

Hawkesbury Compassionate Community

‘Improving Social Connectedness of Older People in the Hawkesbury’

The Background

Wentworth Healthcare consider social isolation and loneliness of older people in our area as particularly significant. Older people without adequate social connections are at an increased risk of experiencing poorer mental health and wellbeing, negatively impacting on their physical health and use of health services.

In response to this, and to further develop current work that is being undertaken focusing on older people in the region, WHL applied for and was one of two successful PHN’s in receiving pilot funding for the ‘*Improving social connectedness of older Australians project pilot*’ from the Australian Government Department of Health. This pilot funding will enable us to further develop and evaluate the *Compassionate Communities* model across the region. This project will build on the existing work that has been undertaken in partnership with Penrith City Council and the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District with the North St Marys Village Café and the establishment of a Compassionate Community in the mid-upper Blue Mountains with Groundswell.

The Project

Working in partnership with the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, WHL has designed and will deliver a two-year pilot project. The project will focus on sustainable processes and interventions that increase the social connectedness of older Australians who are assessed by their primary health care professional as having, or being at high risk of, mental health and health conditions that are associated with social isolation and/or loneliness.

Key features of the project include:

- Older people (the target group is 75yr+ or 65yr+ for Aboriginal people) are identified as having or being at risk mental health or health conditions associated with social isolation and/or loneliness. We will be working particularly to identify those isolated people not identified through other means, e.g., through collaboration with other services such as those in health, community, emergency and aged care.
- Referral is made to a pilot Health Connector. Health Connectors work one-to-one with patients and carers on practical and achievable, person centred social network mapping, planning and goal setting. They act as a bridge between formal health care providers (GPs, aged, community and other services) and informal care networks (families, neighbours, colleagues, social and support groups etc.). They help people develop their social support networks, especially those who are isolated, vulnerable and at risk of ‘falling through the cracks’.

What's happened so far?

- Wentworth Healthcare have a Community Development worker engaged in the Hawkesbury who has mapped existing formal and informal support services. We have recorded hundreds of activities, groups and services that can increase social connectedness of older people.
- High risk areas for social isolation in the Hawkesbury have been identified using various data sources and community consultation.
- The PHN is well advanced in producing a web-based directory of socially relevant formal and informal supports in the community that will be accessible throughout the community. It is called *MyHealthConnector*.
- Three Connecting Our Community Workshops have been held to ensure community participation from the beginning particularly from vulnerable people. The areas identified for the initial co-design phase are Bligh Park/South Windsor, North Richmond and surrounds and Pitt Town and surrounds.
- A project advisory group (SCHAC) has been established following the co-design workshops to act as an advisory group that will support the direction and implementation of the social isolation pilot project.

What's happening for the rest of 2019?

- The Health Connector role will be piloted across the Hawkesbury in selected GP Practices. The Health Connector informs, empowers and connects people with services in the community. They work together with the person to help build the knowledge, skills or confidence that they might want in order to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Community Connectors training sessions will start to be rolled out across the Hawkesbury. Community Connectors are members of the community who know what's in the community and will be trained as sign-posters using the knowledge contained in the *MyHealthConnector* directory for the Hawkesbury. They form a living bridge that helps convey the word of what's available to isolated people in need. Community Connectors can be anyone interested from the community – volunteers, taxi drivers, baristas, retail workers - anyone who has contact with older people.
- Wentworth Healthcare will continue to work to develop and support identified, sustainable strategies to strengthen community for socially isolated people, particularly in partnership with existing groups, services and organisations across the Hawkesbury. There will be working groups starting in September to focus on areas identified in the Community Workshops.

If you would like to explore working collaboratively, find out more about Health Connectors or express an interest in becoming a Community Connector we would be happy to hear from you.

For any further information or to register for updates, please contact the Populations in Focus team Project Officer.

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Want to know more?

What is a Compassionate Community?

A Compassionate Community is one that recognises that care for one another at times of health crisis and personal loss is not simply the role of health and social services, but everyone's responsibility. *Allan Kellehear.*

It is a genuine partnership between health and community.

What is a Health Connector and What do they do?

- A Health Connector works with the older person (and their family/carers if appropriate) to find out what is important to them.
- They listen to the person's health story and can give information about local services such as exercise classes and support groups.
- They work closely with people's networks, bringing them to life and enhancing them. This can include such things as relationship building or connections to services or groups in the *MyHealthConnector* directory.
- Assistance is given in setting goals and making changes that are meaningful to them
- There is a focus on resilience and strengths based practices
- The Health Connector also Identifies gaps and works with the community to fill them.

What is a Community Connector and What do they do?

- A Community Connector is a local person who helps friends, family, colleagues, neighbours and others find support and information in their own community, as they go about their day to day life. They can be hairdressers, taxi drivers, café staff, aged care workers, members of church communities, commuters, or volunteers.
- A Community Connector can be anyone who has had the locally tailored training to signpost local supports to people to benefit their health and wellbeing. They can access and use the *MyHealthConnector* directory.
- Community Connectors are very good at joining up local communities and providing a bridge between local people and health and wellbeing services.
- They can reach the most isolated in the community, forming a community of support for the most vulnerable.
- A Community Connector is **not** volunteering, giving unwanted or untimely help, and doesn't require anyone to have all the answers.
- A community connector recognises that caring for one another everyone's responsibility and is intrinsic part of a strong, connected and supportive community. The more people that know about the support that is available in the community, the more we can all support each other. There are great services in the Hawkesbury community but sometimes people don't know about them.

Contact the Project Officer Liz Murphy on 02 4708 8169, 0402 724 916 or liz.murphy@nbmphn.com.au for more information.