yourself over the coming weeks.

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing event and that you will have a reaction to it.
- Give yourself time to process the event.
- Accept that you will not feel your normal self for a while, but that it will eventually pass.
- Avoid throwing yourself into work or activities to avoid painful thoughts or feelings. However, try to stick to your routine.
- Talk about the event when you feel ready to do so. You may feel like avoiding anything that reminds you of the event, but research shows that avoiding can make things worse.
- Ask for support. Ask for help from friends, family, or someone that you trust, whether that be emotional support, helping you with practical tasks, or just spending time together.
- Make sure you maintain your normal routine: eating, sleeping, moving, and relaxing. Looking after your physical health helps healing and supports your mental health.
- Try to avoid excesses such as overeating, alcohol or using external substances to help block out thoughts or distress. This can sometimes lead to worsening symptoms and developing habits that may be hard to break.

When to get professional support

As rural and remote health workers, we can sometimes minimise experiences of trauma. It's important to remember that these events can be triggering or can simmer away and, over time, have a negative impact on your mental health.

If you feel that you are having difficulty processing the event/s or the following symptoms apply to you, reach out for help early. It's important not to minimise the experience and to seek professional help as soon as possible in order to prevent symptoms from getting worse.

Call the Bush Support Line or contact your GP if you find yourself:

- Feeling very distressed after the event
- Feeling like you're not coping with the intense feelings or physical sensations
- Feeling that things aren't getting back to normal after three to four weeks
- Continuing to have physical symptoms or disturbed sleep
- Deliberately avoiding anything that reminds you of the event
- Finding that relationships with family and friends are suffering
- Using more drugs or alcohol
- Becoming more accident-prone
- Unable to manage responsibilities or return to work
- Feeling as though you do not have anyone to share your feelings or concerns with.

More information

Access our booklet 'Supporting Yourself and Others After Traumatic Events':
crana.org.au/support-after-traumatic-events

Wellbeing for the Bush VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Managing the cumulative impact of other people's trauma

Healthcare workers choose their careers because they care deeply for others. This caring connection involves empathy and a sense of responsibility for others. When working with trauma survivors, this caring connection is an essential part of the healing process. However, it can leave you more vulnerable to vicarious trauma.

Vicarious trauma is like the frog in boiling water – it builds up so slowly that you don't notice how much it's affecting you until it's already taken a serious toll.



"Vicarious trauma is a form of cumulative trauma, and refers to the psychological, emotional and physical distress that can result from repeated exposure to traumatic content. It is characterised by negative changes in the professional's perceptions of themselves and the world."¹

Signs and symptoms

There are physical, behavioural and emotional/psychological signs of vicarious trauma, some of which include:

Physical

- Fatigue and exhaustion
- Sleep disturbance
- Physical aches and pains
- Changes in appetite
- Weakened immune system
- Gastrointestinal issues

Behavioural

- Withdrawal and isolation
- Avoidance
- Changes in work performance
- Increased substance use
- Changes in relationships
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty concentrating

Emotional/psychological

- Anxiety and/or depression
- Emotional numbness
- Detachment
- Irritability and anger
- Guilt and shame
- Loss of hope and meaning
- Intrusive thoughts
- Flashbacks

What to do

For individuals

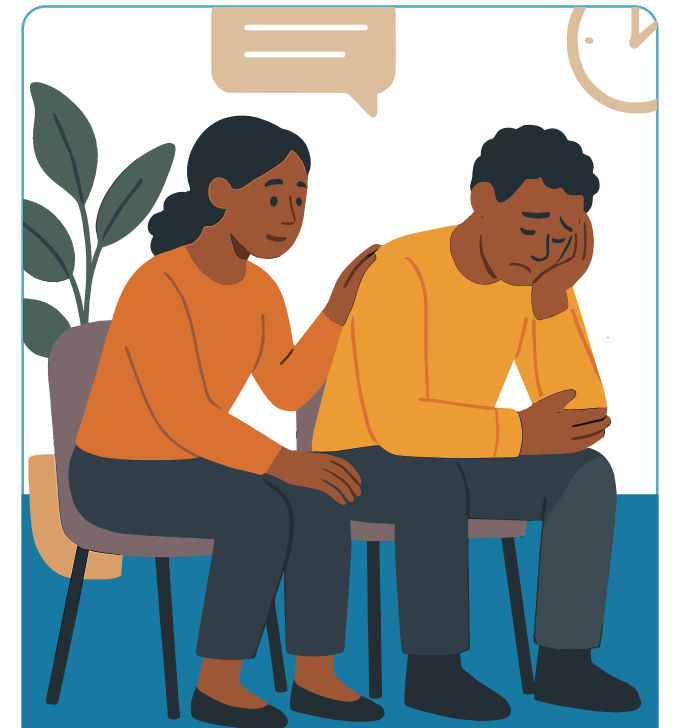
Healthcare workers are often more reluctant to seek help due to perceived stigma within the professions. However, it's essential to prioritise your wellbeing and seek help as soon as possible. If you feel vicarious trauma is something you may be experiencing, or any of the symptoms listed sound familiar:

- Check out our CRANaplus resources designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of rural and remote health workers.



- Access regular clinical or peer supervision, or increase the frequency of supervision if exposure to vicarious trauma is high. Talking through experiences helps the brain process information and try to make sense of what occurred.
- Develop a self-care plan (you can use the CRANaplus Self-care Plan available on our resources webpage).
- Talk to your line manager, co-workers, family and friends and ask for support. Be specific about what you need, as everyone's needs are different.
- Access cultural or spiritual activities.
- Call the Bush Support Line 24/7 on 1800 805 391.
- Talk to your GP and consider accessing professional support.

1. Hydon S, Wong M, Langley AK, Stein BD, Kataoka SH. Preventing secondary traumatic stress in educators. Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am. 2015;24(2):319-33. In https://research.iscrr.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3411064/342_ER_Vicarious-trauma-prevention-FINAL-15.06.2023.pdf



For managers and team leaders

- Attend to all the strategies at an individual level first. Modelling is a great practice that speaks volumes.
- Talk about vicarious trauma in the workplace and inform all team members of the signs. Remember, it is not 'if' but 'when' staff will experience it, and everyone experiences it differently. Normalise the effects of working with trauma survivors.
- Have a thorough staff induction for all new staff and provide them with a 'buddy' where available.
- Provide good staff support and encourage or facilitate clinical or peer supervision for your staff and yourself.
- Promote and support staff to prioritise their wellbeing and implement self-care strategies.
- Ensure workloads are distributed evenly, including trauma cases.

Wellbeing for the Bush BURNOUT

As health care workers, our coping abilities can often be relatively high, and we 'just get on with it'. This can be a reasonable short-term solution; however, if stress issues are not addressed in the workplace, it becomes problematic and may lead to burnout. Burnout is very high among 'people who help people,' but the good news is there are ways to help prevent it.

What is burnout?

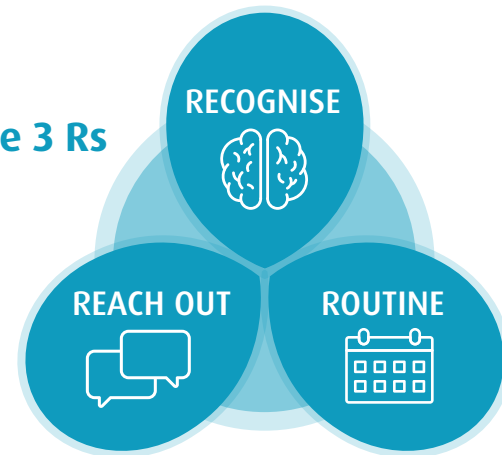
The World Health Organization defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from unmanaged workplace stress, marked by:

- Energy depletion or exhaustion
- Mental distance or cynicism about one's job
- Reduced professional efficacy¹

What are some of the signs?

- Feeling exhausted and unable to perform basic tasks
- Losing motivation in many aspects of your life, including your work, hobbies or relationships
- Feeling unable to focus or concentrate on tasks
- Feeling empty or lacking in emotion
- Losing your passion and drive
- Being easily irritated by minor problems
- Experiencing conflict in your relationships with co-workers, friends and family
- Emotionally withdrawing from friends and family²

The 3 Rs



What can I do if I am burnt out?

Recognise

Recognising that you are burnt out is the first step. Sometimes, it can be hard to recognise, but talking to others can be helpful. Friends and family can be a good start, or talking with a trusted colleague. The Bush Support Line is our 24/7 support line for rural and remote health workers. It is staffed by psychologists experienced in the rural and remote health sector who understand the context in which you work.

Reach out

Reaching out and getting support is the next step. We are hardwired for connection, and when we feel like we are not alone, we can work with the hard stuff. If you feel comfortable, talk to your line manager or seek support from your Employee Assistance Program. Talking to your GP or a psychologist or calling the Bush Support Line are also great supports to reach out to.

Routine

Keeping to a routine is important. A routine includes more than just getting up, brushing teeth, getting dressed, etc. Routines also include things that nurture and support your mental and physical health. If your routine is solely about survival, consider slight changes involving nutrition, moving your body, relationships, recreation, relaxation, spiritual practices, and nature. Contribution and service to others, especially outside your regular day-to-day work, can sometimes return positive rewards for your wellbeing. Refer to CRANAplus' resources on self-care.

Takeaway tips for burnout

- Trust the signs your body is telling you
- Be kind to yourself
- Remind yourself, "I am enough in this moment"
- Your joy matters
- Talk about it to others
- Take regular breaks during the day
- Take your annual leave
- Learn to identify your triggers and early warning signs
- Implement self-care into your routine

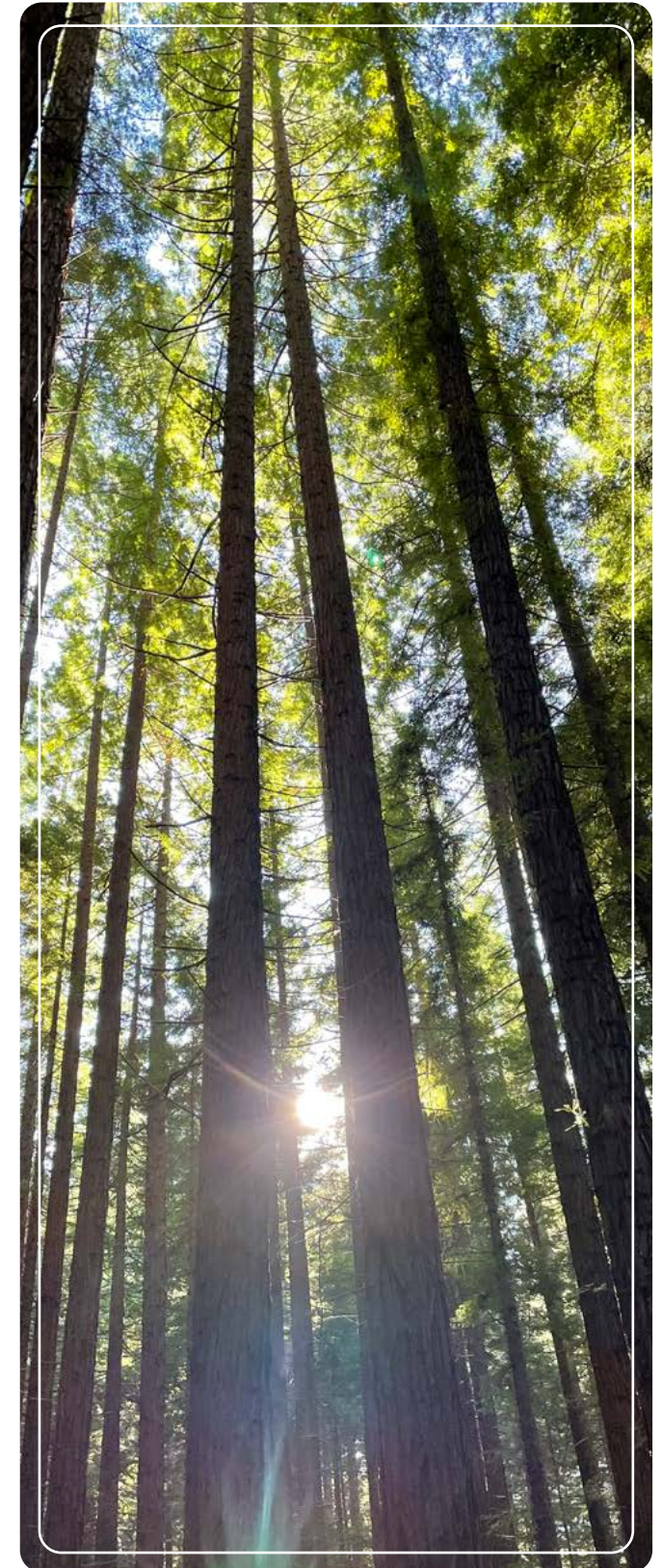
More information

Nagoski, E. & Nagasaki A. (2020). Burnout: The secret to unlocking the stress cycle. Ballantine Books, United States.

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/experiencing-burnout-heres-what-to-do-about-it/>

1. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-disease>

2. <https://au.reachout.com/challenges-and-coping/stress/what-is-burnout>



Tall trees - Meredith Brown, Warburton
Entry from the 2023 CRANAplus Mindful Photography Competition

Wellbeing for the Bush

HEALTHY WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy workplace relationships are not just “nice to have”. They directly impact a team’s functioning, staff retention, and patient care. Built on open communication, mutual respect, and trust, they allow people to feel valued, psychologically safe, and able to work together effectively, especially during challenging times.

In rural and remote settings, these relationships matter even more. Teams are small, roles are broad, and resources are limited. You may navigate professional isolation, dual relationships (such as a colleague who is also a neighbour), and close ties with community members. Healthy connections can be a key source of support, resilience, and job satisfaction.

What do healthy workplace relationships look like?

Healthy Signs



- Respectful, honest communication
- Clear and agreed boundaries
- Feeling heard and acknowledged
- Shared decision-making where appropriate
- Constructive feedback given with care
- Trust and reliability
- Willingness to repair after conflict

Warning Signs



- Frequent conflict or hostility
- Blurred or ignored boundaries
- Dismissiveness or being talked over
- One person dominating decisions
- Criticism that feels personal or harsh
- Gossip, rumours, or exclusion
- Ongoing resentment or avoidance

Creating and maintaining healthy relationships

Communicate openly and kindly

- Check in regularly. Misunderstandings can escalate quickly.
- Use ‘I’ statements instead of blame: “I felt overwhelmed when...” rather than “You always...”
- Listen actively. Give your full attention.
- Confirm understanding: “Can I check we’re on the same page?” and repeat your understanding of the conversation.
- Be mindful of cultural and communication differences.

Establish and respect boundaries

- Clarify roles and expectations early.
- Set shared norms for dual relationships.
- Respect time, energy, and emotional limits, including your own.
- It is ok to say, “I need some time before continuing this conversation.”
- Use supervision or support services to navigate complex situations. (The Bush Support Line is available 24/7 on 1800 805 391).

Build trust over time

- Follow through on commitments. Reliability builds trust.
- Be consistent in how you treat people across settings.
- Acknowledge mistakes. Trust is repaired through accountability.
- Recognise and celebrate team contributions.

Manage conflict constructively

- Address issues early. Tensions grow when things are left unspoken.
- Choose an appropriate time and private space for difficult conversations.
- Focus on the behaviour or situation, not the person.
- Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.
- Involve a third party (e.g. supervisor, EAP) if needed.

Prioritise your wellbeing

- Healthy relationships start with how you relate to yourself. Focus on managing your stress.
- Notice when you’re depleted, as it affects how you show up.
- Use peer support, supervision, the Bush Support Line, or other supports.
- Debrief regularly, especially after difficult cases or community incidents.
- Model the self-care you encourage in others.

Quick self-check in

- ✓ Am I listening to understand others?
- ✓ Have I clarified expectations or uncertainties?
- ✓ Is this a one-off issue, or a pattern?



Unique rural and remote reminders

- In small teams, every relationship matters. Invest where you can.
- Isolation can magnify relationship stress. Talk about it.
- Take time to understand local community expectations and cultural protocols.
- Check in with colleagues who seem withdrawn or overwhelmed.

When things aren’t working

- Seek support early (e.g. supervisor, Bush Support Line, EAP).
- Document concerns if needed.
- Remember: addressing issues early supports your wellbeing, team functioning, and patient care.

Healthy workplace relationships are everyone’s responsibility. You don’t need to be a manager to make a difference. Modelling respectful, consistent behaviour is what matters.

Wellbeing for the Bush CIVILITY

Civility is best described as the “rules of engagement” for how people relate to each other. Demonstrating civility means showing regard for those around us and being thoughtful, respectful, courteous, and polite. Civility sounds simple. However, there is more to it than avoiding unwanted or uncivil behaviours. It relies on positive gestures that encourage, inspire, lift up and promote engagement, connectedness and collaboration. It requires authenticity, trust, communication, and, more than anything else, respect.



Why is civility important?



Civility matters in rural and remote health workplaces because collaboration and open communication contribute to high-quality patient care, workforce retention and greater satisfaction and wellbeing of staff. Rural and remote health settings often require you to work closely within a small team. Furthermore, workers may be living and working away from their usual social supports or have limited external social contacts, making a cohesive and collaborative workplace even more critical.



A lack of civility can be a workplace hazard. If left unaddressed, it can spiral into unacceptable or unreasonable behaviours, for example, bullying. Incivility needs to be addressed as soon as possible. As for any other hazard, such as spilt fluids or a tripping risk, teams need to be galvanised into action to minimise the danger to themselves and others.



What does incivility look like?

Research suggests that incivility is of increasing incidence and concern in Australian health workplaces.^{1,2} Incivility is a key antecedent to bullying and may include ostracism, sabotage, infighting, scapegoating and criticism. Uncivil behaviours are characteristically rude and discourteous and display a lack of regard for others.

Examples of incivility can include:

- Failing to acknowledge another person’s presence
- Taking credit for others’ efforts
- Sabotaging an individual’s efforts
- Withholding knowledge or information from others
- Talking down to others
- Withdrawing from open communication or effort
- Spreading rumours about colleagues (gossiping)
- Being discourteous in everyday exchanges, for example, not saying “please” or “thank you”.

Incivility costs. It costs individuals by increasing psychological distress, patients by increasing the likelihood of mistakes or inattention, and organisations by increasing absenteeism or staff turnover.

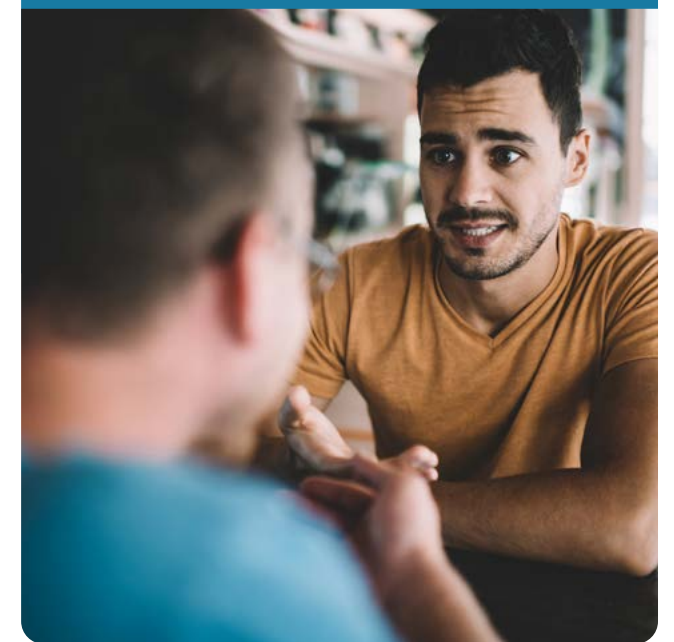
1. Hutchinson, M. (2009) Restorative approaches to workplace bullying: Educating nurses towards shared responsibility. *Contemporary Nurse*, 32, (1-2): 147-155

2. Atashzadeh Shoorideh F, Moosavi S, Balouchi A. (2021) Incivility toward nurses: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Med Ethics Hist Med*. 3;14:15.

What can you do?

Behaving civilly in the workplace is everyone’s responsibility. Here are a few things you can do to increase civility in the workplace:

- **Be a role model.** Check out our Mindful Monday on modelling the behaviour you want to see.
- **Call out uncivil behaviour.** The behaviours you walk past are the behaviours you accept.
- **Take a bird’s eye view of your workplace culture** and contribute to addressing the things that you can.
- **Alert managers to the issues outside your sphere of influence that require attention.** Leaders and managers play an essential role in modelling civil behaviours and intervening early when incivility occurs.
- **Seek help when you need it.** Talk to one of the experienced psychologists on the Bush Support Line, which can help to clarify the issues and identify problem-solving behaviours.



Wellbeing for the Bush

NAVIGATING WORKPLACE CONFLICT

What is conflict?

Workplace conflict is a disagreement between employees or groups and is a natural part of any workplace. It can occur from minor issues, such as personality conflict or work style clashes, or from more serious concerns, such as discrimination or harassment. In rural and remote health services, conflict can feel more personal because teams are small, people often hold multiple roles, and resources are stretched. When left unresolved, conflict can impact workplace culture, staff wellbeing, and client outcomes.

Conflict can be beneficial in that it can ignite innovation and strengthen team relationships. The key is *how* conflict is managed.

This advice is general information about day-to-day workplace conflict. It is not for bullying, harassment or psychological safety concerns. For these issues, seek support from your organisation, professional body, EAP, or Fair Work (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/contact-us>). Support is also available 24 hours a day from the Bush Support Line on 1800 805 391.

Understanding conflict

Conflict often arises when people perceive that their needs, values, or goals are in opposition. In rural and remote health settings, some common sources of conflict include:

- **Role/workload imbalances:** Overlapping responsibilities or uncertainty about scope of practice.
- **Communication challenges:** Misunderstandings or a lack of timely information.
- **Workload pressures:** Competing demands, stretched resources and staffing.
- **Cultural differences:** Understanding and managing cultural contexts, expectations and communications across diverse communities and professional disciplines.
- **Misaligned priorities or values:** Different approaches to client care or organisational goals.

Practical tips for managing conflict

- **Early recognition:** Notice early signs like withdrawal, sarcasm and irritation; consider appropriate action.
- **Pause and regulate:** Use deep breathing, grounding, or other stress-regulation techniques before responding.
- **Use clear, respectful communication:** Try “I” statements, active listening, and avoiding blame.
- **Focus on the issue, not the person:** Stay solution-oriented and specific.
- **Seek understanding of the context:** Stay curious; consider cultural, professional, and personal perspectives that could be shaping the situation.
- **Practical scripts:** Keep short, helpful phrases in mind: i.e. “I am concerned about...” or “Can we step aside to clarify...?”
- **Step back when needed:** Know when a break is better than pushing through during a situation that could escalate.

Protecting your mental health and wellbeing

- **Boundaries:** In small communities, personal and professional lives frequently overlap. Try to set clear boundaries, e.g. work stays at work.
- **Peer support:** Lean on trusted colleagues for support and debriefing.
- **Self-care strategies:** Focus on the small, achievable actions, such as staying hydrated, stepping outside during a break, and engaging in something you enjoy.
- **Accessing support:** You are not alone. EAP services, telehealth psychology, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health networks, the CRANaplus Bush Support Line (available 24/7 on 1800 805 391), and other professional networks are available.



A conflict resolution checklist

- ✓ Can I identify the main issue, without placing blame?
- ✓ Am I prepared to listen as much as I speak?
- ✓ Do I understand the other person's perspective, including community or cultural context?
- ✓ Can I think of solutions that will benefit all involved?
- ✓ Have I debriefed with a trusted colleague, supervisor, or peer?
- ✓ Am I calm before I approach the person?
- ✓ Have I documented this?
- ✓ When will I follow up?

When to escalate

- If conflict involves bullying, harassment or discrimination
- If it impacts patient/client safety
- If efforts to resolve the issue have been unsuccessful

Document clearly and talk with your manager, People and Culture team, Union, or other designated senior workplace support personnel.

Wellbeing for the Bush

LISTENING & COMMUNICATING

This resource is a first step or a reminder of effective ways of listening and communicating with someone who may need support. We can all be affected by personal distress at some point in our lives. *This is not a clinical intervention. These are the conversations you have with your neighbour, work colleague, or friend.*



1. Prepare



2. Ask



3. Listen



4. Support

1. Prepare

There are a couple of ways to prepare for a conversation. It is important to feel as though you have some basic knowledge about mental health and the resources and supports that are available.

When you plan to have a conversation with someone you are concerned about, before having the conversation, ask yourself a couple of questions:

- Are you prepared?
- Do you feel ready?
- How do you feel today?
- Are you the right person to have the conversation?

It is okay to feel anxious – conversations can be difficult.

2. Ask

It is understandable to feel nervous before asking someone about their wellbeing. Not wanting to say the wrong thing or make things worse is a common worry.

It can be challenging to know how to start a conversation with someone you are concerned about.

The following are some examples of conversation starters.

- “I have noticed (name what you have noticed that is different). Is everything okay?”
- “You haven’t seemed yourself lately. Is everything okay?”
- “It’s been a really tough time lately. How are you coping with everything?”

Below are some simple tips for talking with someone.

- Use open-ended questions that don’t require yes or no answers
- Keep it simple – “How can I help?”
- Help them see they are not alone
- Try not to use jargon or platitudes (e.g. look on the bright side!)
- Don’t judge their experiences or reactions but acknowledge that things seem tough for them
- Be aware of non-verbal cues and body language.

What to say next

Below are some suggestions for continuing the conversation once you have asked how they are going.

- “Just take your time, there is no rush. I know talking about this can be difficult.”
- “I can hear that the last few months have been really terrible for you. Please tell me more about it.”
- “Can I just check that I have understood you correctly?”
- “What’s that like for you?”

3. Listen

As health workers we often try to jump in and ‘fix’ things. Sometimes we need to step back and allow the person to talk and for us to just listen.

There are many occasions when being listened to is all that is required to help people through a difficult time.

Silence and pauses are okay.

4. Support

Whether it’s a friend, family, colleague or client/patient that you are supporting, you can play a significant role.

During the listening step, you will get an understanding of the issues they are experiencing, what support they have, and things that might help. Below are some key tips for supporting someone:

- It’s important that you reassure them they are not alone and there is hope that things can get better.
- Check your understanding of the situation and what you can do to help. Ask, “What do you think I can do to support you?”

Planning your own self-care:

- Remember to look after yourself as well
- Don’t forget your own self care.



Early intervention from a colleague, friend, or compassionate health provider could make a real difference to saving lives. Everyone has the capacity to help and to do so safely.

When is extra professional help needed?

- If the person is not feeling better or improving
- The symptoms are interfering with daily life and affecting ability to function
- They are isolating from friends and family
- They have a sense of ongoing hopelessness, lack of pleasure
- There is evidence of risk-taking, thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Avoidance.

More information

Access CRANApplus’ free online course ‘Critical Conversations’: crana.org.au/critical-conversations

Black Dog Institute: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/How-to-help-when-youre-worried-about-someones-mental-health.pdf

RUOK: <https://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask>

Wellbeing for the Bush

STAYING CONNECTED WHEN WORKING RURAL & REMOTE

Working in rural and remote healthcare is deeply rewarding, and it can also be lonely at times. Loneliness is a common human experience, and rural and remote health workers experience it for varying reasons, including:

- A single or frequent relocation, and needing to rebuild connections
- Navigating professional and personal relationships in small towns
- Uncertainty about debriefing with colleagues due to confidentiality concerns
- Being away from family, friends, kin, Country or cultural networks

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a subjective experience, and is the gap between the social relationships you want and the ones you have. It isn't about the number of people you have around you; it's about whether your connections meet your emotional needs, such as feeling loved, secure, and connected.

Signs of loneliness

Loneliness can show up in different ways:

Physical signs

Headaches, pain, feeling unwell or tired, changes in sleep or appetite, low motivation or energy, or weight changes.¹

Emotional or mental health signs

Anxiety, low mood, panic, feeling paranoid, feeling hopeless and worthless, using alcohol or other substances to cope, or thoughts of suicide.



Being away from your usual connections or working long hours can make it hard to maintain social support.

Reducing loneliness begins with building or rebuilding quality social relationships that support your emotional and physical health.¹

What can I try?

Stay in touch

Reach out regularly via calls, texts or emails. Staying connected with people who know you best will help anchor you when you're experiencing your most challenging times. Also, be compassionate and caring to others who may need support to share in the reciprocity of relationships.

Connect with community

Join a local club, organisation, group, or cultural activity. Shared experiences foster belonging, especially in small communities.

Get active

Regular physical activity can help you meet new people and boost your mood, so look for options to join a walking group, sport or recreational club.

Give back

Volunteering helps people form meaningful connections while also giving them a sense of purpose. Choose something that aligns with your interests and values.

Spend time with animals

Pets provide unconditional love and companionship, can reduce anxiety and loneliness,² and improve overall mood. Dogs also encourage regular physical activity and encourage conversation with others.

Small actions count

If energy or motivation is low, a quick chat with a neighbour or a single message to a friend can be beneficial.

Seek culturally safe connection

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, connecting with cultural mentors, Elders, or Country can be deeply protective.



Finding the right balance

Anyone can experience loneliness, and each person's experience may differ from another's. Actively maintaining social connections helps reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing, and you deserve relationships that feel safe, supportive and genuine.

Whilst connection is essential, solitude can be nourishing. Try to find your balance. Find time for quiet moments of reflection that support recovery and clarity, whether that be at home, in nature, or on Country. Notice what fills your cup and what drains it and make choices that honour your needs.

When to seek extra support

If loneliness is impacting your mood, functioning or safety, or if you're finding it hard to connect with others despite trying, professional support can help. Reach out to your GP, mental health care provider, EAP, or call the **Bush Support Line on 1800 805 391** (available 24/7).

1. Healthdirect. (2022). Loneliness and isolation. <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/loneliness-isolation-mental-health#:~:text=If%20you%20feel%20alone%20or%20socially%20isolated,tired%2C%20having%20sleep%20problems%20or%20lacking%20motivation> [Accessed 29 August 2025]

2. Kazi DS. Who is rescuing whom? Dog ownership and cardiovascular health. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Hagerstown, MD; 2019. p. e005887.

Wellbeing for the Bush MORAL INJURY

Healthcare workers in rural and remote Australia are committed and passionate about helping others. They often work in small teams with limited resources, far from support systems, while also carrying potential exposure to community trauma. As healthcare workers, most days your commitment and passion carry you through; but sometimes what you feel is right, and what your organisation requires do not align, and your moral code is challenged. This is known as moral injury.

What is moral injury?

Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay first explored moral injury and defined it as “a betrayal of what is right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation” (Shay 2014), and usually develops through repeated exposure to ethically distressing situations. There are psychological, behavioural, social, and spiritual impacts because you were either perpetrating, failing to prevent, or witnessing acts that rock deeply held personal moral beliefs and expectations (Litz et al. 2009).

Signs you may be experiencing moral injury

Common signs and symptoms include:

Behavioural

Withdrawing, avoiding, increased irritability, overworking to try to compensate, considering leaving your role or profession.

Emotional

Guilt, shame, numbness, powerlessness, or anger after shifts, due to a clinical decision, resource constraints, or leadership decision.

Cognitive

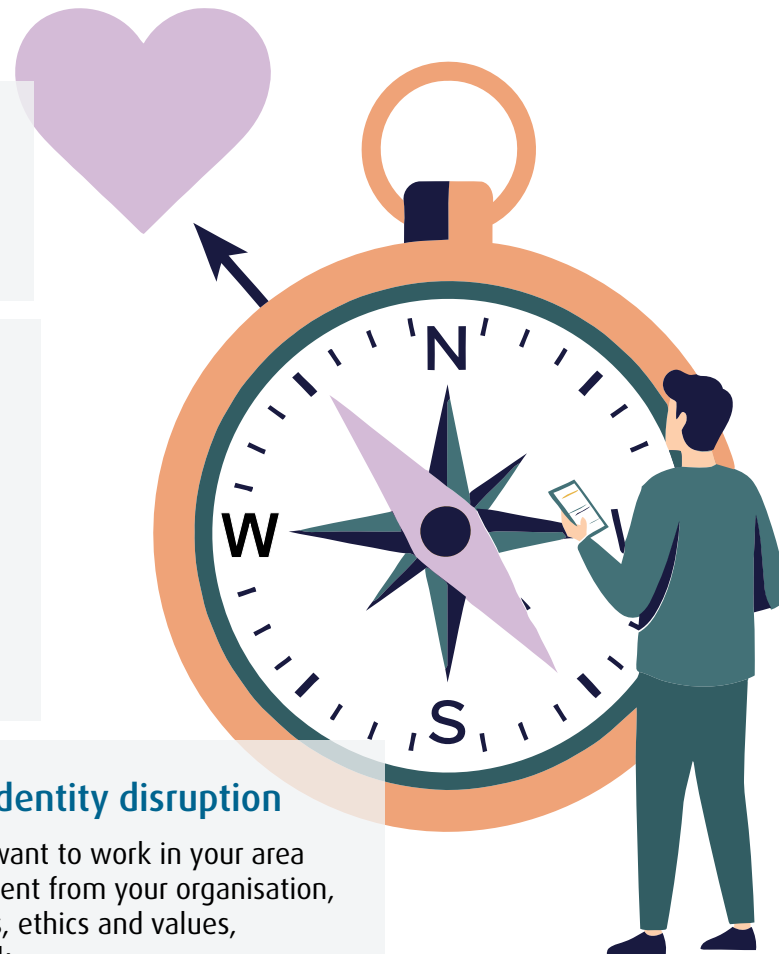
Rumination about “what I should have done”, losing trust in the workplace and processes, harsh self-criticism, confusion about professional identity.

Psychological and somatic

Trouble sleeping, somatic tension when thinking about events, difficulty staying calm when having to make decisions in stressful situations.

Professional and identity disruption

Questioning if you still want to work in your area of training, disengagement from your organisation, questioning your morals, ethics and values, losing pride in your work.



What can help?

Name and recognise it

Name the personal value(s) that were violated. Notice what emotions show up and where you feel them in your body. Saying “This feels like a moral injury,” can reduce self-blame and shift the narrative to systematic strain.

Professional connection

Supervision (especially culturally informed), peer support, and informal debriefs can support reflective practice and a healthy team culture. Ask yourself, “What other support do I need?” Moral injury grows in silence. Healing happens in connection with others.

Advocate in small ways

Document concerns (e.g. “support limited due to staffing/resources”) in your documentation, contribute to service reviews, support colleagues, and advocate for change where possible.

Reclaim meaning outside of work

You are more than your work. Connect with family and friends. Do things that ‘fill your cup’ such as art, sports, spending time with pets and adventures. Meaning, connection, and values outside of work can buffer against moral distress.



Moral injury is not just an individual issue. It is impacted by workplace culture, leadership, resources, and system issues. Creating access to supportive teams in a psychologically safe workplace that is appropriately resourced helps reduce harm.

Further support

- CRANApplus Bush Support Line is available 24/7 on 1800 805 391
- Your EAP provider
- Your GP can review if you are eligible for a Mental Health Care Plan
- Phoenix Australia: Moral injury guide for healthcare workers³

1. Shay, J. (2014). Moral Injury. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31 (2), 182-191. (<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-14055-003>).

2. Litz, B.T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nosh, W.P., Silva, C., & Maguen, S. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29(8), 695-706. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735809000920?via=ihub>)

3. Phoenix Australia. (2022). Moral stress among healthcare workers during COVID-19: A guide to moral injury. <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Moral-Stress-Healthcare-Workers-COVID-19-Guide-to-Moral-Injury.pdf>

Wellbeing for the Bush FIRST PEOPLES HEALTH WORKFORCE

To all the deadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers out there in rural and remote communities - this is for you. Many of you have extraordinary resilience and strength in the face of difficult and challenging times. This is a reminder that everyone needs to take time for themselves to maintain their own wellbeing.

As a health worker it can be challenging to balance the demands of your role, with the demands of family, community and kinship. Sometimes the last person we care for is ourselves. Self-care is often the first thing to go when we are busy and under stress, but it's essential to helping us stay well.

It is an incredibly rewarding job working as a First Peoples Health Worker.

Rewarding aspects

- Connecting to community and building relationships
- Giving and receiving knowledge
- Speaking up for communities
- Being part of the solutions to improve Indigenous health and access to services.

There can also be many stressors that can take their toll...

Sources of stress

- Workloads – high and demanding workloads
- Expectations – managing complex family/community obligations and expectations
- Recognition, respect and support – workers may lack support and feel isolated
- Boundaries – managing personal and professional boundaries
- Racism – coworkers, mainstream community and systems you work in
- Complex personal circumstances
- Loss, grief, Sorry Business – coworkers and managers may not recognise the impact of loss, grief and the importance of Sorry Business
- Culturally safe ways of working – mainstream colleagues and managers may not understand Indigenous ways of working
- Working conditions – can be challenging in rural and remote settings
- Funding, job security and salaries.



7 areas to consider

- **Social Support:** Social support and your mob can keep you healthier and happier, creating a buffer against stress. Surround yourself with people who understand how you feel. Friends and family can pick you up when you're down, burnt out and tired.
- **Sleep:** We all know how important sleep is but sometimes we fail to make it a priority.
- **Exercise:** A walk, a swim – get back in nature and feel the earth between your toes.
- **Food:** Healthy food is fuel for your body.
- **Fun:** What do you love to do? Painting, sport, walking, swimming with your kids, calling a cuz to catch-up? Do something fun and just for you every week.
- **Care for your health:** Remember women's and men's business and don't forget to see your doctor.
- **Quiet time to unplug:** Create and visit special places and spaces in your days or weeks where you unplug from everything.

What can you do?

There are two main ways to prevent and reduce stress as a First Peoples Health Worker.

1. The first way is for health agencies to provide support for you as a worker. This can include supervision and mentoring, debriefing, flexible work arrangements, role clarity, and culturally safe practices including cultural supervision.
2. The second way is for you to do things that reduce your own stress.
 - Connect to community and culture
 - Laughter
 - Have realistic expectations
 - Prioritise tasks
 - Maintain a balance between work and other aspects of your life
 - Enjoy the successes
 - Have a yarn and debrief with someone you trust
 - Set up systems to be able to check in regularly with mentors/supervisors
 - Use services like the Bush Support Line.

More information

Keep yourself healed: Self-care for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJU07iAYN_0

Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly: Indigenous Worker Wellbeing. nceta.flinders.edu.au/workforce/indigenous-aod-workforce/feeling-deadly-working-deadly-indigenous-worker-wellbeing

Wellbeing for the Bush

5 SENSES TECHNIQUE

Firstly, give yourself a moment to become mindful of your breathing. Take a few long, slow, deep breaths to return to a calmer state. Once you find your breath, go through the following steps to help ground yourself:



What are 5 things you can see?

It could be a tree, a spot on the ceiling, or any aspect of your surroundings. You can say what you see out loud, in your head, or even write it down (it's a personal choice). Take your time to pay attention to what you are really seeing, including details like the colours and textures.



What are 4 things you can feel?

Maybe it's the sensation of clothing on your body, how your neck muscles are feeling, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. You may want to pick up an object and think about how it feels in terms of weight, texture, and other characteristics.



What are 3 things you can hear?

Pay attention to the sounds your mind has blocked out. Perhaps you can hear a clock ticking, a dog barking, or the wind blowing through the trees.



What are 2 things you can smell?

This one might be hard if you are not in a stimulating environment. If you cannot sniff something out where you are, walk nearby to find a scent. Maybe you walk to a bathroom to smell soap or outside to smell something in nature, such as gum leaves.



What is 1 thing you can taste?

What does the inside of your mouth taste like? Toothpaste, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch? Focus on your mouth and take in what you can taste.

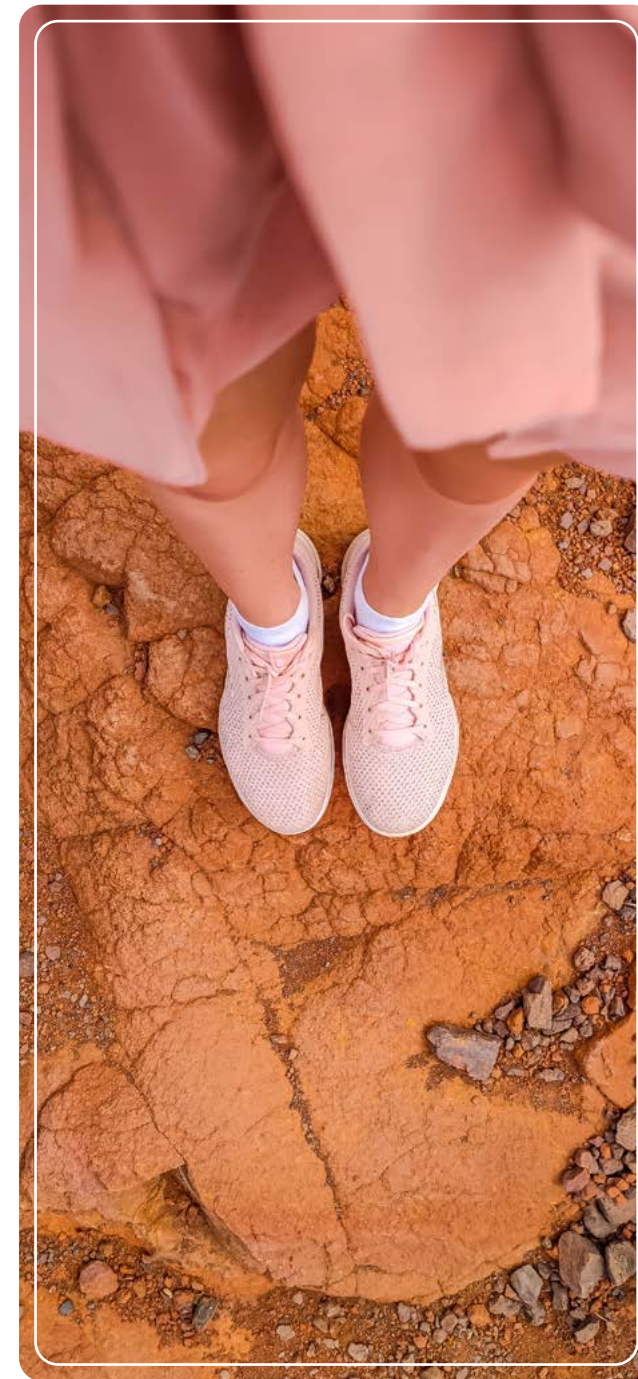
Lastly, don't forget to breathe.

Congratulations. By doing this activity you have taken some time to calm your mind and body. You can do this activity anywhere and anytime you need help to return to a calmer state.

Wellbeing for the Bush

BODY AWARENESS TECHNIQUE

This exercise will help bring you into the present by directing your attention to various parts of your body. You may want to do this while sitting, lying down or even while walking.



1. Take 5 long, deep breaths.

Ensure you are taking each breath through your nose, and exhaling through your mouth with your lips puckered.

2. Notice your feet.

Put both feet flat on the floor and wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times, while paying close attention to what you are feeling in your feet.

3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times.

Hone in on the feelings in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.

4. Clench your hands into tight fists, then release.

Repeat this 8-10 times.

5. Press your palms together, first gently, then more firmly.

Hold for 15-20 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.

6. Rub your palms together briskly.

Notice the sound and the feeling of warmth.

7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky.

Do this for five seconds, then bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.

8. Breathe again.

Take five more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

Great job on taking a few moments for you.

The more you practise the easier it will become to return to this calmer state. And remember, you can practise this technique anytime and anywhere.

Wellbeing for the Bush

TAKE A BREATHING BREAK

Complete this activity several times a day to help refresh you, replenish your energy, let go of distractions, and increase your focus. You can practise this simple, two-step activity anywhere and anytime you wish to return to a calmer state.

Step 1

Stand and take a deep breath whilst raising your arms slowly over your head.

Step 2

Exhale as you lower your arms. Repeat this exercise three times.



Well done for doing something today to support your wellbeing.

Why not share the Take a Breathing Break technique with a friend or work colleague? For more wellbeing exercises and resources to support your wellbeing, visit crana.org.au/support

BUSH SUPPORT LINE

Since 1997

1800 805 391

Free 24/7 confidential
telephone support for
the rural & remote health
workforce & their families

- A free, confidential 24/7 telephone support line
- Available every day of the year
- Staffed by psychologists with remote and cross-cultural experience
- Available from anywhere in Australia
- For all health workers, health discipline students, and their families in rural, remote, and isolated communities, including nurses, midwives, general practitioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health workers/professionals, the allied health workforce and other staff involved in health service delivery.

Wellbeing for the Bush ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

We've compiled a list of support and crisis lines and other mental health resources as a quick go to for when you're needing a little extra support. If you are unsure where to access support, don't hesitate to contact the Bush Support Line to discuss your options.



BUSH SUPPORT LINE

Since 1997

1800 805 391

Our Bush Support Line provides high-quality, free, confidential, 24/7 telephone support for the rural and remote health workforce, and their families.

1800 805 391
crana.org.au/bushsupportline

Support Lines for Health Workers

- 
Nurse & Midwife Support — 24/7 support for nurses and midwives. Phone 1800 667 877 nmsupport.org.au
- 
DRS4DRS — 24 hour crisis support for doctors and medical students. Phone 1300 374 377 drs4drs.com.au
- 
RACGP GP Support Program — 24/7 support for GPs for traumatic incidents or crisis counselling. Face-to-face counselling also available. Phone 1300 361 008 racgp.org.au
- 
Pharmacists' Support Service — A free service run by pharmacists for pharmacists. Every day from 8am to 11pm AEST. Phone 1300 244 910 supportforpharmacists.org.au

National Crisis and Support Lines

- 
Lifeline — 24/7 confidential support from a trained Lifeline crisis supporter. Phone 13 11 14 lifeline.org.au
- 
13Yarn — Culturally safe, confidential, one-on-one yarning opportunity for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. Available 24/7. Phone 13 92 76 13yarn.org.au

Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources and Information

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CRANAplus has developed a series of resources, tip sheets and tools to support the mental health and wellbeing of the remote and rural health workforce. crana.org.au/wellbeingresources
- 
WellMob collates social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. wellmob.org.au
- 
eMHprac connects health professionals to online programs, resources, primary care information and digital mental health resources. emhprac.org.au
- 
Black Dog Institute provides research-informed mental health resources and support tools that are recommended by professionals. The associated TEN (The Essential Networks for Health Professionals) helps healthcare workers find resources and support to manage burnout and maintain good mental health. blackdoginstitute.org.au & blackdoginstitute.org.au/the-essential-network
- 
Australian Psychological Society provides information and resources on varied psychology topics. psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics
- 
Beyond Blue provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live. beyondblue.org.au
- 
This Way Up provides a suite of tailored online treatment courses. thiswayup.org.au
- 
Phoenix Australia is the Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health. They provide a range of resources, online training, and treatment guidelines for health practitioners. phoenixaustralia.org
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Head to Health offers over 500 digital mental health resources from trusted service providers to support your wellbeing and mental health. headtohealth.gov.au



Wellbeing Workshops

CRANAplus provides free, flexible wellbeing workshops to rural and remote health workplaces throughout Australia. Our workshops are designed to help your team meet the challenges of providing health care in their unique setting. They can be delivered in person or online and are customised to meet your organisation's needs. Interested in arranging a workshop? Email us at wellbeing@crana.org.au



CRANApplus acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land, waters and sky, and respects their enduring spiritual connection to Country. We acknowledge the sorrow of the past and our hope and belief that we can move to a place of equity, partnership and justice together. We acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging, and pay our respects to the cultural authority of First Peoples.

We proudly stand with and support our LGBTQIA+ community, embracing diversity as fundamental to quality healthcare for all.

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