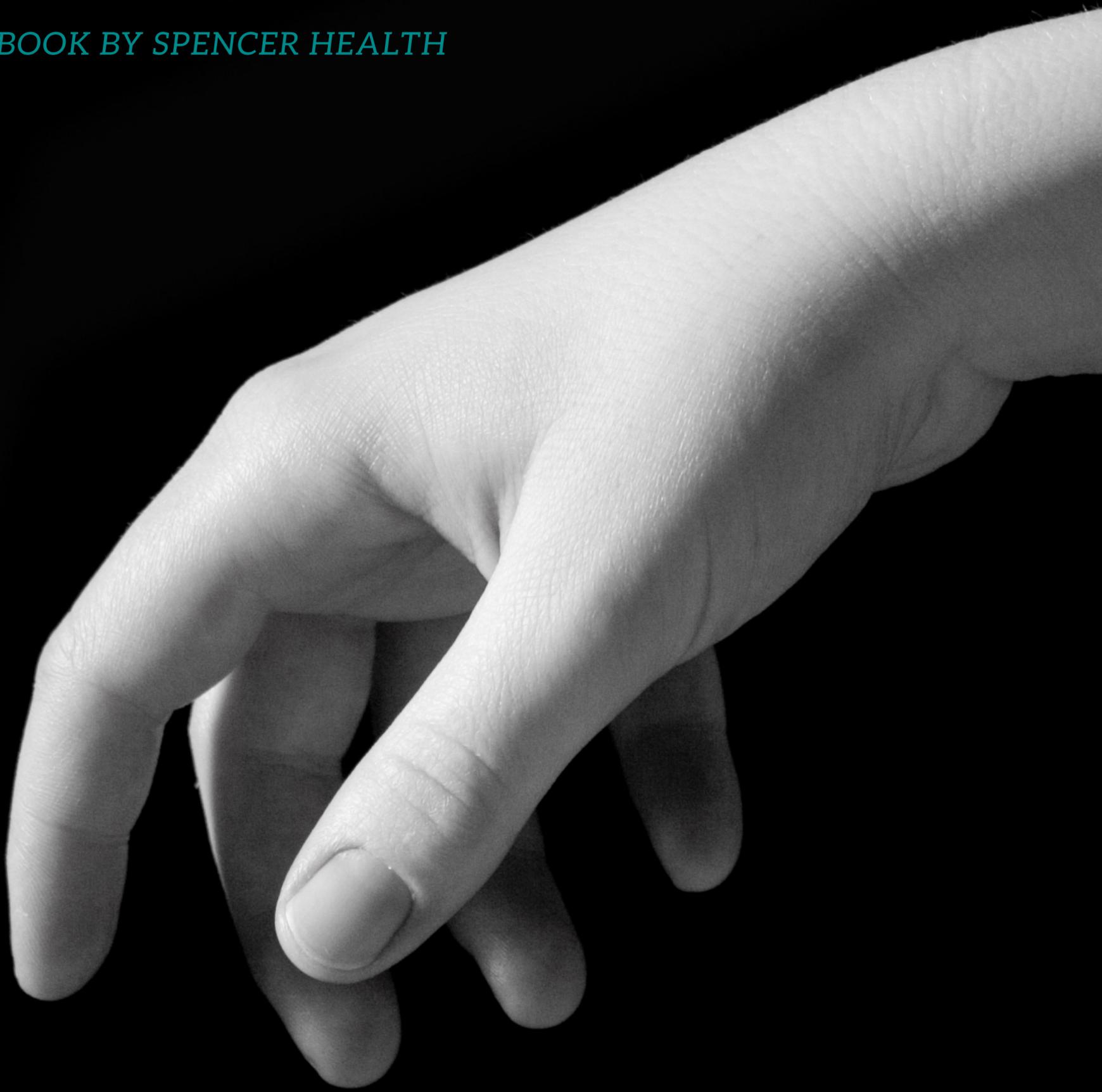


Perinatal Support for Parents

AN E-BOOK BY SPENCER HEALTH



What's up with new dads? Postnatal Depression in men.



Babywearing. The art of being close.



Perinatal Depression - Not just baby blues.





Welcome.

As a mother and a professional who works with families, I understand that the time before and after childbirth can be equal parts joy and trepidation.

We fear the unknown and the changes to our routine, but the excitement and pure unbridled love makes every concerned moment worthwhile.

My team and I have put together this ebook to cover some key topics to help you manage your mental and physical health during the journey.

This ebook is a reminder to look after yourselves before and after childbirth. A reminder that, yes our child is important, but so are the parents.

At Spencer Health we are privileged to work alongside expectant and new parents so if this book raises any questions - please get in touch with our friendly, supportive team.

Yours in health,
Emma

A newborn baby is sleeping peacefully on a white, wrinkled sheet. The baby is wearing a grey and white striped long-sleeved shirt and has a blue and white pacifier in its mouth. To the right of the baby, a brown and white teddy bear is lying on its back, also with a blue and white pacifier in its mouth. The background is a plain white surface.

Perinatal Depression: Not just the baby blues

Simone Chartres - Clinical Psychologist



The perinatal period refers to pregnancy and the first year of parenthood. Typically, perinatal depression shows up within a week to 6 weeks of giving birth. However, it can also manifest during pregnancy, after weaning a child from breastfeeding or months after giving birth. 10-20% of new mothers are diagnosed with perinatal depression each year. New fathers can also experience perinatal depression, with recent research finding that one in ten new dads will experience depression during the perinatal period.

What causes Perinatal Depression?

There are many factors that contribute to a mother (or father) developing perinatal depression. These include a sudden shift in hormones after giving birth, which can cause a chemical

change in the brain that impacts on your mood, lack of rest leading to exhaustion, a lack of emotional support and medical complications during child birth. Other risk factors can include a family or personal history of mental health illness, substance misuse, a perfectionistic personality style, a lack of social support and financial stress, as well as other stressful life events.

What are the symptoms?

When symptoms of depression last for at least two weeks, it is considered a depressive episode. The severity can be classified as either mild, moderate or severe, depending on the intensity of the symptoms, how much distress they are causing and the degree to which they are impacting on the parent's daily functioning.

Symptoms can include crying more often than usual, feeling disconnected or numb from your baby, worrying that you will hurt your baby and doubting your ability to take care of your baby.

Other symptoms include:

- A loss of interest or pleasure in life
- Feeling sad, empty or hopeless
- Physical symptoms including a change in appetite
- Insomnia
- A loss of energy and feelings of fatigue
- Difficulties with concentration and decision making
- Thoughts of self harm or wanting to end your life

Symptoms of the 'baby blues'

Perinatal depression is not the 'baby blues,' which is described as a mild depression lasting typically about a week after giving birth.

80% of women struggle with the baby blues, which includes symptoms of fatigue, anxiety and worry.

The baby blues will pass, whereas perinatal depression is longer lasting and may occur again without the right treatment.



Treatment

It is important to seek help as soon as possible if you think you might be experiencing symptoms of depression.

Without the right help, your symptoms could last months or get worse, and start having a significant impact on you, your baby and your family. With the right support, most parents can make a full recovery. Taking the steps to seek professional help can be overwhelming.

There is a lot of professional support available for expectant and new parents. A great first step is to speak to your GP. Your GP can then refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist who will help you adjust to your new life as a parent.

There are psychologists and psychiatrists who are specifically trained in perinatal mental health and will provide you with strategies for improving your mood and ability to cope with the difficulties that inevitably come with the first year of parenthood. There is also medication available that is safe to take whilst pregnant or breastfeeding.

Your GP or psychiatrist can discuss these options with you.





What's Up With New Dads?

Post Natal Depression In Men

Emma Spencer – Principal Clinical Psychologist



For a long time, post natal depression (PND) has more or less been recognised as a new mum's mental health illness.

Over the last decade there has been a movement to recognise the vulnerability that new dads experience during the transition from husband/partner to father.

When it comes to the new mum, it can be easily understood how PND and other perinatal mental health issues develop. Changes in the body, hormones, demands on the body, recovery from pregnancy and birth, sleeplessness, lack of support and isolation - the list goes on.

When it comes to new dads however, many of these reasons don't apply (certainly the night time breastfeeding doesn't count in their case)

and it can be difficult to appreciate why a new dad might develop a mental health illness.

Some of the reasons are similar to those for women, however new dads have some unique and confronting reasons that create this vulnerability in them.

Three of the most important ones to be aware of are:

Increased pressure to provide for the family

Whilst the modern woman has her "modern woman's mental load" to manage, many men report the intense pressure they feel to provide for their family. This creates anxiety about remaining employed, bringing in enough money for the family, sometimes compromising time with the

family to complete work tasks/strive for promotions. New dads report that when a child comes into the family, the responsibility they feel to provide, and the pressure associated with this, is amplified exponentially.

This is also coupled with the desire to actually want to be around to support their wife and father their new baby. The modern dad tends to be highly driven to be PRESENT and ENGAGED with their children, and many men report feeling caught between a “rock and a hard place” when it comes to providing vs parenting.

Perceived and real loss of their partner's attention and affection

Let's face it, those early months (and maybe years), babies and children take lots of the primary carer's focus, that primary carer is usually (BUT not always) the mum.

Whilst the new mum is all wrapped up in their new responsibilities, new dads often report that they experience feeling grief associated with the change in the relationship and the

change in their spouse's priorities.

“I feel forgotten” are common words these new dads use to describe their experience. This often leads to a feeling of disconnection and isolation. Some new dads even report feeling resentment towards the bond between their wife and child, which very often leads to feelings of guilt. All of these emotions and thoughts are precursors to developing very unhelpful thinking patterns, and consequently mental health illness.

Confusion about their role

So many of our new dads are from a generation of men who were primarily raised by mothers. This was the result of a huge increase in divorce rates and disparate custody arrangements over the past few decades. Many new dads today report that they had very little time with their own father, had an absent dad, or had few father figure role models. This has meant they haven't been exposed to appropriate modelling to prepare them for their role as a father and, as such, feel confusion about how to “be a good dad”.

This confusion often leads to extreme anxiety and disconnection, which ultimately affects new dad's mood and engagement with his family – a perpetuating and unhelpful cycle.

If you know of a new dad who seems to be withdrawn, anxious, or just generally not himself, please encourage him to discuss his thoughts and feelings with yourself, a trusted friend or a professional.

Lots of dads feel shame that they are thinking or feeling anything other than joy over the new bundle of love that has arrived in their life. The simple fact of the matter is, transitions can be challenging for anyone, and new dads require as much care and concern as a new mum does.

In the end, **supporting new parents can only lead to a more connected family unit and healthy, happy and integrated** humans. That's what we want for our children and the generations to come.





Babywearing

The joy of closeness.

**Danya Braunstein – Registered Psychologist and Baby
Wearing Consultant**

Australian statistics show that anxiety and depression can affect 1 in 5 women during pregnancy and the 12 months after birth, and up to 1 in 10 non-birthing partners/fathers. While we're seeing improvements in general knowledge of the mental health for the perinatal period, practical strategies for managing caregiving can also be hugely beneficial.

Babywearing is one tool that parents may find useful during this period.

What is Babywearing?

Babywearing is becoming more popular as a parenting tool, and baby carriers are easily purchased online or in stores. Despite modern innovations in safety standards and accessibility of baby carriers, wearing babies using a structured device or a length of fabric is a historical practice dating back centuries and has been demonstrated across many human cultures.

In fact, some authors suggest that slings were a necessary technological invention for the evolution of homo erectus into modern-day humans. During evolution the newborn brain size increased but mobility decreased, meaning that newborns required more care from mothers to survive their first year. The use of slings by early humans allowed parents (predominantly mothers) to continue to care for their babies until they reached physical maturity.

What to look for in a baby carrier, wrap or sling?

Caregivers have a variety of options when babywearing, including commercially-made structured carriers, woven wraps and ring slings. For the purpose of this article, I'll use the term carriers to include all options.

It's never too early to start babywearing. Learning how to use a wrap or sling during pregnancy can provide pregnant mothers with the confidence to begin wearing immediately after birth. Woven wraps can also be used for belly wrapping during pregnancy or postpartum to provide additional support for loose ligaments and muscle pain.

There are many baby carriers on the market, but not all of them are ergonomic, and not all of them are consistent with best practice safety guidelines.

Caregivers find ergonomic carriers most comfortable when they have adjustable straps to allow for tightening to fit the individual shape of the wearer. New babies should be worn high on the chest, not down near the hips, and this provides better support for the wearer so they don't strain their back muscles. Older babies can be worn on the back, and again they should be worn high, near the shoulder blades. Padding in key areas such as shoulder straps and waistbands provide extra comfort for these pressure points.

Babies should be able to sit comfortably in a carrier with their legs in a froggy M position, and their spines in a curved J-shape, especially when newborn until they have strengthened their neck muscles and can move and sit independently. Wide-based carriers, and soft woven wraps and slings can provide the adequate support for optimal hip development and support for their delicate spines and necks.

How can babywearing help during the perinatal period?

Babywearing is useful in a variety of ways. Many parents feel overwhelmed by household tasks in the early days of caring for a newborn, particularly if there is limited family support or when partners return to work. A secure wrap, carrier or sling can provide caregivers with the ability to complete household tasks with their hands free, to move around while baby sleeps, or to engage with older children while carrying the baby.

Additionally, the flexibility provided by babywearing can assist caregivers with getting out of the house - seeking social contact and reducing isolation are great for improving mood.

Most importantly, the closeness offered by babywearing can assist with bonding between infant and caregiver.

The neurochemical oxytocin is released through gentle touch, meaning that both the infant and caregiver feel more relaxed. This can reduce stress and anxiety for the caregiver, and assist with co-regulating distress for the infant.

Is there any evidence to support babywearing?

Although there is limited scientific evidence to support babywearing as a mental health intervention, some recent research has shown promising results.

Researchers compared low-income adolescent mothers who engaged with babywearing and those who didn't. These mothers were most at risk for disrupted attachment as a consequence of their young age, social disadvantage, limited parenting skills, and the increased risk of postpartum depression, anxiety and stress. This study found that when the babies were 7 months of age the participants in the babywearing group reported higher mother-infant bonding, which is an important predictor of later secure attachment.

Trained babywearing consultants can assist with fitting and safety, as well as recommend types of carriers for the comfort of both caregiver and infant.

The perinatal period is one of transitions, joys, and challenges.

As always, at Spencer Health we are here to support you and your family. So please reach out to our friendly team.

You aren't going to 'ruin' your child

No matter how many times you fear you're screwing up





Parenthood is probably one of the most difficult and stressful jobs in society and has been for centuries.

Unlike most jobs, you don't get much training before you start. Sure, there are the antenatal classes and baby books, but nothing will prepare you for the uncertainty of the birth, the anxiety of keeping your baby safe, or the unavoidable emotional rollercoaster.

You are out there on your own, sometimes with a partner and sometimes not, wondering if every decision you make will be the right one for your child.

You might find yourself hoping for just ten uninterrupted minutes to yourself or wishing your baby would stop screaming. This will no doubt make you start to wonder if this makes you a bad parent.

It doesn't.

There is one simple statement that will make your day: **You only have to get it right 30% of the time.**

Research has found that 'good enough' parenting is sufficient to ensure secure attachments in children, and that this number turns out to be around 30%.

Next time you yell at your child, or wait a little too long to pick them up when they're crying, don't hate yourself. Don't go immediately to the thoughts that you are 'not good enough' or that you 'can't handle being a mother'.

Instead, remember the 30%, and engage with your child fully again at a time that's right for you.

There are also a number of things we hear over and over again that just aren't helpful. They may be from other mothers, doctors, teachers or your own parents.

It's time we debunk these myths.

Myths of Motherhood

- A mother is selfish if she wants a break or expresses her own needs
- A mother 'copes' no matter what
- A mother must be available 24/7
- Motherhood is romantic
- A woman will instinctively know how to be a mother
- A mother will love and attach with their baby the second they see them
- A mother needs to breastfeed to be a good mother

These myths can be detrimental to the mental health of mothers! Comparing themselves to others and then beating themselves up when they aren't the same. Instead, take the pressure off yourself.

Ask for help when you need it. Ask questions when you need to. Increase self-nurturing activities and social interactions.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY, REMEMBER THAT YOU DON'T
HAVE TO BE PERFECT.**



Find Your Doula

Your pregnancy support team.

Emma Spencer – Clinical Psychologist and Doula

Pregnancy and childbirth is one of the most exciting, yet scary, times of anyone's life. With so many ups and downs it is a rollercoaster of emotions that ends with a little bundle of joy.

When it comes to birthing support, we need as much advice and love as we can muster and a key way to gain this is through a 'doula'.

A doula might seem like a strange word, but in essence, it's a term for your very own birthing team mate. A person who is part of your support crew who will give you loving advice and instructions throughout the entire process.

The word "doula" comes from ancient Greek, meaning "a woman who serves." Today, a "doula" refers to a professional trained to provide emotional, physical and informational support to women throughout their pregnancy, birth and the early postpartum period.

"As a doula I work to create a sacred space for the most sacred event parents can go through – the birth of their child," explains Emma Spencer, CEO of Spencer Health.

"Birth is one of the most life impacting experiences any parent will go through. The emotions you will travel through will be so rewarding and a doula will be there right alongside you."

"A doula will aim to put you at ease throughout the entire process and help you understand not only your physical, but mental shifts."

Frequently Asked Questions

What does a doula do for you?

The main part of a doula's role is to give you the confidence you need throughout the birthing journey. They can give you practical and emotional care during your pregnancy and birth.

Is a doula a midwife?

No, doulas aren't trained to provide hands on physical care. They will not give you medical advice on yours or the baby's condition. You will still need medical support from an obstetrician and/or midwife.

What does a doula do during pregnancy?

They can support you in a number of different ways, ranging from providing you with birthing information and supporting you to plan the birth (home or in hospital). They can also assist you in how you need to support your own health before the baby arrives.

What does a doula do during birth?

During labour a doula is still an essential part of your team and can suggest positions and movements to help ease pain and make you more relaxed. They can be a great caring support person to keep you calm and focussed as well as communicate with the medical team.

How do I meet a Doula?

To get in touch with a Doula you can go onto a mum's group (e.g. Northshore Mums) as many advertise there. Otherwise do a Google search or contact The Australian Doula College.

The usual process would be for you to have an initial chat to work out if you are a good fit. You want to feel a good fit as the person is going to see you in your most vulnerable state! We urge people to only make contact with a couple of Doulas – not multiple as you just have too many to choose from.

Check our website, have the chat and see who is a good fit.

About us.

At Spencer Health we believe that "children are not things to be moulded, but people to be unfolded".

We also believe that all humans have unique qualities, however recognise that sometimes these can become obstacles to them reaching their full potential. Through recognising and building on the unique skills of every child we can support them to find their place in the world.

With this in mind our Mission is to provide an uncompromising quality of service to parents, children, adolescents and families so that they may achieve their full capacity in life.

Our practice values focus on providing an environment and opportunities in which to nurture our clients, from which positive growth will occur. This is achieved by supporting each individual's development so that they may evolve into the humans they have the potential to become.

Our services include assessment and treatment services for the spectrum of developmental needs, providing support from pre-conception to young adulthood. We provide individual and group based therapies and offer tele-health services to rural and remote clients.

Please get in touch with us if you would like our support.

SPENCER *Health*

