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World Suicide Prevention Day: Local Suicide Prevention Group Fosters Connection, Reduces Stigma and Builds Hope

Changing the Narrative on Suicide, is the theme of World Suicide Prevention Day on Wednesday 10 September. It challenges us to shift how we think and talk about suicide and is a call to reduce stigma by encouraging openness, empathy and action, to ensure those who are struggling feel heard, supported and connected.

A group of local individuals and organisations called the Nepean Blue Mountains Suicide Prevention Collaborative are doing just that, by combining forces to achieve a shared goal of reducing suicide rates across the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas.

The Collaborative is a group of people with lived and living experience of suicide, representatives from government and non-government organisations, community groups, volunteers and business owners. The group shares a commitment to preventing suicides, promoting aftercare following a suicide attempt or crisis and support after suicide loss, fostering connection, reducing stigma and building hope through initiatives, open dialogue and accessible support.

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, supports the Collaborative through funding from the Australian Government's Targeted Regional Initiatives for Suicide Prevention program.

Since March 2024 the Collaborative has been meeting regularly to discuss activities that will make a positive impact. These activities recognise that building people's capacity to look out for the signs of distress and have the confidence to know what to do if someone they know might need some support, can make a difference.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that suicide is a deeply complex issue that requires a whole of community approach.

"Preventing suicide takes a collective effort from a diverse group of people, such as those who make up the Collaborative and other agencies, to ensure we are looking at the different angles and perspectives to help prevent suicide," said Ms Reay.

"Contributing factors to suicide are varied and not always linked to mental illness. I think people would be surprised to learn that around a quarter of Australians who experienced suicidal thoughts or behaviours in the past year had no symptoms of a mental health concern or didn't meet the criteria for one," she said.

The Australian Government's National Suicide Prevention Strategy revealed that community-led suicide prevention approaches that are tailored to regional needs can reduce local suicide rates by 7%.

As part of one of the Collaborative's first activities, members have worked on a short public awareness video for World Suicide Prevention Day. The video has been produced to grow community understanding of the complexities of suicide and offer more information and understanding of a lived experience of suicide. It will be promoted through social media and



launched in time for World Suicide Prevention Day and will be available via Wentworth Healthcare's website.

"This video will engage the community and provide an opportunity for them to be part of the change in our region. It draws on local voices and perspectives of those with a lived or living experience of suicide to help to create awareness, reduce stigma, and show people that they aren't alone," said Ms Reay.

In the coming months, the group will recruit more like-minded individuals to join working groups to develop other activities in line with the Collaborative's goals. Wentworth Healthcare will actively support the recruitment of additional members via their website, advertising and social media. In the meantime, interested individuals are encouraged to join Wentworth Healthcare's Connected Community newsletter via their website to ensure they receive the application information once it is available.

For more information, or to join the community newsletter, visit nbmphn.com.au/SuicidePreventionCollaborative

If the content of this article has brought up strong emotions for you and you would like to seek support, please contact **Lifeline on 13 11 14**.