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## Local general practices helping victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence

Tuesday 25 November marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, which is a global campaign that runs through to Human Rights Day on 10 December.

Wentworth Healthcare, the provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, is proud to support the campaign and to deliver the Care and Connect Program, funded through Federal Government, that helps victims-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas.

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research recently reported that in the last financial year, there were over 3,000 Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSVM) incidences reported across the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that while these numbers are alarming, the actual number of incidences that are occurring within the community are higher as a large number still go unreported.

“Domestic, family and sexual violence can affect anyone regardless of their cultural background or socioeconomic status and a whole of system approach is needed to address this issue. An important part of combatting this issue is increasing awareness around what it actually is, the signs and symptoms that someone may be experiencing abuse, or could be at risk, and upskilling those who are in a position to help,” explained Ms Reay.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare more than **1 in 5 patients** make their first disclosure of domestic and family violence to their general practitioner (GP). Most people visit a GP regularly for various health reasons throughout their lives, creating opportunities for general practice to be a safe place where these issues can be identified or disclosed and where victim-survivors can seek support.

“We believe that general practice and other community-based health services play a crucial role in identifying and addressing these issues as not all victim-survivors can, or will, access specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services. It’s important that we give healthcare professionals at these services the training and the tools to support to respond to patients impacted, as in many cases, these health services may be the first point of contact for victim-survivors,” said Ms Reay.

“Our Care and Connect Program is designed to do just that. Through this program, GPs and their staff receive specialised training that equips them with the tools and resources they need to identify patients who may be experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence and provides them with the skills to provide safe, informed support,” she said.

As part of the Program, GPs and patients can also access Care and Connect Linkers, who are specially trained domestic, family and sexual violence support workers.



“Care and Connect Linkers are available to all general practices across the region and co-locate with several local general practices, making it easier for victim-survivors to access these services in a safe and supported place. They can assist with everything from making a safety plan, to providing support around seeking apprehended violence orders, housing, counselling, financial support, and more. They can also provide referrals to behaviour change programs for individuals who use violence,” Ms Reay said.

Federal Member for Macquarie, Susan Templeman MP, recently met with some of the practitioners involved with the Care and Connect program.

“I applaud the work that is being done by the Care and Connect Linkers and the general practices that have become involved,” said Ms Templeman.

“I was pleased to hear about the practical difference this federally funded program is making,” she said.

“Making support available to victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence in a familiar and trusted location, like their regular GP practice, makes a lot of sense, and I thank all those involved for the training they are providing to support and skill-up health workers.”

Ms Reay added that GPs can be a safe place to seek support and that embedding domestic, family and sexual violence services into current health services is crucial to ensure people have a safe place to seek support when they need it.

While the holiday season is often a time of celebration, it can also be a high-risk period for violence. If you or someone you know needs help, 24/7 support is available through the following services:

**1800RESPECT**, which offers counselling, information and support via phone, online chat or discreet text messaging

**Link2Home on 1800 152 152** provides emergency accommodation and housing referrals

If you are in immediate danger, always call the police on **000**.

For more information about the Care and Connect program, visit **[nbmphn.com.au/DFSV](http://nbmphn.com.au/DFSV)**