



MEDIA RELEASE

Country Callback for Regional Queensland

UnitingCare Community has launched a new service to help Queenslanders affected by drought and hardship.

The Country Callback Service 1800 54 33 54 is a free, confidential and independent 24-hour advice, referral and counselling service for anyone living in rural Queensland.

“UnitingCare Community operates the Lifeline Crisis Support Line in Queensland and this places us in a unique position as we have the experience, skills, and infrastructure to provide this service and offer more targeted emotional support to Queenslanders affected by drought and associated hardship,” said Angela Williams, UnitingCare Community Project Officer.

“What’s different about the Country Callback Line is that it allows us to check in with our callers within a 24-hour timeframe – something the Lifeline Crisis Line isn’t resourced to do.

“It’s also a regional service, so those on the phones have a lived understanding of some of the challenges specific to regional Queensland,” said Ms Williams.

“We’re having a chat from Queenslander to another Queenslander. What I’m trying to provide is the front line that says somebody here is listening to you, that you’re not on your own,” said Lester, a Crisis Supporter on the Country Callback Line.

“Talk like its one mate to another. I’ll listen to anything you want to tell me,” he said

UnitingCare Community encourages anyone challenged by the effects of the drought to contact the Country Callback Line, operational 24-hours a day.

“We know people affected by drought, financial pressures and isolation are calling the Lifeline Crisis Line. This service is more specific to supporting people affected by drought and associated hardship, and is more in-depth because we have the capacity to follow up with you and continue the conversation,” Ms Williams said.

“The line is for all rural Queenslanders, whether you are a landholder, run a business, offer a service or support those on the land. We’re here and we’re ready for your call,” said Ms Williams.

Contact the Country Callback Line on 1800 54 33 54.

Contact Details

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See over page for background information



Relevant background information

- In Queensland, Lifeline services are delivered by UnitingCare Community
- We are leveraging the skills, expertise and history we have from running the Lifeline Crisis Line into this new UnitingCare Community Country Callback Line.
- Our Lifeline telephone supporters will continue to take crisis calls on **13 11 14** from across Australia (including from our Bundaberg call centre)
- Over 8500 crisis calls into the Lifeline call centres have been taken from drought affected communities in Queensland from May to September 2014. We know rural communities are using the service now, however there is currently there is no follow-up or callback mechanism

What is Country Callback?

- Unitingcare Community now has a complementary information, referral and counselling service offering telephone support (callback) to rural communities affected by drought and hardship in Queensland – it is called Country Callback **1800 54 33 54**
- UnitingCare Community is offering this new, complementary service to specifically support drought affected communities. It will offer more in-depth telephone support to those landholders and their families in the grip of drought and will also provide telephone support for the supporters including those at the coalface assisting affected landholders on a daily basis, such as Rural Financial Counsellors, teachers, etc. These roles are often stressful too and people may need someone safe to talk to.
- Country Callback is funded by the Queensland Government under the Community Connections Program

Why is it needed? Why now?

- We know people are struggling in rural Queensland and we know they are accessing Lifeline's Crisis Support Line. Currently our Lifeline service does not offer a callback option to provide more one-on-one telephone follow-up support to people who need it.
- Queensland has been in the grip of drought and forecasts continue to look worrying but hopefully this drought will break soon across the state.
- We understand people in rural communities need emotional support at this time as they may not wish to talk to their friends, family or neighbours as they may be doing it tough themselves or may be worse off than themselves.
- In addition, some people want confidentiality and anonymity to share their worries which may be difficult sometimes in small communities.
- People sometimes don't want to burden friends or others going through similar hardship, so now they can contact this callback service to have a safe talk whether in crisis or just needing a listening ear.
- Heading into Christmas and the New Year is a stressful time for people, often managing additional family members, and requiring additional money for food and presents.



How will it work?

- Our team of Lifeline Crisis Supporters (TCS) take the initial call to assess whether the caller:
 - is in crisis and requires immediate support eg suicide OR
 - requires a listening ear and some referrals OR
 - requires more in-depth telephone support to the caller and/or their family at a time that suits the caller to check in with them if needed
- If callers request additional support for themselves or their families and request a callback (telephone support), our qualified counsellors can provide this support responsively and will work with the person on the issues they are facing.

Where will it be located?

- Country Callback is based in Bundaberg – a rural, regional town who has also suffered this past couple of years and the callback team has empathy and experience to now take up this challenge to support Queenslanders to Queenslanders.