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Health Grants connect Hawkesbury Community

A new service which aims to improve community connectedness in the Hawkesbury has been announced by the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN) as part of their *Well-being Grants to Support Farming Communities*.

The initiative is funded by the Federal Government and is part of the *Empowering Our Communities* project which was introduced as one of the increased support measures implemented for communities affected by drought.

The Hawkesbury region has been identified as one of the most impacted areas within the NBMPHN region with 99.5% of NSW considered in drought or drought affected. While much of the region is now considered suburbia, there are still over 33,000 hectares of farmland within the Hawkesbury, and over 450 enterprises in the agricultural sector.

NBMPHN is dedicated to identifying needs and addressing gaps within the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas and have funded five grants in Round 1 of the initiative. One of the grants includes an innovative and exciting new project for Hawkesbury residents. Hawkesbury Be & Co. is a fortnightly pop-up social event that aims to foster community connections and improve access to support for isolated people. The cafe will officially launch on Thursday, May 2.

Michelle Hookham, Project Lead for Be & Co., said that the initiative is a collaborative community-led social enterprise that will promote connection, support and well-being.

“There is an established link between social isolation and poor mental health outcomes. There is also an acknowledged lack of access to mental health services in the Hawkesbury, as well as how to access services when they are needed.”

“Be & Co. will provide an opportunity for people to meet, get support, share skills across generations, build community and connect with well-being services.”

The project will also provide an opportunity for young people who are involved in the *Transition to Work* program to gain practical, hands-on experience in hospitality and customer service.

“We hope to build capacity and resilience within the community,” said Ms Hookham.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said the response to the *Empowering Our Communities* initiative has been positive.

“We are thrilled with the interest in the grants and have enjoyed learning about the community connections that already exist in the Hawkesbury. We hope that the grants can build on this existing social capital.”

“Since the announcement of the [Empowering our Communities] funding, we have conducted a lot of community engagement and consultation. It has been a great opportunity for the community to tell us what they want and need.”

“The general consensus is that there is a definite need to connect people within the Hawkesbury area, not only to mental health and well-being services, but to each other. We’re proud to be able to support programs like Be & Co. to do just that.”

Wentworth Healthcare is now accepting applications for Round 2 and is open to a variety of proposals, providing their project or service is aimed at supporting the well-being and mental health of the community.

“This is a very creative and practical opportunity for communities and we would love to see what ideas the community has to offer,” said Ms Reay.

Wentworth Healthcare is open to a variety of proposals from a range of community groups and individuals such as hairdressers, beauticians, fitness, yoga and meditation instructors who can raise awareness of mental health and reduce stigma.

Applications for Round 2 close on Friday, 3 May. For the full application guidelines and to apply, go to www.nbmphn.com.au/grants.

Round 3 will open at the conclusion of Round 2 and will close Friday, 19 July.

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The Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network is a program run by Wentworth Healthcare – a not for profit organisation which works to improve health for the communities of the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith.

This service has been made possible through funding provided by the Australian Government under the Primary Health Network (PHN) Program.