

17 October 2023

Mental Health Month: Free mental health support available for those who need it

October is Mental Health Awareness Month, which promotes the importance of mental health wellness and encourages us to talk openly about our mental health and wellbeing to help break down the stigma that can still be associated with mental illness.

According to the World Health Organisation, by 2030 depression is expected to become the largest single healthcare burden in the World. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2017-18 one in ten Australians (10.4%) had depression or feelings of depression, and that was before we experienced the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires, COVID-19 and several severe flooding events.

Within the Nepean Blue Mountains region, which includes Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith local government areas, it is estimated that up to 17% of the population are likely to experience a mental illness within a 12-month period. In addition, 23% of the population are expected to be at risk of a mental illness.

Wentworth Healthcare, the provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, fund a range of community-based mental health services in the region. They want local residents to know that there is free mental health support available for people of all ages.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Ms Lizz Reay said, "Mental health issues, just like physical health issues, can affect anyone at any time. Yet, even though conversations about mental health and wellbeing are now more mainstream, there are still people who need support who continue to suffer alone."

"It's important to remember that you can experience negative mental health impacts without meeting the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness or disorder. If you have feelings of sadness, hopelessness, stress or anxiety, or just don't feel like taking part in the activities you normally enjoy, then you may benefit from some extra support," she said.

Ms Reay added that this time of year can also be triggering for those who were impacted by the bushfires that devastated parts of our region 10 years ago, as well as the more recent bushfires and floods.

"Our community has displayed incredible resilience despite the challenges we have faced. Physical and emotional recovery can take time, so don't be afraid to reach out to get the help you need," she said.

For those people who are unsure about what support they may need, Ms Reay suggests a good starting point would be to talk to your GP about how you are feeling. GPs can refer patients to services in the area and can also look at other health factors that may be impacting your overall wellbeing.

"Another option is to call the free Head to Health phonenumber. When you call, you will be asked to enter your postcode and anyone living in our region will be transferred to a local mental health professional. These clinicians know our local region and will take the time to listen to your concerns and connect you with the most appropriate local service in your area," Ms Reay said.

The Head to Health phonenumber is available on **1800 595 212**, Monday to Friday from 8:30am - 5:00pm, excluding public holidays. Callers may be referred to the Penrith Head to Health centre or



the Hawkesbury Head to Health satellite, or another appropriate local services that meets their individual needs. An example of another service could be one of the headspace centres that operate in Katoomba, Lithgow and Penrith. More information about the Head to Health phoneline can be found at nbmphn.com.au/HeadtoHealthPhoneline

For those people who prefer to look for their own support online, Wentworth Healthcare has developed the MentalHealthHelp.com.au website. This local directory lists over 300 mainly mental health-based services located in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas and can be searched by area and service type.

Ms Reay added that mental health and wellbeing are complex issues that can be influenced by a range of interacting social, environmental, psychological and cultural factors but that getting support early was critical.

“Don’t be afraid to reach out to get help when you need it. Mental ill health not only impacts the individual’s life but can impact their family, friends and the whole community around them,” she said.

“As a funder of mental health services we are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of our community. We want to make sure that mental health support in our region is accessible and protected so that our community can receive the highest quality care, when and where they need it,” she added.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. If your life or the life of someone you know is in danger, call emergency services on 000. For those seeking urgent mental health care, they can call the NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511, which is available 24/7 including public holidays.