

10 July, 2019

New Mental Health Service Launches in Hawkesbury and Lithgow

Drought affected communities across Lithgow and Hawkesbury can now access free mental health coaching support.

NewAccess, developed by Beyond Blue and delivered locally by Marathon Health, is a free self-referral, early intervention program for anyone who may be experiencing signs of depression and anxiety. The service is funded by Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, through the Empowering Our Communities initiative.

While the region has experienced recent rain and pastures are greener, over 97% of NSW is still considered in drought or drought affected. This is impacting businesses, individuals and families, leading to financial stress and uncertainty which can have lasting effects on mental health and well-being.

Those residing in these areas report having limited or poor access to free mental health services, often traveling long distances or taking valuable time off the land, meaning some people aren't getting the help they need.

Federal Member for Calare, Andrew Gee said "this drought is taking a physical, economic and also a huge emotional toll on our farmers across the region and sometimes being able to talk to someone can make all the difference."

"I'm proud the Federal Government is supporting our farmers and regional communities through the NewAccess program because it's important everyone has the right tools to be able to offer support at this crucial time."

NewAccess is available to anyone feeling stressed, anxious, isolated or struggling to deal with difficult work or personal life challenges – getting on top of challenges like these early can prevent conditions such as depression and/or anxiety from developing further.

The program links patients with a mental health coach, trained in Low Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Over six free sessions, coaches assist people develop the skills needed to tackle issues causing them distress.

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman, said "easy and affordable access to local mental health services in our regions is crucial. Having someone who understands the constant pressures of drought on local families and communities can make a world of difference.

"We know country people are resilient, but no one is immune to the kind of stress that comes with life changing events like this drought.

"NewAccess allows people to get mental health support early; it's free, accessible from home, confidential and it gives people practical ways to regain control of their mental health."

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Wentworth Healthcare CEO Lizz Reay, said "we know one size doesn't fit all when seeking support for our well-being. What may be helpful or accessible for one person isn't necessarily right for the next. People in rural and remote communities particularly need access to services that don't involve them taking time off the land."

"The NewAccess program is part of a suite of mental health services we are funding to ensure people get the right care, in the right place, at the right time."

Marathon Health Acting CEO Garry Burton, said Marathon Health is very pleased to work with Beyond Blue and the Nepean Blue Mountains PHN to deliver NewAccess in the region.

"Considering the struggles in this region, due to the drought and tough economic situation, it's a timely service that aims to give control back to the people doing it tough. We aim to empower individuals with the skills to help them get through it," he said.

NewAccess is accessible via phone, Skype, Facetime or face to face. Patients can call 02 6333 2838 during business hours to request a booking or visit the Marathon Health website at www.marathonhealth.com/newaccess.

Notes to the editor:

- In 2017, 17.2 per cent of people aged over 16 in the wider Nepean Blue Mountains area experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress, higher than the NSW average
- In 2016-17, 9,390 people were hospitalised for mental health reasons
- In 2016, the rate of deaths by suicide was 12.5 per 100,000 population, which is higher than the state average (10.3)

Lithgow launch details

- Wednesday, July 10 – Lithgow Workies Club, 3 -7 Tank Street, Lithgow from 10.30am-12pm

Available for interview:

- Beyond Blue CEO, Georgie Harman (upon request)
- NewAccess coaches – Shelly Ryan and Prue Mogg

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The Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network is a program run by Wentworth Healthcare – a not for profit organisation which works to improve health for the communities of the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith.

This service has been made possible through funding provided by the Australian Government under the Primary Health Network (PHN) Program.