

NEWS RELEASE

Rural Australians urged to 'Help a Mate' to combat mental illness

Mark Pickford thought he was having heart trouble. He had been experiencing chest pains, headaches and decided to take himself to the doctor to have his heart checked out.

But it wasn't Mark's heart that was the problem. Luckily for him the doctor was able to identify that Mark was suffering depression which came as a bit of a shock to the fifth generation Yeoval farmer.

"When the doctor told me I had depression I said 'hang on a minute, I came here with a heart problem I don't have depression,'" Mark said.

"He asked me to consider going on anti-depressants and I thought, that is what little old ladies take.

"I realised then that this stigma was something that needed to be broken down."

Mark has bravely told his story as part of a new program across rural Australia designed to help rural communities identify the signs of mental illness and arm them with the tools to help.

Called 'Help a Mate' the program is being launched in October by Incitec Pivot Fertilisers in conjunction with Brisbane Psychologist Dr Chris Day. The program will be an online tool kit hosted on the recently launched Farmer Community website. The program has already received support from Australian of the Year and mental health ambassador Professor Patrick McGorry.

The Help a Mate program is designed to not only encourage people to seek help themselves but also to provide family and friends access to tools to help when they can see that someone close to them is suffering.

The online tool kit includes checklists, videos and a question and answer forum. Dr Day, a clinical psychologist, executive coach, author and public speaker on psychological issues has provided her expertise in defining the resources.

"If you suspect your partner or your brother or your business partner or whoever is showing signs of depression for goodness sake do something for them," Mark said.

"In a bushfire we help each other out, in a flood we help each other out; we need to be helping each other out in this area as well."