





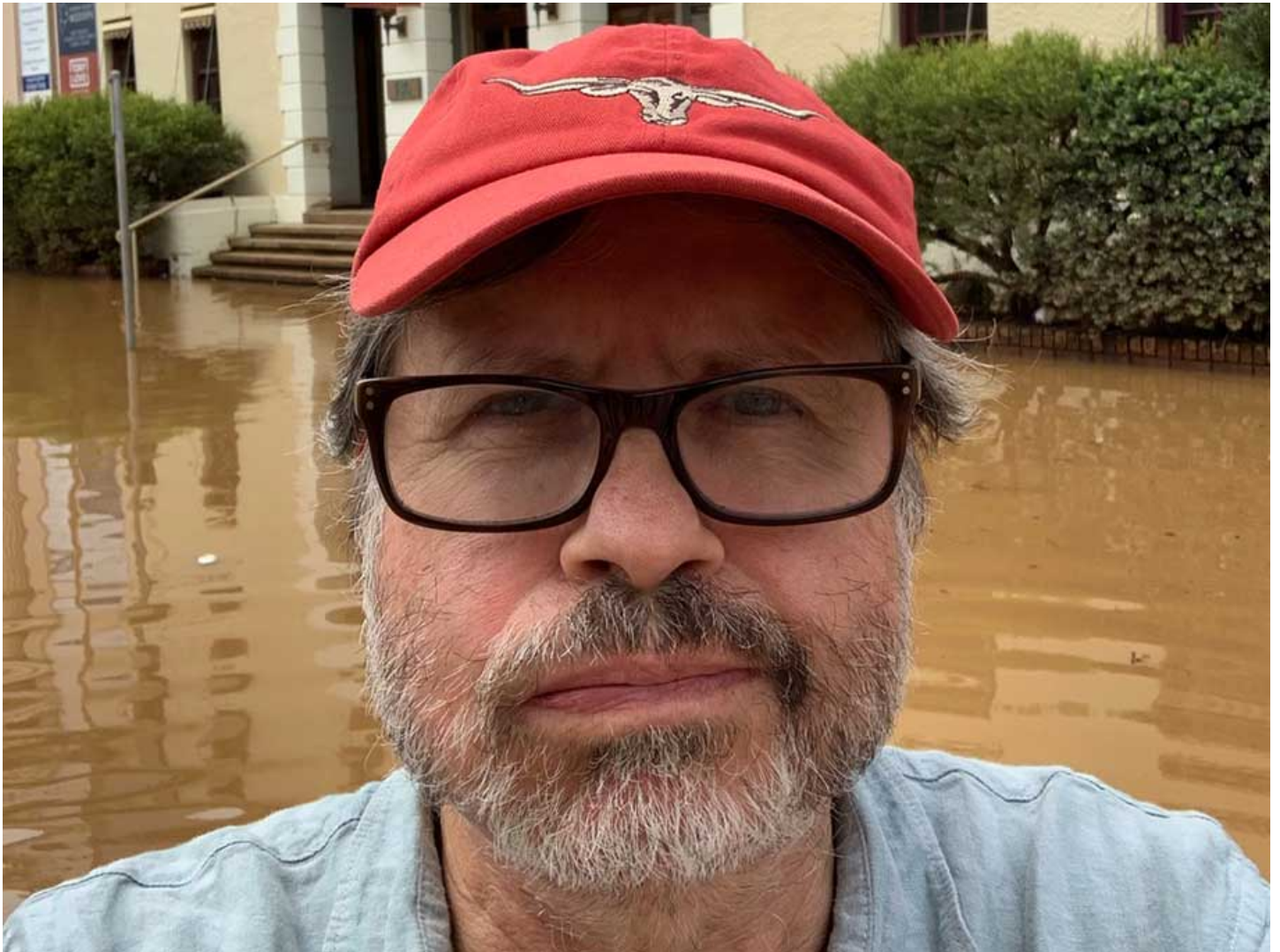
6minutes News

## 'Yeah, I'm depressed': Doctor's despair as flood aftermath leaves him \$500,000 in debt

Dr Ken Gudmundsen says he's still not back in his practice as he waits on funds to help rebuild

 [Carmel Sparke](#)

 6  28 February 2023  Save



Dr Ken Gudmundsen.

*Today marks one year since record-breaking floods swept through the NSW Northern Rivers region. But time has stood still since then for Lismore dermatologist Dr Ken Gudmundsen.*

*Here he describes his despair, depression and financial losses of more than half a million dollars, as he waited — and waited — for financial assistance, to trickle in to rebuild.*

**6minutes:** Can you describe what happened to your practice in the flood?

**Dr Gudmundsen:** The water reached the ceiling of the first level — and we've got high ceilings as it's an old building.

Nearly all the equipment in those rooms was lost or ruined.

We did move equipment, but if we'd known how high the waters were going to reach, we'd have shifted everything to the first floor.

If you're in the 2480 postcode — that's Lismore — insurers won't offer you cover, so we had no insurance this time.

Most of the internal walls were wrecked, floors ruined and the electrics need repair.



*Inside Dr Gudmundsen's practice after the floods*

**6minutes:** How did the experience affect you over the course of the year?

**Dr Gudmundsen:** At first you go into emergency mode, you start cleaning up and throwing things out, and coping with the emergency.

And that can take a couple of months before you go to the next phase, which is when you ask, what are we doing about rebuilding?

At the time, you think someone will come and help, that some government agency, will offer money and support.

We kept on waiting and waiting and still nothing happened.

Five months in, we had a public meeting with TV channels and all the presidents of various medical societies, but that also came to nothing.

So it was all this oscillating between hope and despair for months and months until we got to more of a realistic phase — that no-one's going to come and help us.

We realised we've got to start pushing hard ourselves.

That's when I contacted the AMA.

I also wrote to lots of people including health ministers and the media.

I've done radio, magazine and newspaper interviews, to try to explain what's going on.

**6minutes:** Early on, businesses could apply for a \$50,000 grant. How far did that go?

**Dr Gudmundsen:** I'm at least half a million dollars in debt.

That's probably an underestimate because we didn't earn any income for three months, so it's anywhere between that and a million.

I've taken out a \$200,000 loan and I've used all my savings to keep going.

We got the \$50,000 in a small business grant, but they're treating us like any other business, like a hairdresser or something.

Running a medical practice is a complex business though, it needs a lot of money.

The money helped, but it's not enough.

Now I'm waiting to see how easily accessible the recently announced health practitioner grants of \$150,000 will be.

We asked for \$15 million which would cover 25 doctors and all their losses, we got \$5 million between us all.

Yet we found out last year that a government agency has given \$50 million to help some of the sports fields in Lismore recover.

6 minutes

It's the old Aussie belief that sports are more important than anything else.

**6minutes:** How has it all affected your mental health? And what does the next year hold?

**Dr Gudmundsen:** I think most of us are pretty depressed.

Yeah, I'm depressed. I think we've all got post-traumatic stress syndrome.

This coming year depends on whether we get any money or support.

It's just that we're all in limbo. And we're all a bit mentally traumatised.

I've got no optimism anymore, but we're not going to let it go.

**6minutes:** How are you practising, a year on?

**Dr Gudmundsen:** I'm working out of two rooms in the local hospital, compared with eight rooms available before the flood.

We're trying to repair the building but it's going slowly because there's just not enough money to make it happen quickly.

We're like the other GP practices that got wiped out as did some pharmacies in the CBD.

were also wiped out..

They had to work out of smaller spaces for months, while they fixed up the practices.

I think we're seeing less people.

A lot of GPs have left, and the ones who are still here are wondering whether they can keep going for another three years.

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**Ms JANIS JANIS**  
Psychologist  
Portarlinton, VIC

Dear Ken, It must be so traumatising to have to face this disaster. However, be glad you are still alive and recognise it's only money you have lost at the end of the day. Am sure you and all your colleagues will be able to recoup it in the near future – presume you still have house, car/s, family etc ?

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