

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## Neighbourhood cohesion linked to resilience of rural women

Emerging evidence suggests that older women living in Australia's rural areas have better mental health than their sisters in the cities. The findings come from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) and will be examined in a colloquium on Resilient Rural Women at the 12<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference to be held in April this year.

The longitudinal study provides information from three birth cohorts of women – those born 1973-1978, 1946-1951 and 1921-1926 – and the focus of the colloquium will be urban-rural differences in women's mental health and wellbeing.

Sue Conrad's paper on *Neighbourhood cohesion among middle-aged women* is a good news story for rural women who report better neighbourhood safety and connection, and better neighbourhood attachment and trust than women living in cities. There are a number of reasons why this might be so, including demographic and psychosocial factors, community resources and the physical environment.

However the news is not all good, with women in rural areas more likely than urban women to experience depression across the lifespan. The paper *Mental health trajectories in three cohorts of women: are there urban-rural differences?* to be presented by ALSWH Data Analyst Richard Hockey finds that, overall, rates of doctor-diagnosed depression in women increase until about age 45, then decrease until the mid-80s when there is a small increase.

When it comes to uptake of mental health services Xenia Dolja-Gore, from the Research Centre of Gender, Health and Ageing at the University of Newcastle, will report in her paper *Trends in mental health service utilisation for Australian women* that while there has been a gradual uptake of services under the Better Access Scheme (BAS) it has mostly been young women in urban areas who have benefited from the services compared with other groups of women. The BAS was introduced in 2006 with the rollout of new Medicare items to improve access to mental health care, but the study shows that a large percentage of women with self-reported depression and anxiety have not been treated under the BAS.

The final presentation in the colloquium will be from Deirdre McLaughlin, Senior Research Fellow with the ALSWH at the University of Queensland. Her paper on *Mental health in older rural Australian women* shows that although older adults generally report lower rates of depression than younger adults, there are conflicting findings regarding urban-rural differences in psychological distress in older adults.

The colloquium will be chaired by Libby Kalucy, former Director of the Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHCRIS) and editor-in-chief of the Australian Journal of Primary Health.

More information on the Conference can be found at [www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)



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