



Global Leadership Exchange

Presentation:

The hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people in NSW, Australia

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NSW Health

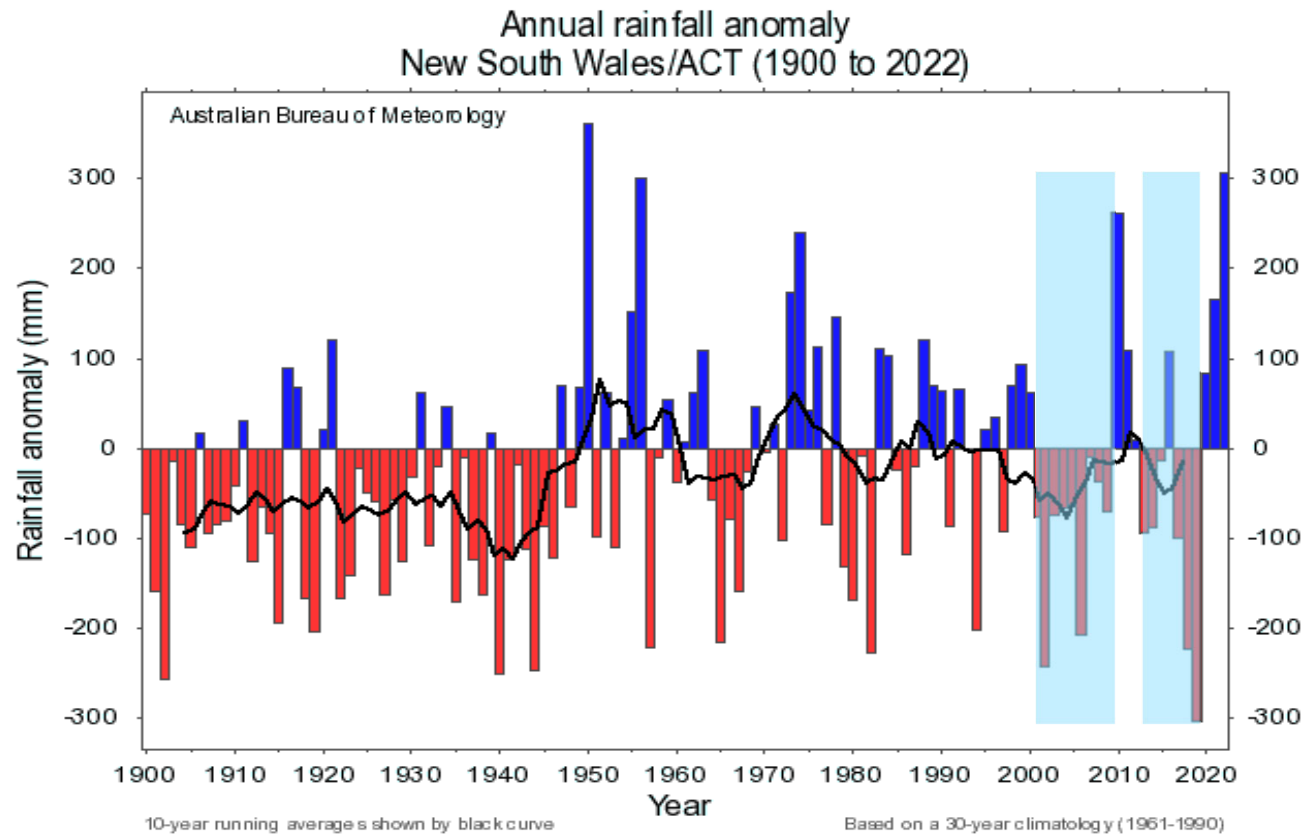
The hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people in NSW, Australia



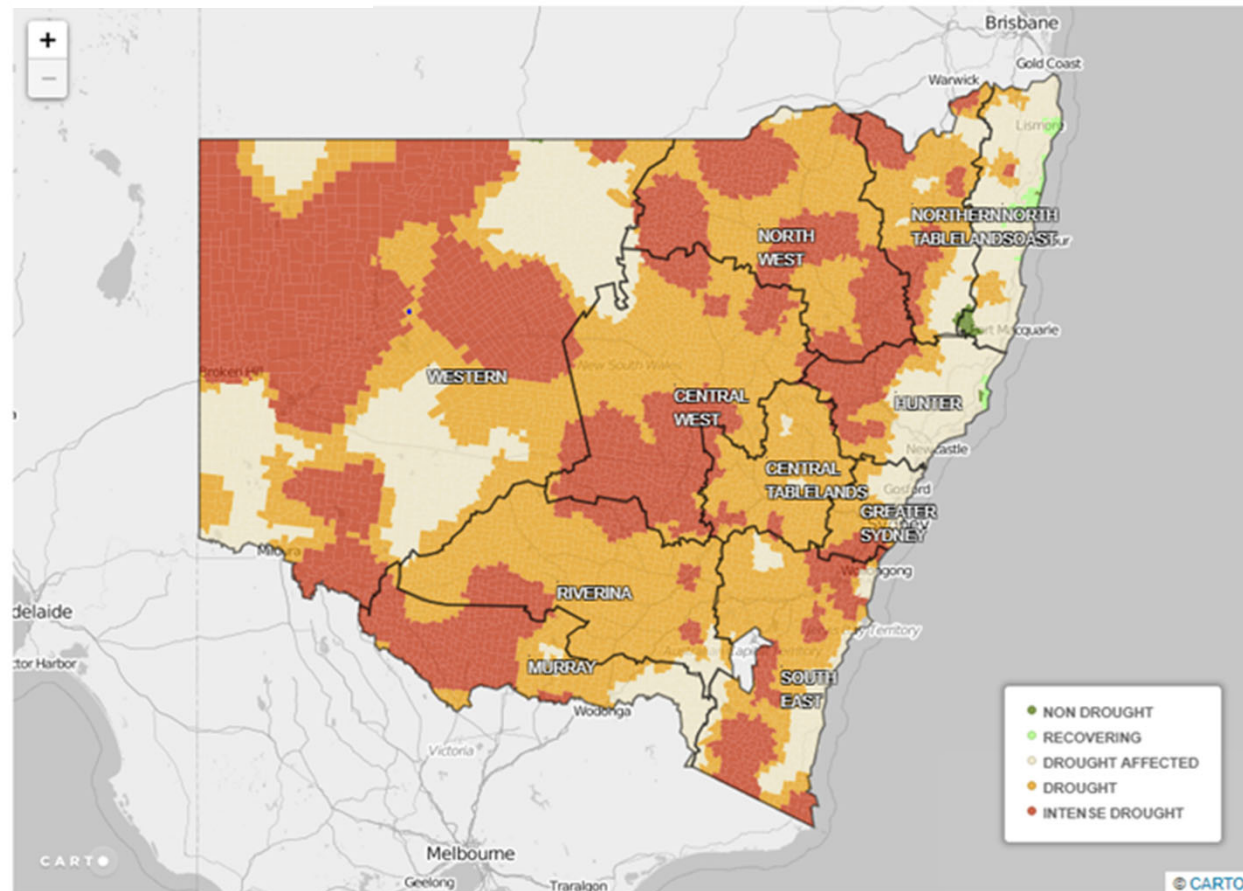


A Land of Drought and Flooding Rains

Drought is normal but not predictable



100% of NSW was drought declared



CDI = Combined Drought Indicator. RI = Rainfall Index. SWI = Soil Water Index. PGI = Pasture Growth Index. DDI = Drought Direction Index

Climate Change Impacts Mental Health

Surveys of Australians



Concerned about climate change



More concerned about climate change in the past 12 months



Environment the most important issue in Australia



Experienced a natural disaster since 2019



Experienced multiple disasters

The impact of heat on people in the community and those with an existing mental illness is well known



increase in the annual average daily maximum temperature worsened Australian childhood mental health.

Xu Y, Wheeler S, Zuo A. Will boys' mental health fare worse under a hotter climate in Australia? *Population and Environment*. 2018;40(2):158-81.

youth self-harm presentations to Emergency Department are significantly more common on hotter days

Dey C et al 2023 A retrospective time series analysis of emergency department presentations in New South Wales, Australia. Unpublished Manuscript

Casual Links Between Drought and Mental Health



Declined agricultural production and livelihoods



Changed environmental conditions



Family relationships



Harm of physical health



Community resources and stigma

<https://www.saxinstitute.org.au/evidence-check/emergency-drought-relief-package-health-resilience-services/>

Wheeler S, Zuo A, Xu Y, Grafton Q. Emergency Drought Relief Package — Health and Resilience Services: an Evidence Check rapid review brokered by the Sax Institute (www.saxinstitute.org.au) for the NSW Ministry of Health, 2019.

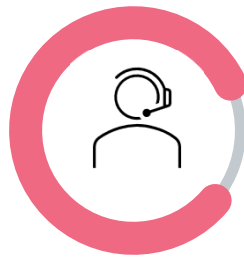
Interventions to improve mental health outcomes for people living in drought-affected communities



Psychological treatment programs



Mental health outreach and care coordination



Online and telephone support



Health literacy programs



Mental health first aid

<https://www.saxinstitute.org.au/evidence-check/emergency-drought-relief-package-health-resilience-services/>

Wheeler S, Zuo A, Xu Y, Grafton Q. Emergency Drought Relief Package — Health and Resilience Services: an Evidence Check rapid review brokered by the Sax Institute (www.saxinstitute.org.au) for the NSW Ministry of Health, 2019.

Emergency Drought Relief Package



\$500 million
Emergency Drought Relief Package

- ✓ Approximately \$190 million for Drought Transport Subsidies
- ✓ Approximately \$100 million for cutting the cost of farming fees and charges - by waiving Local Land Services rates, waiving fixed water charges in rural and regional areas, and waiving class one agricultural vehicle registration costs, among other initiatives
- ✓ \$150 million to bolster the Farm Innovation Fund (FIF) infrastructure program
- ✓ Counselling and mental health
- ✓ Critical services in regional communities including transporting water and drought related road upgrades and repairs
- ✓ Animal welfare and stock disposal

Part of the \$1.1 billion NSW Drought Assistance Package

droughthub.nsw.gov.au



\$6.3 million for mental health in 2018/19 and 2019/20



The EDR-MH spanned a geographical area comprising more than 85% of NSW



Drought Support Teams provided 4,000 one-to-one services (brief interventions and counselling sessions) to more than 1,750 individuals



At the broader community level, coordinated program of activity focussed on increasing awareness of mental health services. 800 community events with 30,000 attendees over 18 months

Generation Drought

The cumulative toll on the physical and mental wellbeing of the children and young people was evident and concerning



Dean J, Stain HJ. The impact of drought on the emotional well-being of children and adolescents in rural and remote New South Wales. *J Rural Health*. 2007 Autumn;23(4):356-64. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-0361.2007.00113.x. PMID: 17868243.

Dean J, Stain HJ. Mental health impact for adolescents living with prolonged drought. *Aust J Rural Health*. 2010 Feb;18(1):32-7. doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1584.2009.01107.x. PMID: 20136812.

In Their Own Words



“You have to take care of [the animals] more than you take care of yourself or your family...you have to focus on them because they’re part of the income” (Boy, Year 9)

“Our parents want to give us things but they just can’t and we just know that and don’t say anything. Because it probably hurts them too.”
(Girl, Year 11/12)

“Education-wise, me personally I’ve had to probably take 10 or more days off this term alone to help.”
(Girl, Year 9)

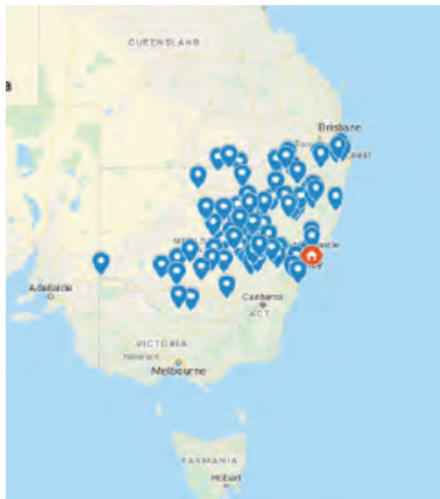
“For a lot of these kids, they’re losing their childhood.”
(Teacher)

“...because I know if I can get through this I can sort of get through anything, really. Because it’s just making me work harder than anything else and toughen me up.”
(Boy, Year 11/12)



The NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought

Summit design & implementation



- Organised with UNICEF Australia
- Co-designed with drought affected young people
- Stakeholder Consultation
- 100 young people (14-25)
- 3 day residential camp at Lake Macquarie
- Held during Mental Health Week 2019

Program built on 4 pillars:

- Policy issues
- Solutions and actions
- Promoting psychosocial support and wellbeing
- Advocating for change

Summit Circles

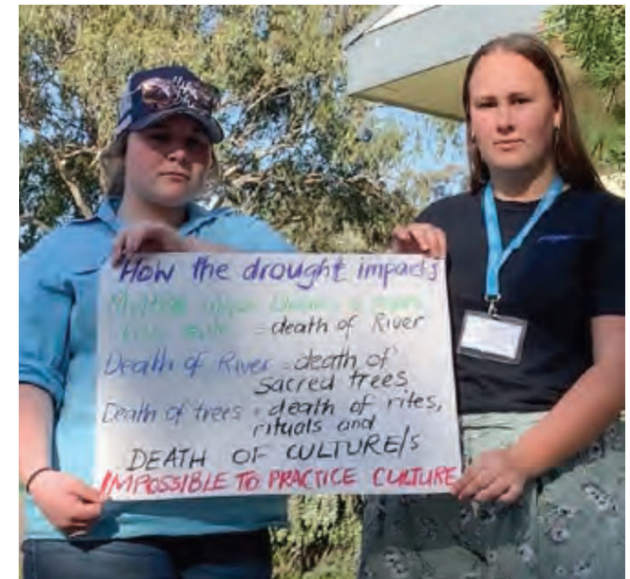


- 5 summit circles over 3 days
- 12 young people
- Peer to peer
- Facilitators introduced a number of guiding questions for discussion
- Observation and data collection undertaken by social work students from University

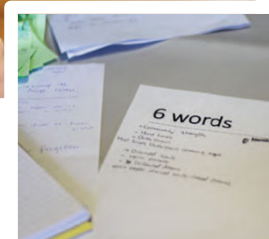
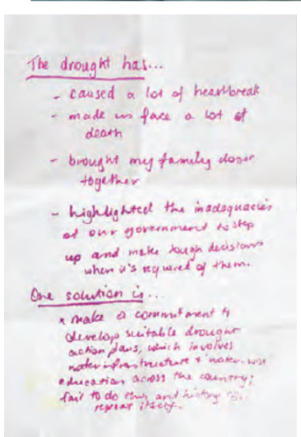
Participation and place of Aboriginal young people








“
*The River is the blood that
flows through us. Death of
the river is the death of us.*
”



Key themes emerging from the summit



-  Families and financial stress
-  Drought decision-making
-  Education
-  Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing
-  Mental health in the community

Advocating for Change



- Call for Action presented to a panel of decision-makers
- Substantial media interest
- Delegation of summit participants visited Canberra where they presented the Call to Action to ten key government leaders

What did the Summit achieve?

- Shared experience & understanding of the impact of drought
- Forum for meaningful, action-oriented discussion between young people, policymakers and service providers
- Strengthen confidence in advocacy
- Strengthen awareness of mental health and wellbeing needs, avenues for support, and tools for self-care

