

Media Release

MOVING MENTAL HEALTH FROM THE MARGIN TO THE MAINSTREAM

The World Health Organization prediction that depression will be the second leading cause of disability in the world by 2020 has been the impetus for VicHealth to commit \$4.6M on promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

Speaking at the launch of 38 projects funded under the VicHealth Mental Health Promotion Plan, Dr Rob Moodie said, 'Whilst visions of illness come to mind when we mention the term 'mental health', the challenge for us all is to embrace mental health and wellbeing as a positive experience.'

'We need to address the way society thinks about mental health - in the workplace, in schools, in the media, in government and in health care settings.'

'Having strong social networks and connections within the community, supportive relationships, freedom from discrimination, and having access to money to feed, clothe oneself or participate in the community are linked to mental health and wellbeing. Lacking these things are perhaps some of the major reasons for depression and other stress and anxiety related conditions. Investing in the treatment will not reduce all the costs of mental illness. We must therefore not focus on spending only on the treatment side.'

The 38 projects launched by the Hon. John Thwaites, Minister for Health today will help address issues of discrimination, social isolation and access to the benefits of employment. Specifically, projects will focus on issues of racism, ageism, homophobia and sexism, as well as social community connectedness, participation in supportive relationships, freedom from discrimination and a valued social position.

'The challenge is to work in partnership with practitioners from across sectors to shift the focus on the social and economic components of mental health from the margin to the mainstream,' says Dr Moodie.

The breadth of projects is vast but each relates to one of three themes: - social connectedness, economic participation and freedom from discrimination.

For example, the Celebrate Youth Project in the City of Latrobe, Gippsland targets disadvantaged or vulnerable youth to increase the levels of involvement and participation in local community activities.

The Online Youth and Sexuality Diversity Project will develop and pilot an integrated online youth health information advice service in an environment that is accessible, safe and inclusive for young people and, in particular, same sex attracted young people.

Another project, A Country Welcome, in the Moira Shire aims to enhance the community's capacity to support new arrivals to Australia. A network of community volunteers and professionals will help provide easier access to, and encourage participation in, existing social and recreational activities.

The Department of Human Services' Rural Health and Development Branch has joined with VicHealth to fund the Rural Partnerships for Mental Health and Wellbeing Program, which supports seven projects in rural Victoria.

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