

Embargoed until Thursday, Jan 31st 2013

Innovative national approach launched to tackle substance use and suicide

Launch of the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use and the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention.

WHEN: 31 January 2013

TIME: 10:15am for 10:30am

WHERE: Lowy Cancer Research Centre, University of New South Wales
Level 4 Building C25, Gate 9 High St, Randwick.

SPEAKING: The Hon. Minister Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Health; The Hon Mark Butler, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing; Professor Maree Teesson, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre; Professor Helen Christensen, Black Dog Institute.

Interviews will be available with speakers as well as consumers with first-hand experience of the issues.

Federal Minister for Health Tanya Plibersek and Federal Minister for Mental Health Mark Butler are co-launching national research centres into two of the most pressing mental health issues affecting the Australian community - substance use and suicide.

Despite considerable funding and community attention over the last five years, suicide is still the biggest killer of Australians aged 15 – 44yrs. As well as being a known trigger for suicide, co-morbid mental illness and substance use impacts around 300,000 Australians and can result in significant social and physical impairment.

Professor Helen Christensen, lead researcher and Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute at UNSW, says the launch marks the first time clinical and research experts from around Australia have united to target these areas.

“Specialists from a wide range of backgrounds including psychology, psychiatry, medicine, public health and community education are involved to ensure the clinical outcomes are relevant and accessible for all at-risk individuals and groups around the country including rural, indigenous, youth and multicultural communities.”

Media Contacts

Marion Downey, NDARC Communications Manager
02 9385 0180 | 0401 713 850 m.downey@unsw.edu.au

Gayle McNaught, Blackdog Institute Communications Manager
0401 625 905 g.mcnaught@unsw.edu.au



“This approach will not only reduce the money spent on costly in-patient services, it will save lives.”

Professor Maree Teesson, lead researcher and Professor at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at UNSW, says this exciting new approach will build infrastructure for the future.

“Unlike more traditional public health programmes, these Centres will focus on prevention and intervention. These areas have been neglected in the past due to the complexity of physical and environmental triggers and the associated stigma.”

“Our combined expertise, and the incorporation of new delivery techniques such as eHealth, will enable us to identify who is at risk and target them with programmes designed for them specifically.”

The Centres are both funded for five years by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

About the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use

Mental and substance use disorders account for more years of life lost due to disability than any other disorder (24% of burden) and are second only to cardiovascular disease and cancer as leading causes of disease burden. In young Australians (aged 15-24) the top 10 causes of burden of disease are dominated by mental and substance use disorders. Comorbidity is common, with 25-50% of people experiencing more than one disorder.

This CRE will focus on prevention and treatment. It aims to break down single disorder silos by generating significant new research on the prevention, treatment and epidemiology of comorbid mental health and substance use disorders. An integral component of this CRE is the translation of research findings into educational curricula, training programs, clinical resources, as well as resources for the general public. It's a collaboration of researchers from the University of New South Wales, the University of Newcastle, University of Sydney, University of Macquarie and University of Queensland. International collaborators include the University of Birmingham in the UK, North-western University Medical School, USA and the Medical University of South Carolina, USA.

About the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention

Every year 400,000 Australians experience suicidal thoughts, 65,000 make suicide attempts and 2,500 die. Suicide is recognised as a public health crisis yet little is known about how best to deliver the intervention programs that are so urgently required.

Involving clinical and research experts from around Australia, the CRE in Suicide Prevention aims to test new delivery options for interventions, investigate models of suicide causation including social patterns and gene-environment interactions, improve help-seeking behaviour nation-wide and inform government on funding priorities. This new collaborative approach will enable the development of a central suicide research hub – unifying the sector and facilitating the smooth and effective translation of research into impactful clinical outcomes.