

perceptions

RELEASE OF THE REVISED MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION BROCHURES

A new series of brochures released during National Mental Health Week 1999 are set to replace the mental health information brochures that were developed as part of the Community Awareness Program.

The new brochures aim to increase the community's knowledge and awareness of mental health issues and following focus testing have a style and content that include the most up to date information.

The brochures were launched by the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, Dr Michael Wooldridge, reinforcing the Government's commitment to stamp out the harmful myths and misconceptions surrounding mental illness.

Speaking at the launch of the brochures during Mental Health Week, Dr Wooldridge stressed how damaging negative stereotypes of mental illness can be and emphasised the need to think, talk and learn more about mental health and mental illness.

"One in five Australians are affected by mental illness. It can affect any one of us at anytime," Dr Wooldridge said.

"This Government's priority is to increase mental health literacy – that is the knowledge of the risk factors, early warning signs, and importantly where to turn for professional help,"

"Too often people are discriminated against for having a mental illness. It is not an illness anyone should be blamed for – mental illness is like many other

illnesses such as heart disease – there are many different types and many different approaches to prevention, management and treatment. Most can be treated effectively and people do recover and continue to live rewarding lives."

The six new brochures provide clear, easy to understand information about symptoms, causes and appropriate treatment



of mental illness. The brochures are an excellent resource for anyone seeking straightforward information about mental health, to inform their own treatment or to learn more about someone's condition.

They provide information on some of the most common mental illnesses people experience. Available through general practitioners' surgeries and pharmacies, they address facts about mental illness, schizophrenia, anxiety, bipolar mood disorders,

depression and eating disorders.

The brochures have also been distributed through the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Centrelink offices and employment services.

The information in the brochures was prepared by clinical experts and focus tested with general practitioners, psychiatrists, mental health workers and the general public. Research undertaken during the review* found that the brochures are regarded as a valuable resource for people who may be affected by mental illness in some way: whether it be personally, a family member, someone at work, a neighbour or a friend.

Ongoing national distribution is being handled by Mental Health Branch utilising a central distribution service. States and Territories have also been given a supply of brochures to distribute according to their local needs.

The distribution and use of the mental health information brochures will be evaluated on an ongoing basis by Mental Health Branch. ■

**Copies of the brochures can
be ordered on**

**Phone: 1800 066 247 or
Fax: 1800 634 400**

**Or through the Mental
Health Branch Home Page:
<http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe>**

*The report of the review titled "Report on the Review of Mental Health Information Brochures Produced under the Community Awareness Program" is available on the Mental Health Branch Home Page:
<http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe>

FROM THE COMMONWEALTH MENTAL HEALTH BRANCH HEAD

I recently attended Federal Health Minister Dr Michael Wooldridge's announcement to commit \$17.5 million to reduce the harm and hurt of depression in Australia within five years.

The establishment of the Australian Depression Foundation will be led by former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, whose personal commitment to the project, along with his considerable skills and connections, will play a major role in ensuring the goals of the initiative are met.

Essentially, the Australian Depression Foundation aims to de-stigmatise depression and enable sufferers of the illness to obtain appropriate professional help quickly.

Dr Wooldridge said that Mr Kennett had been a passionate advocate for those with depression in his days as Victorian Premier, and it was due to his leadership that there was already considerable interest in this project from State governments as well as the academic, community and business sectors.

"Depression is one of the biggest causes of illness and disability in Australia, and it will affect more and more Australians in years to come," Dr Wooldridge said.

"It will be a major task to develop partnerships to ensure that all Australians — no matter where they live — can find information, advice and hope as they deal with depression.

"We are fortunate to have Mr Kennett's considerable leadership skills to take this project forward so we, as a community, can foster greater awareness and education, professional training and development, as well as research to better prevention, treatment and management knowledge," said Dr Wooldridge.

The depression initiative reflects the call in the 2nd National Mental

Health Plan, to expand the focus of the National Mental Health Strategy, creating partnerships across the community, reducing stigma and promoting evidence-based treatment.

The Government will commit up to \$3.5 million a year for five years to the initiative. However, with State government and business partnerships, the annual budget could be around \$10 million.

The board of the Australian Depression Foundation is expected to be up and running by June.

This issue of Perceptions reports on a newly developed teaching resource called *MindMatters* that encourages those involved in Australia's education sector to take a whole new approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention, especially at the secondary school level.

The Commonwealth is also supporting promotional activities to ensure a greater knowledge and awareness of mental health issues in the general community. This includes the release of six new brochures that provide clear, easy-to-understand information about symptoms, causes and appropriate treatment of mental illness. Available from general practitioners, pharmacies, Centrelink and employment offices, and the



*Dermot Casey, Assistant Secretary,
Mental Health Branch,
Health and Aged Care*

Royal Flying Doctor Service, the brochures provide information about mental illness, schizophrenia, anxiety, bipolar mood disorders, depression and eating disorders.

Additionally, a new resource kit for journalists and media professionals has been developed. The kit — *Achieving the Balance* — aims to improve the way suicide and mental illness are reported and portrayed. The kit includes useful tips, checklists, information and contacts for media professionals preparing stories about mental illness.

It is important to remember that people with mental disorders constitute more than 20 per cent of Australia's health burden. The challenge in implementing the 2nd National Mental Health Plan is to ensure that those involved in making decisions about health resources acknowledge this fact. Unless we can expand the focus on mental illness as a significant health burden, then those who experience mental illness will be without adequate support to live fulfilling lives and will continue to be stigmatized in their communities.

Dr David Satcher, US Surgeon-General visited Australia last November. He was briefed on a number of areas of work within the Department of Health and Aged Care, including mental health and suicide prevention.

During his time in Australia, he visited the New South Wales Transcultural Mental Health Centre, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, St Vincent's Hospital Mental Health Services and the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre. He also visited St John's Park High School, one of the pilot schools that participated in

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the *MindMatters* National Mental Health in Schools program. More information on Dr Satcher's visit will be included in the May/June issue of *Perceptions*.

Finally, I'm pleased to welcome Professor Harvey Whiteford back from Washington. While continuing his role as advisor to the World Bank, Harvey has taken up the position of Kratzmann Chair in Psychiatry at the

University of Queensland and will also join Professor Scott Henderson as an advisor to the Mental Health Branch of the Department of Health and Aged Care.

Information about the National Depression Initiative can be found at www.health.gov.au/depression a temporary site established for the development phase. ■

Dermot Casey

SPREADING THE WORD ON GOOD MENTAL HEALTH: NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK 1999

National Mental Health Week recently celebrated throughout Australia from 17 – 23 October. The focus of the week was to get positive mental health messages into the community – to raise community awareness of mental illness and promote mental health.

The Mental Health Council of Australia was responsible for the national coordination of Mental Health Week, with an association for mental health in each state and territory coordinating local activities. Many people contributed to what was a very successful National Mental Health Week, in which an increasing number of people, and particularly those in rural and remote areas, received information and were made more aware of the importance of looking after their mental health.

A lot of energy, from consumers, carers, health and community workers, went into organising a huge range of events for the week. Many of the events were fun, some were serious, but all were informative. The activities brought together consumers, carers and the wider community, giving people an opportunity to share their experiences and learn from each other. The week was also an opportunity for consumers to display

their skills and talents, to challenge myths, and show that people with mental illness are able to participate and contribute to society.

SPREADING THE WORD

On Sunday 17 October the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Aged Care, Dr Michael Wooldridge, officially launched National Mental Health Week by participating in a demonstration of telepsychiatry and launching the new information brochures on mental health. The National launch, and the launches in each state and territory on Monday 18 October, all received considerable news coverage. Interviews with consumers, carers and health professionals, talking about mental health issues, were played on radio and TV throughout the week, as were community service announcements for National Mental Health Week. This coverage was complemented by various articles in newspapers and magazines which not only highlighted the seriousness of mental illness, but also showed the reality of living with mental illness – the highs and the lows.

Partnership were formed with organisations including the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, Royal Flying Doctors, National

Union of Students, Centrelink, Country Women's Association, St Vincent de Paul, and the Salvation Army. These organisations offered considerable assistance by distributing National Mental Health Week materials throughout Australia, and encouraging their members to raise awareness in their local communities. These partnerships were instrumental in reaching people in rural and remote areas and encouraging rural and remote communities to take part in National Mental Health Week.

FROM THE SERIOUS TO THE SUBLIME...

Over 300 events were held throughout Australia during National Mental Health Week. A selection of some of these events include:

Open Minds Open Doors Art Exhibition in Fremantle

Progressing the Needs of Carers Forum, Adelaide

A "Chill Out" Dance Party in Darwin

Suicide Prevention Workshop in Broken Hill

Launch of Mental Health video clips for use by News Media, Canberra

Mini Olympics on the Mid North Coast, NSW

Aboriginal Carers Retreat, Port Lincoln, SA

First National Conference of the Australian Transcultural Mental Health Network, Melbourne

Mental Health and Ageing Seminar in Hobart

The Mad Mardi Gras on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Mental Health Week Fun Run in Alice Springs

Focus on Depression Seminar in Launceston

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STRESSING LESS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Wednesday 20 October was officially Stress Less Day and the media helped promote simple ideas like taking time out for lunch, sharing a joke or a compliment, and having a laugh. Activities including 'massage buses', tai chi demonstrations,

workplace stress reduction kits and 'stress busters' workshops added a fun touch to the day. It's amazing how people react when they hear about Stress Less Day – everyone can relate to it. Stress can trigger or prolong mental illness so it's very important that people manage their own stress levels as a preventative measure. Getting people to talk about stress also opens the door to talking about serious mental illness.

National Mental Health Week 2000 will be celebrated 8 – 14 October, to coincide with World Mental Health Day on 10 October. ■

For more information on National Mental Health Week 1999, or to contribute to plans for 2000, contact the Mental Health Council of Australia on (02) 6285 3100.

MINDMATTERS - NEW MENTAL HEALTH TEACHING RESOURCE

The mental health of children and adolescents is fundamental to their academic and social competence. Schools play a crucial role in shaping the health and development of young people, through the curriculum, organisational culture and social environment.

Until now, barriers have existed to achieving this goal.

There has been a lack of confidence in teaching about mental health and other sensitive issues. This coupled with a poor availability of teaching resources and an already crowded curriculum can make mental health issues difficult to approach in schools.

To address this, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care has developed a teaching resource called *MindMatters* that includes mental health education materials, resources and curriculum for a wide range of secondary schools, students, and learning areas.

MindMatters was developed by a consortium of representatives from Melbourne University, Sydney University and the Australian Council of Health and Physical Education and Recreation.

MindMatters encourages schools to take a whole school approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention. This includes school policies, school ethos, curriculum

and professional development for teachers. The resource materials include:

- SchoolMatters – managing and mapping mental health
- Educating for Life – a guide for school-based prevention of suicide and self-harm
- Curriculum Units including:
 - Changes and Challenges
 - Dealing with Bullying
 - Enhancing Resilience
 - Understanding Mental Illness
 - Loss and Grief
- *MindMatters* Bibliography
- *MindMatters* School Case Studies

The Commonwealth Government will continue to support the next phase of *MindMatters*, which will commence at the beginning of the 2000 school year and will involve all secondary schools. Two national organisations, the Curriculum Corporation and the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, will work with the Department to implement the project. Several high level committees will steer the project and key staff including project managers, a national coordinator and indigenous education officer will be recruited.

This next phase will focus on

- Ensuring that secondary schools are a mentally healthy place for teachers and students to work and learn, including procedures and referrals for at-risk students and policies for the management of critical incidences.
- Building teacher's knowledge, skills, and confidence to effectively communicate with colleagues and students about mental health issues.
- Establishing a national, State/Territory and local infrastructure to ensure the provision of effective services for at-risk students, including referral, treatment and follow up. ■



SUICIDE PREVENTION - TRAINING NEW PROFESSIONALS

The Hunter Institute of Mental Health, based in Newcastle, has recently launched resources for the undergraduate training of new professionals. The resources were developed as part of the Youth Suicide Prevention - National University Curriculum Project, one of the education and training initiatives of the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy.

The focus of this project was on three professional disciplines: nursing, secondary education and journalism.

Nurses are in a key position to undertake a range of prevention strategies from early identification of vulnerable people at risk of suicide through to the support of families and friends who are bereaved by suicide.

High schools are increasingly being viewed as one of the most promising access points through which prevention programs may reach vulnerable young people. High school teachers, therefore, need to be adequately trained in order to play a range of roles including early identification of young people experiencing difficulties and referral. They also need to be aware of the appropriate responses that might be considered

in the event of suicidal behaviour in the school.

Journalists are also targeted because of the influential role they may play in forming the community's views of suicide and also due to the convincing evidence that the media's handling of suicide can influence the incidence of suicide.

The new resources are known as "Response...Ability". They are available to academics teaching in each of these disciplines via the Internet. Resources for students can also be downloaded from the web. The address, for those who are interested in viewing the students' resources is:

www.himh.org.au/Origin.html

In addition to the written resources, a video was developed for each of the disciplines of nursing and secondary education.

The resources were piloted in a number of universities in 1998 and now universities across the country are beginning to make use of them. ■

Anyone interested in further information about the project or the resources could contact Trevor Hazell on (02) 4924 6723.



LEMON PIPS PROJECT

Some Perceptions readers might remember earlier articles about the Lemon Learning Project. It was a project designed to promote consumer participation in mental health services by developing training packages for consumers and services providers. It was funded under the first National Mental Health Strategy as an innovative grant. As part of this project the team from the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council developed

an exciting teaching tool to be used by consumers in the training of service professionals around the consumer perspective.

The tool is a boardgame called 'Lemon Looing'. The game was developed over eighteen months with input from many people who have experience mental illness. It is a colourful representation of consumers' experience. Players travel around The Community, The Public Hospital and The Private

Hospital. Service providers are invited to take on the role of the consumer as they move around the board landing on squares which represent consumer experiences ranging from trying to get into public hospital to being taken to hospital in the back of a police van, from losing the support of the family to going 'mad' in the workplace.

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The power of the game however relies heavily on the exchange of experiences between players. As each player lands on carefully worded squares the consumers who are playing are encouraged to talk from a consumer perspective about the images, incidents and stories the words and graphics on the squares evoke for them. Participating staff are encouraged to respond. As the game goes on staff become more confident and start to feel able to tell their own stories sometimes expressing ambivalence – tentatively striving to find words to talk about

the things they are often unable to say. Such is the power of the game that some staff players have felt safe enough to ‘come out’ as consumers themselves talking with a degree of candour about the discrepancies they

experience when playing the game from the perspective of self-as-staff-member and as self-as-consumer. Other staff develop awareness in a comfortable enough environment to challenge assumptions that had previously been taken for granted. The game encourages an emergence of a culture which values and actively seeks consumer wisdom.

Following the Deakin Human Services conducted National Education and Training workshops the Mental Health Branch invited the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council to submit a funding proposal which would enable some of the learning from the Lemon Tree Learning Project to be disseminated nationally. Money was granted to

fund a series of workshops in each state and capital territory.

The project became known as ‘Lemon Pips’. This was a further extension of the Lemon Tree metaphor whereby the lemon pips are seeds are planted in each state and may grow. In the original metaphor (see Lemon Tree Book¹) the juice of the lemon was equated with the experience of mental illness-learning to acknowledge and appreciate the bitterness of the lemon as well as recognising its life enhancing qualities. The tree symbolised the community and connectedness of the consumer movement.

Each of the Lemon Pip workshops comprised two days of training. The

first day consisted of training in the use of the game as a teaching tool and was designed for consumers interested in developing their skills as staff educators. On the second day a staff workshop took place. Venues

ranged from a rural service in South Australia to a non-government agency in Brisbane to a western suburbs clinical service in Sydney. Consumers trained the previous day had an opportunity to work with staff using the game.

The first workshop was conducted in Launceston and the format was changed somewhat to accommodate the 1998 THEMHS conference in Hobart. Subsequent workshops following the two consecutive day format have taken place in Brisbane, Sydney, Perth and Adelaide. Feedback both from formal evaluation and from anecdotal information has been overwhelmingly positive. Consumers have confirmed enormous benefit from learning how

to use the game in a training context with fellow consumer trainers who have wide experience of the game. Hope is generated by sharing positive encounters of its potential and we have all appreciated the supportive atmosphere and the sense of groupness which develops within the workshops.

The project is still not finished. We hope to complete two more series of workshops and a report before the end of the year. The involvement of indigenous people as workshop participants and trainers means that the project team maintained a continuous awareness of some particular issues facing indigenous consumers of mental health services and led to the conception of a related project funded by the ANZ trustees which is still being developed.

At the present time there are now approximately ten to fifteen consumer educators familiar with Lemon Looning ready to work with it in training contacts in their own states.

Developing Effective Consumer Participation in Mental Health Services – the report of the Lemon Tree Project, VMIAC Melbourne 1997. ■



More information about the Lemon Looning game and state resources can be obtained from the Victorian Illness Awareness Council, 23 Weston Street, Brunswick 3056 Victoria (03) 9387 8317

¹ Developing Effective Consumer Participation in Mental Health Services - the report of the Lemon Tree Learning Project, VMIAC Melbourne 1997

RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES SUPPORT LIVES WORTH LIVING

Demand for a new resource manual for preventing suicide has proved that awareness and concern about preventing suicide is high on the agenda of Australia’s rural and regional communities.

The demand has been especially high from community agencies, library and local government who are using the intervention and prevention community resource manual as a means of better understanding suicide behaviour and recognising risk signs.

Funded under the Commonwealth Government’s Here for Life initiative, “Lives Worth Living” was published by the Gilmore Centre for Health Improvement of Charles Sturt University, NSW as part of the “Support to Rural Communities” project.

The manual was written by Bronwyn Williams, a clinical psychologist from WA, under



arrangement with the Gilmore Centre and trialed by the Centre in five different rural and remote sites including Tiwi Islands, NT, and Oatlands, Tasmania, over two years.

Reviewed by the University of Wollongong, the manual has received a high commendation and has established itself as a best practice program for rural communities to better communicate with young people about suicide.

The manual provides community educators and trainers with a tool to

present a range of training sessions to increase community awareness and understanding of mental illness, especially suicide.

Lives Worth Living is available at a reduced cost to community agencies, libraries and local government authorities for \$85 (including postage and handling) by forwarding a cheque to The Gilmore Centre for Health Improvement, PO Box 588, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650, Telephone (02) 6933 2844 or email gilmore@csu.edu.au. ■

WHAT’S NEW FROM THE AUSTRALIAN TRANSCULTURAL MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK (ATMHN)

‘Perceptions’ article (February 2000 Issue)

The ATMHN, originally established in 1995, continues to receive funds under the 2nd National Mental Health Plan to consolidate a sustainable infrastructure of partnerships in transcultural mental health across Australia. It also maintains a national information service that includes an Internet site and library service. The Network is made up of members from across Australia from an array of government transcultural policy and program areas, professional disciplines, and has strong community representation.

In October 1999, the ATMHN held its first national conference in Melbourne; this provided a valuable

opportunity for the Network to consult more broadly with those interested in transcultural mental health, to gather views, and to hold workshops on critical issues such as education and training, promotion and prevention and community sector development. These consultations will serve as a basis for the preparation of discussion papers on identified priority issues. The Network’s Co-ordination Unit is aiming to release these papers in 2000.

The conference was launched by Senator Kay Patterson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Drawing on her personal experience as an

educator, Senator Patterson outlined three challenges she saw facing the ATMHN and others working in the field of transcultural mental health in the years ahead:

1. The ageing of Australia’s population which will bring with it new challenges if we are to meet the service needs of those who lose linguistic competence or face cultural isolation as they age. She outlined how whole-of-government approaches will be needed to ensure that appropriate information, support and services are available for ageing Australians from diverse backgrounds.

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2. The continuing challenge of encouraging people to seek help at an early stage. Early detection and treatment of mental illness is the best way to ensure recovery, however, lack of information about mental illness, service access and continuing stigma and discrimination are all common reasons why many Australians and not just those from diverse backgrounds, do not seek professional services when needed.

3. How we are to meet our humanitarian obligations and develop appropriate responses and support for those who have come to Australia as migrants or refugees with a history of political unrest, torture or trauma in their countries of origin.

Senator Patterson also had positive messages for the future. She emphasised the many opportunities that new information technology provides people working in the field of transcultural mental health - both for international and domestic communication as well as contributing to the strength and capacity of Australia's existing transcultural and migrant resource infrastructure. She also affirmed the importance of a sense of community that we all share and which must continue to be fostered if we are to contribute to the social, emotional and mental health of all members of our diverse society - and commended the ATMHN for its contributions in this important area.

Planned ATMHN activities for 2000 include sponsoring a conference on suicide prevention in migrant communities on 16-17 March. The Network will also sponsor a two-day transcultural mental health forum in Adelaide in

November. The aim of this event will be to assist the emerging South Australian transcultural mental health network to build partnerships, community links, and to learn from the successes of others. Interested participants from across Australia will be welcome to attend the forum, for more information, please contact: Rosie Bonnin on 08 8200 3900.

The second national ATMHN conference is now in the early phase of planning. This will be an international event to be held in May 2001 at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre in Sydney. First calls for papers will be invited early in 2000. ■

For more information about the Network or upcoming conferences, please contact the National Co-ordinator, Meg Griffiths, by email: Meg_Griffiths@wsahs.nsw.gov.au, or phone: (02) 9840 3383.

QDGP PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

The Queensland Minister for Health, the Hon. Wendy Edmond, recently launched the Queensland Divisions of General Practice (QDGP) Primary Mental Health Strategy. 100 official guests attended the launch on Monday October 4 at the Brisbane Marriott Hotel to celebrate the changing face of mental health care in Queensland. Speakers at the launch included Dr John Aloizos, President of QDGP, Dr Peggy Brown, Chief Psychiatrist, Queensland Health, Dr Harvey Whiteford, Director of Mental Health at the World Bank in Washington DC, and Dermot Casey, Acting Assistant Secretary, Mental Health Branch. All speakers strongly endorsed the QDGP Primary Mental Health Strategy and reinforced the need for collaborative approaches to the provision of mental health care.

In addition to the \$458,000 provided by the Commonwealth through the PMHC initiative, Queensland Health has provided \$2.25 million to the QDGP Mental Health Strategy. QDGP, in conjunction with the Queensland Mental Health Intersectoral Reference Committee, decided to utilise the Commonwealth PMHC funding to provide training (in 1999-2000) for 200 GPs across the State in the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P). Queensland Health and Education Queensland are also participating in the Triple P Program and are providing training to health workers and teachers across the state. Once the training is completed intersectoral case-conferencing meetings will be established for those GPs, teachers and Queensland Health staff who have participated in

the program.

All divisions of general practice in Queensland have endorsed QDGP's Primary Mental Health Strategy. This is evidenced by the fact that ninety percent of Queensland Divisions have now formally identified mental health as a priority in their business plans. The Strategy has also been strongly endorsed by mental health service providers and consumers.

The QDGP Strategy aims to facilitate the development of effective, sustainable and genuinely collaborative ways of working between general practitioners and specialist mental health service providers, which will result in improved care for mental health

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consumers by improving the capacity of the health system. The QDGP Mental Health Strategy is consistent with the recommendations of the General Practice Strategy Review and with the aims of the National Mental Health Strategy, the National Mental Health Plan and the Queensland Mental Health Plan.

Given the broad geographic spread of the State of Queensland and the differing demographic profiles and related service delivery needs for metropolitan, rural and provincial areas, it was considered important to incorporate a range of pilot programs and sites into the QDGP Strategy. To this end the strategy is inclusive of:

- a State-wide approach to continued collaboration between general practitioners and mental health service providers;



Dermot Casey, Qld Minister for Health - Hon. Wendy Edmond and Harvey Whiteford

Grace Groom, Harvey Whiteford and Dermot Casey

- a State-wide program of GP training and support through the Positive Parenting Program;
- three separate pilot programs, one remote, one provincial and one metropolitan;

Although the proposed pilots have been developed separately in collaboration with stakeholders in each of the respective communities, and therefore differ in structure and

goals, their commonality and indeed their strength, is in the development of partnerships between general practitioners and mental health service providers.

Together, these three pilots and the two statewide components form a comprehensive program of collaborative mental health care for Queensland. ■

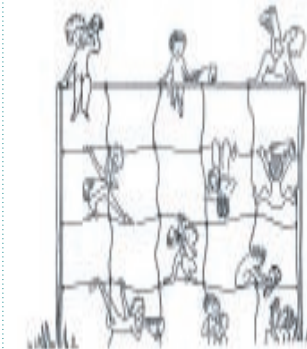
THE AUSTRALIAN MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER NETWORK

The Australian Mental Health Consumer Network is a national, representative mental health consumer voice, valuing consumer expertise that enables full participation in Australian society.

The Australian Mental Health Consumer Network began in 1996 at the THEMHS Conference held in Brisbane, when Australian consumers for the first time indicated their conviction that a coherent national voice on consumer issues was vital if their concerns about mental health issues were to be addressed on a federal level. As users of mental health services, consumers are entitled to a place at the committee tables which decide what services are to be delivered, how they should be implemented, and whether or not they are working in consumers' best interests.

The Network consists of all its members, although only ordinary

members have voting rights. Ordinary members are people who identify themselves as having, or having had, a mental illness or psychiatric disorder, or have used



mental health services for their own needs. Associate members are people or organisations who empathise with consumers of mental health services, and support their right to have a voice in planning and providing

mental health services. There are no State branches, but each State and Territory is entitled to elect two delegates to the national committee.

The Commonwealth Mental Health Branch has provided a seeding grant of \$50,000 for the Network to develop and approve a constitution and become incorporated, develop a strategic plan and develop organisational and management structures. The Network is now in a strong position to move forward to the next phase of establishing a secretariat and further developing strong links with other organisations and groups, both in the mental health sector and the broader health field. ■

For more information about the Network contact Helen Connor on (07) 3394 4852 or email hconnor@gil.com.au.

PERCEPTIONS ARTICLE: NATIONAL SURVEY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In 1995, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care funded the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. This national project was established to gather baseline information about the prevalence of mental illness in the Australian population, the amount of associated disablement, and the use of health and other services by people with mental disorders or mental health problems.

The National Survey has three components. The household study of adult Australians undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and a study of low prevalence disorders (psychotic illness) of people aged 18-65 years are completed. The results of the child and adolescent survey undertaken through the University of Adelaide on behalf of the National Collaborating Centres for the Survey of Mental Health and Young People is due for release in March 2000. Together, these three components will provide reasonably representative information about the mental health status and needs of the Australian population.

THE MENTAL HEALTH OF AUSTRALIANS

The household survey of the adult population was undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Preliminary findings are published in *Mental Health and Wellbeing: Profile of Adults, Australian 1997* (McLennan, 1997). The report includes information on the prevalence of mental disorders and associated disablement for adult Australians. Information is also included about health service usage as a consequence of a mental health disorder.

As part of their work for the survey, the Australian Bureau of Statistics prepared a confidentialised unit record file (CURF) of data

collected, which enables further analysis of the data by scientific groups. The *Mental Health of Australians* is the first report prepared by a consortium using the CURF. The consortium comprises: Gavin Andrews of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney; Wayne Hall and Maree Teesson of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales; and Scott Henderson of the NHMRC Psychiatric Epidemiology Research Centre, the Australian National University.

The report describes how much the Australian population is affected by mental disorders. It goes on to consider the practical implications of these findings. In any 12 months, close to 1 in 5 (17%) of adult Australians have a mental disorder. By far the most common are anxiety or affective disorders and substance misuse. In addition, one in four of these people suffer from more than one mental disorder. The evidence reinforces how common mental disorders are in the Australian community and the need to better understand their impact on individuals and the community as a whole.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH PSYCHOTIC ILLNESS

People Living with Psychotic Illness: An Australian Study 1997-98 presents the main findings gathered through a census of 3,800 Australians aged 18-64 years of age with psychotic disorders. They were drawn from people who had attended mental health services in catchment areas in the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia during the census month. An additional sample of 146

individuals was also included which consisted of individuals who had previously been in contact with mainstream inpatient and outpatient services but who were not in contact with those services during the census month. An in-depth interview was also conducted with 980 of the respondents.

Psychotic disorders cover a diverse group of illnesses that are characterised by fundamental distortions of thinking, perception or emotional response and include schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorders and delusional disorders.

The study found that between 4 and 7 persons per 1,000 adults resident in urban areas are in contact with mental health services during any given month because of symptoms of psychotic disorder. The majority of psychotic illnesses begin in early adulthood. Schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorders account for over 60% of the prevalence and men and women are equally affected. For a high proportion of survey participants the course of the illness had been continuous without remission for an average of 15 years after the first onset of psychotic symptoms. People with psychotic disorders accessed mental health services regularly, for example, more than half of the participants in the study had at least one hospital admission and 81% had made at least one visit to a general practitioner in the past year.

The report provides evidence of the high burden of ill-health and disability experienced by people with psychotic disorders throughout their lives. Only a minority of people had attained a level of functioning and wellbeing that is commensurate with a good quality of life. The impact of

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psychotic disorders is experienced in terms of symptoms (duration and distress), compromised daily living and life achievement activities (particularly in relation to education and employment) and dependency as a consumer of welfare and support services. The additional impact on the homeless is further cause for concern.

This report highlights the need to come together to strengthen partnerships across all service providers, particularly to better provide accessible and flexible accommodation, employment, legal aid services, vocational training and



living with my family



living with my shadow

'Living with psychotic illness'

community-based rehabilitation services, for this disadvantaged group in the community. More importantly, it stresses the need for continued efforts by all Australians to lessen the suffering, particularly the pain of rejection of those with mental illness, so that all Australians can enjoy the high quality of life we have in this country.

The above reports are available on the Mental Health Branch website (<http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe/>) or by contacting the Publications Area of the Mental Health Branch on 1800 634 247 or facsimile 1800 634 400. For ease of processing orders, please note that fax orders are preferred. ■

diary dates

THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS 35TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE: LOOKING OUTWARD – CULTURE, CREATIVITY & PSYCHIATRY

27-30 April 2000, Adelaide, SA

Contact: Australian Convention & Travel Services
Phone: 02 6257 3299
Fax: 02 6257 3256
Email: ranzcp2000@ausconvservices.com.au

4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: PSYCHIATRIC REFORM & SERVICE RESEARCH IN EUROPE

28-30 April 2000, Leipzig, Germany

Contact: ENMESH 2000
Email: ENMESH2000@medizin.uni-leipzig.de

GETTING IT RIGHT! A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ANXIETY DISORDERS

5-6 May 2000, Sydney, NSW

Contact: Conference Action
Phone: 02 9956 8333
Fax: 02 9956 5154
Email: contact@conferenceaction.com

2000 GEEL INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONGRESS: 700 YEARS OF FOSTER CARE

18-21 May 2000, Geel, Belgium

Contact: Timshel Conference Services
Email: info@timshel.be

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS SECTION OF FORENSIC PSYCHIATRY ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2000

22 June 2000, Townsville, QLD

Contact: The Conference Organiser
Phone: 03 9380 1429
Fax: 03 9380 2722
Email: conorg@ozemail.com.au

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH OUTCOMES CONFERENCE 2000 – HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR THE NATION: BEST BETS & BEST BUYS

2-3 August 2000, Canberra, ACT

Contact: Ms Jan Sansoni or Ms Lorna Tilley
Phone: 02 6205 0869 or 02 6291 7271
Fax: 02 6291 2371 or 02 6205 2037
Email: jan.sansoni@act.gov.au
or jansan@atrx.net.au

CONTINUUM OF CARE: MEETING THE CHALLENGES ACROSS THE HEALTH TERRAIN – FROM THE BUSH TO THE BIG SMOKE

8-11 August 2000, Darwin, NT

Contact: The Conference Organisers
Phone: 08 8941 0388
Fax: 08 8981 8382
Email: dcem@desliens.com.au

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF BEHAVIOURAL MEDICINE: BEHAVIOURAL MEDICINE & PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

15-18 November 2000, Brisbane, QLD

Contact: Intermedia
Phone: 07 3369 0477
Fax: 07 3369 1512
Email: ICBM2000@im.com.au

ACHIEVING THE BALANCE – A RESOURCE KIT FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

If you want to receive **FREE** copies of *Perceptions* please fill out this coupon.

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Aged Care,
GPO Box 9848, Canberra
ACT 2601**

The Department of Health and Aged Care, in collaboration with the media industry, and health professionals has developed a new resource kit for journalists and media professionals. This kit, titled *Achieving the Balance*, aims to improve the way suicide and mental illness are reported and portrayed.

The resource kit has six elements:



SUICIDE

- A media resource for the reporting and portrayal of suicide.
- A life promoting media strategy
- A media quick reference card on suicide.

MENTAL ILLNESS

- A media resource for the reporting and portrayal of mental illness
- A mental health promoting media strategy
- A media quick reference card on mental illness.



The two media resources aim to promote awareness of the issues relating to mental illness and suicide, recognising the important influence the media have on the perceptions and behaviours of the wider community.

The mental health promoting strategy aims to support the media to report and portray mental illness sensitively and to encourage the media to educate the community on issues relating to mental health and mental illness.

The life promoting media strategy aims to encourage the media to portray suicide in a responsible way to minimise the possibility of imitation suicide, or to avoid the risk of normalising suicide.

The media quick reference cards aim to provide media professionals with easily accessible information on mental illness and suicide. The cards provide useful tips, checklists and contacts at the fingertips of media professionals producing stories. *Achieving the Balance* is a landmark initiative that brings together the efforts of key players to lessen the threat of imitation suicide and reduce the stigma currently faced by people with a mental illness. Copies of the kit can be ordered on Phone: 1800 066 247 or Fax: 1800 634 400 Or through the Mental Health Branch Home Page: <http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentallhe>. ■

*For information about
Perceptions
please contact Renee Bryant
Ph: (02) 6289 7823
Fax: (02) 6289 8788
Email:
renee.bryant@health.gov.au*