

Media Release

GROUPS JOIN FORCES TO RAISE BULLYING AS A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

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VicHealth has joined forces with key education, adolescent and welfare organisations to put bullying behavior under the spotlight as a significant mental health issue for all Victorians.

With students returning to schools, VicHealth, supported by the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), the Centre for Adolescent Health, Kids Help Line, Mind Matters and The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, today launched a new anti-bullying campaign to raise awareness of bullying as a mental health issue in the community.

VicHealth's CEO Dr Rob Moodie said bullying was a long-term mental health issue, and it was time that we took up the challenge together.

Dr Moodie said research from the Centre for Adolescent Health showed that up to 30% of depression in young people could be prevented if we could stop bullying.

Mr Michael White, Director of the Office of School Education, in DEET, said schools and their networks are well placed to contribute to the creation of safe and healthy environments through building positive social relationships and making effective responses to issues such as bullying.

School communities are offered support through DEET's website Addressing Bullying Behaviour – It's Our Responsibility. The website is a comprehensive resource which includes an interactive student zone, video clips and a range of school support materials. A Parent Zone section will be launched early this term to provide information and guidance for parents to assist them in their school partnerships.

Dr Moodie said in a survey of 600 Victorians aged between 18 and 65— Victorians' Attitudes Towards Bullying — 95% of respondents said that bullying was never acceptable.

"School is a microcosm of the greater community, and the group is committed to highlighting what is and what can be done to address bullying behaviour in our schools," Dr Moodie said.

"The research highlights that schools with a supportive and inclusive school community, where students feel they belong and appreciated, are less likely to have high levels of bullying behaviour. Having a positive school environment that the entire school community has helped build, will help prevent bullying from happening in the first place.

"What can we do to address bullying behaviour? What is needed is a community response, just as schools in Victoria have adopted a whole of school approach to create positive and healthy environments for learning. Bullying is not simply an individual problem, or something that is simply part of the 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' way of life.

"Failing to address bullying behaviour sends the message that it is an acceptable behaviour within our schools, homes, sports fields, workplaces and community. It misses the opportunity to build positive, respectful and supportive relationships. If we are serious about addressing bullying behaviour it is important to work together as a community to ensure that bullying is not tolerated in schools or the community. Together we can do better".

For more information, please contact:

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