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October is Mental Health Month: Take the Next Step on Your Wellbeing Journey

October marks Mental Health Awareness Month, and this year's theme, 'Taking Steps on Your Wellbeing Journey' encourages people to recognise that wellbeing is a journey that looks different for everyone.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1 in 5 Australians aged 16 to 85 reported experiencing a mental health concern in the past year. Despite this, 1 in 3 are unlikely to reach out for support or aren't receiving the support they need, with cost being the biggest barrier to accessing services.

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, provides a range of free mental health services across the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas through funding from the Federal Government.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that it's a common misconception that mental health services are only for those who have a mental health diagnosis, or who have more serious concerns.

"Research shows that getting support early can reduce the seriousness and duration of a mental health concern. It can prevent things from getting worse and help you to feel better sooner. Early support can teach you ways to cope, build resilience and prevent smaller problems from becoming bigger ones," she said.

"It can be difficult for some people to recognise that they may need support for their mental health. Then once they do consider getting help, it can often be challenging to know where to go, or what support is right for them," said Ms Reay.

Ms Reay explained that there are different services available in the region for different needs - from online tools, someone to talk to, more regular support, or specialised help.

"In the first instance, it's always a good idea to talk to your GP. GPs can refer you to services in your area and can also look at other health factors that may be impacting your, or your family's, overall wellbeing. They can provide personalised support, referrals to specialists or mental health professionals and can ensure you receive the right care for your specific needs," she said.

Ms Reay also highlighted other options such as Medicare Mental Health, which is a free phone service that anyone can call to talk to a trained mental health professional who can help them find the right service. To connect, people can call **1800 595 212** Monday to Friday from 8:30am - 5:00pm, excluding public holidays.

"Taking the first step to find support can feel overwhelming for a lot of people but calling a service like Medicare Mental Health can help. In our region, when you call this number, you will talk to a mental health professional who works or lives locally. This means they have a good understanding



of the challenges and concerns people are experiencing in our area, what local services are available and what service would be the best fit for you,” she said.

For those who can travel and are seeking walk-in face-to-face support, the Penrith Medicare Mental Health Centre located at 111 Henry Street, is open 7 days per week, 365 days a year, including public holidays. Services are free without the need for a Medicare card, prior appointment or referral. The centre's opening hours are 1:00pm - 9:30pm (Monday, Wednesday – Sunday) and from 1:00pm - 5:00pm on Tuesdays, and from 1:00pm – 9:30pm on public holidays. More information is available via nbmphn.com.au/PenrithMedicareMentalHealthCentre

headspace Katoomba provides support for young people aged 12-25 years and can assist with a range of concerns including mental health, physical health, work and study, and alcohol and other drug needs. headspace Katoomba is located at 37 Waratah Street, Katoomba and is open Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm. More information is available via nbmphn.com.au/headspace

For those who prefer to look for support online, Wentworth Healthcare has developed the MentalHealthHelp.com.au website which is an online directory that makes it easier to find local mental health and wellbeing services in the Blue Mountains area.

“Taking that first step on your wellbeing journey may mean talking to your GP, making that phone call or exploring options online. Whatever your concern, it’s important to remember that you are not alone and support is available,” said Ms Reay.