TOGETHER WE DO BETTER CAMPAIGN TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

VicHealth is launching an action plan to help ensure that everybody gets the chance to get involved in activities and the community. The second phase of its Mental Health Promotion campaign Together We Do Better explores ways in which individuals and organisations can remove potential barriers to participation and help everyone improve their social networks.

Launching Together We Do Better in Melbourne today, VicHealth CEO Dr Rob Moodie said depression accounted for six million lost working days nationally and was now the fourth leading cause of disease in Australia.

"If suicide and self-inflicted injury is included, depression rises to third place, accounting for five per cent of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia," Dr Moodie said.

“Just two weeks ago, the National Heart Foundation confirmed that depression, social isolation, a lack of involvement with others and an absence of social networks and friends can be as dangerous to our health as smoking.

“But studies show the more connected people are with their communities, the less likely they are to experience coronary heart disease, cancer, depression and premature deaths of all sorts.”

Dr Moodie said world renowned Harvard researcher Professor Robert Putnam had put the issue bluntly saying: “As a rough rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half.”

“Hundreds of community organisations across Victoria are already doing great work to make their activities more inclusive and to help strengthen our sense of community. Well connected communities have been shown to benefit through lower crime figures, better health, education and economic growth.”

Speaking at the launch, Australian theatre and television legend John Wood spoke of his many years as a Hawthorn Football Club supporter and stressed the importance of welcoming others into groups and activities.

“If you feel unwelcome, you may never come back, you may never have the confidence to take up the opportunities that might otherwise come your way in life," he said.

Surf Life Saving Victoria Project officer, Damian Dour, has been working in Geelong with a group of teenagers, newly arrived to Australia, to teach them surf life saving skills.

Mr Dour told launch guests that his experience had shown him the importance of breaking down barriers to encourage youth participation in a wide range of activities.

“The project highlighted numerous barriers to participation, but the results had been extremely rewarding,” Mr Dour said. “The pride shows all over their faces – faces which have not been associated before with Aussie surf life saving.”

Dr Moodie stressed that Australians were yearning to rebuild their sense of community and that everyone could draw strength from playing a vital role in a vibrant community.

“Together we will all do better.”

For more information, please contact:

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