

28 November 2024

Your GP can be a safe place to seek support for domestic, family or sexual violence

Wentworth Healthcare, the provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, is supporting the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign. This global campaign runs from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, through to 10 December, which is Human Rights Day.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said the campaign provides the opportunity to talk about the prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence, and to highlight the support services available to those affected, as well as their friends, family and colleagues.

Research from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reveals that 1 in 6 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner, while 1 in 16 men have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research report that for the outer west and Blue Mountains regions, there were 1,723 reported domestic violence related assaults from July 2023 to June 2024. While these figures are alarming, they are likely to be even higher, as many women may not report assaults to police.

Wentworth Healthcare provides a program called Care and Connect, funded by the Department of Health and Aged Care. The program supports primary healthcare professionals, like GPs, working in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas to identify the signs and respond appropriately to patients who may be impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence, including child sexual abuse.

“Research shows that in some cases, GPs can be the first point of contact for victim-survivors. Through the Care and Connect Program, we are increasing the knowledge and resources GPs and other primary healthcare professionals have access to, in order to better support victim-survivors,” she said.

Ms Reay explained the program provides training for healthcare professionals, including GPs, practice nurses, practice staff and others, and connects them with Care and Connect Linkers, provided by Relationships Australia NSW, to help them and victim-survivors navigate often complex systems.

“Linkers are specially trained support workers who can assist with everything from making disclosures and safety planning, to seeking apprehended violence orders, housing, counselling, financial support, and more. They also provide referrals to behaviour change programs for individuals who use violence,” she added.

Care and Connect Linkers work out of several local general practices in the region, making it easier for victim-survivors to access these services.

“We want people to know that their GP can be a safe first point of contact if they are facing any of these issues. By providing healthcare professionals with the tools and training they need, we can create a stronger, more informed health system. This will provide those affected by violence with the confidence and sense of safety they need, to seek and access help and to hopefully heal and rebuild their lives,” said Ms Reay.

Ms Reay added that while the upcoming holiday period is usually a time to celebrate, in some cases, it can also be an unsafe time.



In Australia, **1800RESPECT** is a nationally recognised service offering counselling, information, and support for those affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. The service operates 24/7 and includes phone and online counselling and has recently expanded to provide a discreet text messaging option. **1800RESPECT** can also take calls from concerned family and friends and can provide them with advice on how to help people they care about who are being impacted.

“We know that people who are experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence, will commonly seek support from someone close to them – be it a friend or family member. Often, people don’t know how to respond, what to say, or where to get help. An important part of ending gender-based violence is educating ourselves and knowing how to support someone who may reach out for help.”

“There are multiple state and national services that are available 24/7 and operate regardless of public holidays. Another important service to be aware of is Link2Home on **1800 152 152**. For those who may find themselves in need of emergency accommodation due to domestic violence, this service provides information, assessment and/or referral to specialist housing services, including services just for women and children.” said Ms Reay.

If you need urgent crisis support or are in immediate danger, it’s important to always make the police your first point of call on 000.

Other organisations that can offer support include:

- [**1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732**](#)
available 24/7 to support people with confidential information, counselling and support.
- [**NSW Domestic Violence Line – 1800 656 463**](#)
available 24/7 providing counselling and referrals.
- [**LINK2HOME \(Statewide 24/7\) – 1800 152 152**](#)
Link2home is the NSW statewide homelessness information and referral telephone service.
- [**Full Stop Australia | – 1800 385 578**](#)
available 24/7 via telephone or online chat.
- [**Child Protection Helpline \(Statewide 24/7\) – 132 111**](#)
Reporting service if you think a child of young person is at risk of harm from abuse or neglect.
- [**Sexual Assault Counselling Australia \(National 24/7\) – 1800 211 028**](#)
For adult survivors of childhood institutional sexual abuse. Supporting anyone accessing the Redress Scheme and alternative compensation.
- [**Kids helpline \(National 24/7\) – 1800 551 800**](#)
Free confidential online and phone counselling service for young people aged 5 - 25.
- [**Mensline \(National 24/7\) – 1300 789 978**](#)
Telephone and online counselling service for men.
- [**Mental Health Help website**](#)
Services for people living in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow or Penrith.

To learn more about the Care and Connect Program visit www.nbmphn.com.au/CareandConnect

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