



## Issue No.1

# Welcome to the SMS4Dads Newsletter

**Happy New Year! SMS4dads is back, and we're here to stay with funding until 2028! We are sending out this Newsletter so that clinicians can stay informed and up to date with new resources, the latest research, and hear from others in the field.**

## Rural Dads

About 7,000 dads who have enrolled in SMS4dads come from locations outside of metropolitan areas. In our exit survey, we ask them; 'Why would you recommend SMS4Dads to other dads living in rural areas?'

*'I live out of town so Dads groups (which I might've gone to if they were down the road,) just didn't happen. But this is an easy way to get this kind of info and stay in the loop'*

*'SMS4Dads was the first time I could be involved in a positive way.'*

*"It offered support TODAY that family couldn't provide because they are far away."*

Rural dads will continue to be a focus for SMS4dads. For these dads, we understand there is less social connection, and less people, if any, that they can lean on. SMS4dads aims to support all fathers, wherever they live, to feel understood, encouraged, and to know that they aren't in it alone. We are boosting our outreach to clinicians outside of metropolitan areas and SMS4deadlydads have begun partnership discussion with ACHHOs in regional and remote locations.

## What Rural Clinician's Say

### Community Child Health Nurse on using SMS4dads at home visits;

*'I introduce the dads to SMS4dads at the first home visit, when parents are settling into home after they had a baby. I show the video to every father and mother. I directly speak to the dads and tell them what an important role they play in their child's life.'*

*'I remember one father who I introduced the app to when his baby was 10 days old, and he appeared quite overwhelmed. Baby was unsettled and cried a lot, and he has never held a baby before. His wife was teary. When I saw the couple at baby's 8-week developmental health check he gave me feedback on the app.'*

*'He told me that the app helped him connect with his wife and baby. He appreciated a service that was for dads. He liked the regular text messages. He was able to support his wife. The mum said that the app gave dad a little more control during a chaotic time.'*

## Research Update

### Will dads from rural areas seek help when they are struggling?

The usual answer is "Never." But perhaps a digital service like SMS4dads makes it easier to reach out. After all, if the help is available through your mobile phone, no one else needs to know. To test this idea, we collected the data from 3261 expectant and new fathers who were part of SMS4dads.

Most of the fathers who enrolled came from around Sydney but 554 lived in the Murrumbidgee region or Northern NSW.

We measured their mental distress at the start and collected program data on how long the dads stayed in the program and whether they responded to the Mood Checker messages that occur every four weeks in the program.

Here is what we found comparing the two groups:

Measure	Rural dads	Urban dads
Age	Younger	Older
Alcohol	More	Less
Education level	Less	More
Highly distressed	More	Less
Stayed in SMS4dads	Less	More
Willing to complete a mental health quiz (K10)	Same	

Rural dads were a couple of years younger, drank more alcohol, had lower education levels and reported higher levels of distress compared to dads from urban areas. Slightly more urban dads stayed in the program to the end (82.1%) than rural dads (77.1%) but more rural dads were highly distressed (19.7%) than urban dads (15.6%).

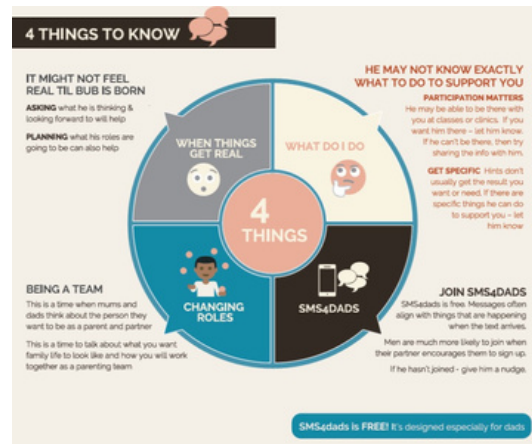
When offered a Health Quiz (The K10 Distress Scale) just as many rural as urban dads completed the questions and there was no difference in the rate of those escalated to mental health support (Perinatal Anxiety and Distress Australia (PANDA) helpline or Mensline).

Fletcher, R., Regan, C., Leigh, L., Dizon, J., & Deering, A. (2023). Online mental health screening for rural fathers over the perinatal period. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12997>

## Resource for Mums about new Dads

### *Dads want to be involved and mums want support;*

But the dads may be unsure what is appropriate and mums may expect him to know how to help. This resource for clinicians to pass on to mums has been designed to support clinicians trying to build support for the mums they are seeing.



It outlines key things for Mum to know about Dad and suggests ways to approach early challenges together. This resource encourages conversation and teamwork... What kind of parents do you want to be? How will you communicate, share roles, and support one another? Info for mums about new dads is available for FREE to download at the [SMS4Dads Website](#)

[Download Resource here](#)

## Resource for Rural Clinicians

**Rural Dads don't get a chance to tell their story very**

And, new dads outside the cities may not have other new dads nearby. "Rural Dads: Sharing the Joys and Challenges of Fatherhood" is a video resource created to present the experiences of fathers living in rural areas, these men give honest accounts of their hesitations, struggles and the value they place on fatherhood. The video may be a conversation starter with dads that you see or for mums to share with their partners.

[View video here](#)





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