

**March 2024**

## **IVP is pioneering mental health support for struggling farmers in Germany**

### **Rural and remote mental health leadership and research**

As we embrace the changing seasons, we are reminded of the resilience ingrained within the very fabric of our communities. This month, we delve into two crucial articles shedding light on innovative approaches and collaborative efforts towards strengthening mental health support in rural settings.

In "Sowing Resilience," we uncover the pioneering strides made by IVP in Germany, offering vital mental health assistance to farmers navigating the intricate challenges of agricultural life. Through personalized coaching, crisis intervention, and digital accessibility, IVP is sowing the seeds of resilience, ensuring that no farmer faces their battles alone.

Meanwhile, in "Rural and Remote Mental Health Leadership and Research," we explore the profound impact of global collaboration on rural mental health initiatives. From the Rural Behavioral Health Collaborative's insights to the upcoming Rural Wellbeing Match in the Netherlands, this article highlights the power of shared knowledge and community engagement in fostering holistic well-being.

Join us as we delve into these transformative narratives, celebrating the strength of our collective efforts in promoting mental health awareness and support.

## **Topics**

IVP's groundbreaking mental health support for farmers in Germany.

---

Collaborative efforts showcased through the Rural Behavioral Health Collaborative.

---

Insights into upcoming initiatives like the Rural Wellbeing Match in the Netherlands.

---

Highlighted initiatives including Farmstrong in New Zealand, Collaborative Approaches to Well-Being in Rural Communities in Texas, and the "Our Town" initiative in South Australia.

## IVP is pioneering mental health support for struggling farmers in Germany

For years, agriculture in Germany has been grappling with constant changes: increasing demands for climate friendliness and animal welfare, a relentless price squeeze, and fluctuating political conditions. The burdens in the societal, familial, and financial spheres are immensely high. The lack of appreciation, pressing existential fears, and conflicts within families, who must work closely together in agricultural operations, significantly impact the mental health of farmers.

Studies reveal that mental illnesses are the second most common cause of absenteeism among farmers. Additionally, insufficient healthcare and support options in rural areas contribute to the challenges.

This is where the therapy and prevention services of IVP come in, developed in collaboration with the agrarian social insurance provider SVLFG (Sozialversicherung für Landwirtschaft, Forsten und Gartenbau). For already five years, these support programs have aimed to provide quick and locally accessible professional assistance to individuals in “green professions”. We had the opportunity to interview the head of these programs at IVP, Mrs. Margot Flaig, who provided a detailed description of the assistance available.



*Portrait of Margot Flaig*

***"Mrs. Flaig, you are the leading psychologist at IVP, overseeing the support services for farmers and foresters. Can you describe the programs in detail?"***

Support services for farmers must be accessible and location-independent. Therefore, our programs offer individual coaching via telephone, online courses, group sessions, and crisis emergency assistance. Our programs can cover prevention topics such as "How can I reduce stress before it affects my health?" or address the management of mental health issues like depression, burnout, and anxiety. Our team is specifically trained to meet the industry's needs and is familiar with the challenges and typical stressors faced by farmers. ...

It is crucial that the components of support seamlessly fit into farmers' daily lives. We avoid travel requirements and provide maximum time flexibility. No matter, if a farmer has time for relieving conversations only in the early morning or during a break in the middle of the day on a tractor in the field, digital support options, make it easy to access assistance.

***"What are the typical problems that farmers approach you with?"***

The issues vary widely. Farmers today are often uncertain and usually have a limited inner circle to share concerns and fears. Many contact us because they feel stuck. They are ageing, their children are not interested in joining the business, and there are difficulties in obtaining seasonal labour. There is also a lack of separation between work and personal life, leading to overwork and exhaustion.

***"How can you specifically help in such situations?"***

For many, having someone to listen is already a tremendous relief. They ask questions like "How do I explain this to my husband?" or "What can I do about my anger when I feel like smashing everything?" We try to empathize with the individuals, work with them to find personalized solutions, and collaboratively develop feasible strategies. We build an understanding of mental illnesses and involve the personal surroundings as well. Since we can accompany individuals with our coaching for up to six months, we get to know them and their life circumstances well. We share in their joy when implemented solutions bring relief. Our crisis hotline is also crucial in this context. Here, farmers can speak with trained professionals 24/7 and receive immediate support.

***"How do you assist when someone is already severely mentally ill?"***

If someone is dealing with severe depression or suicidal thoughts, we try to organize other forms of help, such as connecting them with counselling services, specialists, or a hospital stay. We aim to involve other stakeholders in the system, such as spouses and doctors, psychiatric services, or psychosocial counselling centres.

***"How do farmers respond to the offer?"***

We receive very positive feedback, both directly from the patients and through the SVLFG. The offerings are easy to integrate into everyday life, and the support is highly individualized, and tailored to each person's situation. The quote from my patient in last week's concluding conversation reflects the effects well:

"I have become more composed and now have a certain distance from the daily business. As a result, I now have recovery periods and can sleep through the night without constantly worrying."

We thank Mrs. Flaig for the interview!

If you have further questions about the IVP's offerings, please feel free to contact Gabriele Knuth, Head of Project Management at IVPNetworks GmbH: [gknuth@ivpnetworks.de](mailto:gknuth@ivpnetworks.de)

# Rural and remote mental health leadership and research

The Global Leadership Exchange, founded in 2003 and formerly known as IIMHL and IIDL, is a platform for connecting leaders in the fields of mental health, disability and substance use. It supports networking, learning and knowledge exchange. It is underpinned by the following leadership principles: inclusive, competent, authentic, collaborative, innovative and visionary & strategic.

## Rural Behavioral Health Collaborative special interest group

Having hosted an informal rural mental health match in 2016 in Australia (Prof David Perkins and Dr Hazel Dalton, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health), a special interest group was formalised in 2019 as the Rural Behavioral Health Collaborative, Chaired by Prof Ron Manderscheid, which formed part of the 2019 match in Washington DC, USA. It was at this exchange that the influential Orange Declaration on rural mental health was launched to an international audience.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a traditional in-person match in New Zealand was impossible. The group persisted and met virtually over a series of workshops focused on sharing collaborative community-based means to improve mental health and wellbeing. The first session covered fostering engagement and ownership in rural communities.

Session organisers Dr Ron Manderscheid and Dennis Mohatt (WICHE), brought us a range of perspectives, including the 15-year-strong community-led Thrive Allen County initiative (Lisse Regehr, USA), the Together with Veterans rural suicide prevention program (Jason Alves and Sarah Jordon, USA), and the national challenge of reshaping the landscape of

mental health in the Philippines (Dr Rodney Boncajes, National Centre for Mental Health, Philippines).

The second session addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural well-being. Session organisers Dr Hazel Dalton and Prof David Perkins (Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, Australia), sought a range of perspectives globally with written submissions garnered from Niall Fay, Fay Fuller Foundation, for the Our Towns initiative in rural South Australia, Dennis Mohatt on rural perspectives from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, USA, Gerard Vaughan presented perspectives from FarmStrong New Zealand, and Karla Thorpe (Mental Health Commission Canada) gathered perspectives from rural Canada. Dr Hazel Dalton presented research findings on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of rural communities, funded by the Australian National Mental Health Commission. This supported a wider group discussion and captured other perspectives and experiences from Australia, New Zealand, Oceania, Canada, the USA, and the Netherlands.

In the third session, community engagement was brought to the fore by session organisers Gerard Vaughan ([FarmStrong](#), New Zealand) and Tammy Heinz ([Hogg Foundation for Mental Health](#), Texas USA), notably the Hogg Foundation has made a substantial commitment to support [collaborative approaches to wellbeing in five rural Texas communities](#). A wide-ranging discussion and sharing of knowledge and lessons learned ensued.

A final session, enabled a round-up and reflection, including what the collaborative group wished the next match to focus on – rural wellbeing and the contribution that community development makes, including at the interface of the mental health system – how we improve access to care and distribute and shift tasks to add capacity.

## Rural Wellbeing Match 2024

With Dr Hazel Dalton now as Co-Chair with Ron Manderscheid, we will oversee a Rural Wellbeing match at the next Global Leadership Exchange in the Netherlands in June, with our local co-host Hanneke van der Veecken from GGZ Noord Holland Noord. This will take place at the beautiful Artfarm in Heerhugowaard, a suitable rural venue for this match. [Home - 2024 Leadership Exchange \(gle.world\)](#).

Over the last year, we have reconvened and heard updates from a number of our initiatives and from new members eager to share and learn. We are in the process of co-designing this year's rural wellbeing match with those who will be attending.

In connection with this special interest group and the rural mental health-focused [Manna Institute](#), Prof Russell Roberts and Dr Hazel Dalton ([Charles Sturt University](#), Orange NSW Australia), have led the development of an Australian position statement on rural mental health research.

This has entailed consultations with researchers and stakeholders at various workshops including with the Manna Institute, the Western NSW Health Research Network, the National Rural Mental Health Conference and the expert

group that informed the [Orange Declaration on rural mental health](#). This work is currently being written up. We have worked collaboratively with our international colleagues (via the GLE and other networks) to support parallel activities in their own countries, with progress towards these statements in Canada, the USA and Scotland well underway.

Farmstrong is a nationwide wellbeing initiative for farmers, growers, and their workers in New Zealand. It provides practical, farmer-to-farmer tips, informed by wellbeing science, to help the rural community navigate the unique challenges of farming. The programme emphasizes the importance of mental and physical health in maintaining a successful farm. By promoting strategies for managing stress, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and fostering resilience, Farmstrong aims to create healthier, happier farming communities.

Collaborative Approaches to Well-Being in Rural Communities – supported by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, this initiative is supporting five underserved communities in rural Texas to address their wellbeing needs. It has moved carefully and included people who have been historically excluded from participation and decision-making. They have been running for several years now, building trust and capacity, planning their approaches and are now moving into the implementation phase. This initiative is part of a broader effort to address health disparities and support community resilience and wellbeing.

The “Our Town” initiative, is an 11-year, \$15 million mental health project funded by the Fay Fuller Foundation in South Australia. It focuses on empowering regional communities to create local solutions for mental health and wellbeing. The initiative emphasizes community-led change, strength-based approaches, and learning through change. It also highlights the importance of understanding local cultures and economies to influence regional policy effectively.

*The authors:*

*Dr Hazel Dalton, Senior Research Fellow of Rural Public Health, Rural Health Research Institute, Charles Sturt University*

*Prof Russell Roberts, Professor of Management and Leadership, Charles Sturt University and Director, Equally Well Australia*

*Hanneke van der Veeke (MEd), manager FIT-academy, GGZ Noord-Holland-Noord, Netherlands*

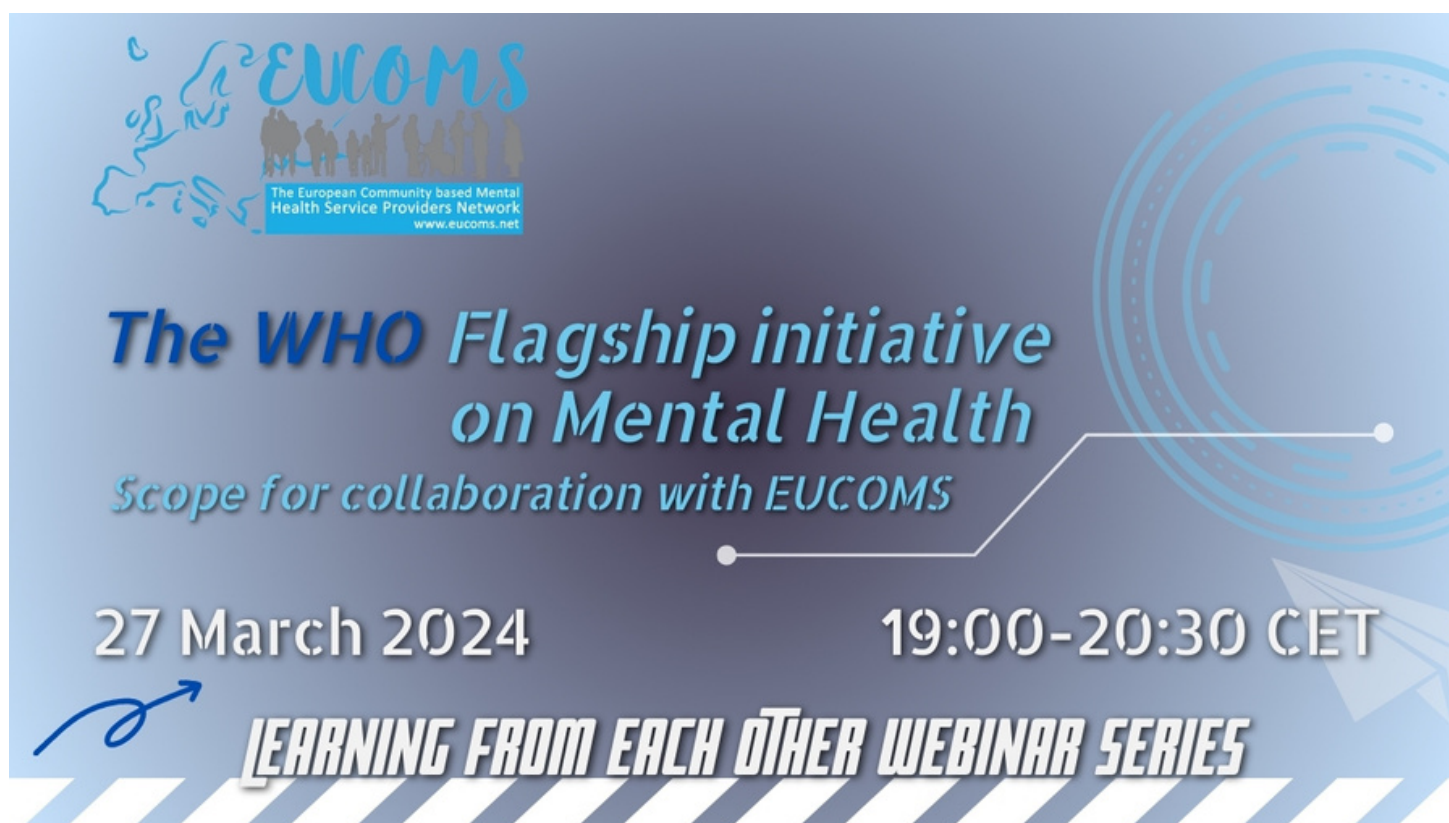
## Webinar review

"The WHO Flagship Initiative on Mental Health: Scope for Collaboration with EUCOMS"

Thank you to all who attended our webinar on March 27th titled "The WHO Flagship Initiative on Mental Health: Scope for Collaboration with EUCOMS." It was an enlightening discussion led by keynote speaker Dr Ledia Lazeri from the WHO Regional Office for Europe, chaired by Dr Ionela Petrea, and featuring insightful remarks from Callum Ross of Habitus Collective UK.

For those who missed it, the recording of the entire webinar is available down below.

Click on the image below to watch the entire webinar



The graphic features the EUCOMS logo in the top left, which includes a map of Europe and the text "EUCOMS The European Community based Mental Health Service Providers Network www.euoms.net". The main title is "The WHO Flagship initiative on Mental Health" in a large, bold, blue font, with the subtitle "Scope for collaboration with EUCOMS" below it. The date "27 March 2024" and time "19:00-20:30 CET" are displayed in white. At the bottom, a blue arrow points to the text "LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER WEBINAR SERIES" in a stylized, italicized font. The background is light blue with abstract circular patterns and a white line graphic.

**The WHO Flagship initiative  
on Mental Health**  
*Scope for collaboration with EUCOMS*

27 March 2024 19:00-20:30 CET

**LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER WEBINAR SERIES**

## Upcoming on-location EUCOMS meetings

Sustainability of Care | Lisbon, Portugal

21 - 22 November 2024

Alexandroupoli, Greece

27 - 28 March 2025



## Upcoming EUCOMS webinars

LHBTQ+

18 September 2024



[Click here to review the previous webinars](#)

## DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A PARTNER?

That is possible! Becoming a partner or collaborator is open for individuals and organisations that provide or support services for people affected by mental illness. For more information and to register please click the link below.

[CLICK TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER](#)

[CLICK TO JOIN OUR NETWORK](#)

Find us on social media:



Our mailing address is:

**[info@eucoms.net](mailto:info@eucoms.net)**

Copyright © 2024 EUCOMS Network. All rights reserved.