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## Free Local Mental Health Support Available this Festive Season

While the Christmas season can be a time of joy and celebration for many, for some it can also be a time of added stress, anxiety and loneliness.

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, is encouraging people to prioritise their mental health and wellbeing during the festive season and wants the Penrith community to know that there are free mental health services available for those who may need it.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that for some people, the festive season can stir up painful memories.

“Whether that’s the loss of a loved one, anniversaries of natural disasters, or simply the pressure to meet financial and social expectations, it’s important to remember that for some people this can be a challenging time of year to navigate and taking proactive steps can help,” she said.

Psychologist and Wentworth Healthcare’s Clinical Advisor Primary Care - Mental Health, Daniel Angus, said there are simple and practical ways that we can support our mental health and wellbeing during the festive season.

“For people experiencing grief, the holidays can be particularly difficult. Creating new traditions or honouring old ones in a way that acknowledges your loved one can be comforting,” said Daniel.

“If you are feeling alone, focus on small interactions, like chatting with a neighbour or joining a local group to help foster connections and a sense of community. Volunteering is another great way to connect with others and find purpose, and there are many local organisations that need help during this period,” said Daniel.

For people who need support with grief or social connections, Wentworth Healthcare’s **MyHealthConnector.com.au** website lists local support and social groups, wellbeing activities and a variety of health and community services available in Penrith.

According to Daniel, handling family dynamics can be tricky for many families at this time of year.

“Be proactive. For family gatherings where tension is expected, consider setting boundaries and managing expectations ahead of time. It’s okay to prioritise your emotional wellbeing over family traditions. If gatherings feel stressful, consider limiting your time there and avoiding topics that trigger conflict,” he said.

Financial pressure is another issue many people face during the festive season, and it can take a toll on people’s mental health.

“You don’t need to spend a lot to show you care. Thoughtful, handmade gifts or shared experiences can be just as meaningful. If you are feeling overwhelmed by financial stress, there are free services that offer support such as confidential financial counselling through Salvation Army, Wesley Mission and Muru Mittigar,” he added.



Ms Reay said that anyone struggling with their mental health should reach out early and not wait until things reach a crisis point.

“If you’re struggling, your GP is always a good first place to start. They can refer you to appropriate services and look into other health and lifestyle factors that may be contributing to how you are feeling. In Penrith, we have Penrith Medicare Mental Health Centre and headspace Penrith which both offer free mental health support without the need for a referral,” she said.

The **Penrith Medicare Mental Health Centre** provides walk-in support 7 days per week, 365 days a year, including public holidays. The centre's opening hours are 1:00pm - 9:30pm (Monday, Wednesday – Sunday) and from 1:00pm - 5:00pm on Tuesdays. Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day, the Centre will be open 1:00pm – 9.30pm. For more information visit [nbmphn.com.au/PenrithMedicareMentalHealthCentre](http://nbmphn.com.au/PenrithMedicareMentalHealthCentre)

**headspace Penrith** provides free early intervention support to young people aged 12-25 years across mental health, physical health, work and study, and alcohol and other drug needs. More information, including how to access this service and holiday operation times, is available via [www.nbmphn.com.au/headspace](http://www.nbmphn.com.au/headspace)

“Another option is the free Medicare Mental Health phone service. When you call this number, you will talk to a mental health professional who either works or lives locally. This means that they understand the unique challenges of living in our region and can guide you to the most appropriate local support,” Ms Reay said.

People can call **Medicare Mental Health** on **1800 595 212** Monday-Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm (excluding public holidays).

“We want people to know that if you’re feeling stressed, anxious, sad, or just not yourself, it’s okay to ask for help. You are not alone, and free support is available,” said Ms Reay.

If you or if someone you know is in crisis, call Lifeline 24/7 on **13 11 14**.