

8 June 2020

New research shows mental health coaching reduces anxiety and depression symptoms

A mental health coaching service could improve the mental health and wellbeing of almost 450,000 Australians while creating jobs, new evidence suggests.

New research published in the *Journal of Mental Health* found that a mental health coaching program, originally developed in Australia by Beyond Blue, improves the condition of the majority of people who use it.

Study author **Professor Michael Baigent**, of Flinders University, said the observational study included 3946 participants from three NewAccess sites located in metropolitan and regional parts of Australia.

Results show that seven out of 10 people who used NewAccess reported a significant reduction in depression and anxiety symptoms.

More than three million Australians experience anxiety and depression each year and the Productivity Commission estimates that up to 450,000 Australians would be served better by low intensity supports than clinical services.

“At a time when demand for mental health support is growing, these research findings make a strong case for the immediate, widespread rollout of evidence-based low intensity services such as NewAccess,” said Prof Baigent, who is also a board director of Beyond Blue.

NewAccess offers one-on-one sessions with coaches who have been trained in a type of self-guided therapy called low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy. Coaches deliver this therapy, which has a strong evidence base, under clinical supervision.

NewAccess is currently available at 11 sites around Australia and if rolled out nationally, would employ a workforce of up to 100 coaches. Since 2013, it has supported almost 12,000 people.

NewAccess is free, safe and available face-to-face, by phone or by video. It does not require a doctor’s referral.

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said creating a new workforce of mental health coaches for people with mild or moderate issues would allow other mental health professionals to focus on supporting people with more complex needs.

“Low intensity supports simplify access, reduce the cost of treatment and overcome the social stigma that for many people persists around support-seeking,” Ms Harman said.

“Importantly, models like NewAccess employ new workforces at time when so many Australians need more jobs.”

Official estimates say that 38 percent of the population has or is at risk of developing a mild or moderate mental health condition.

“Demand for preventative and early intervention mental health and wellbeing support is growing and we expect more of that in the months and years that follow the COVID-19 pandemic,” Ms Harman said.

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“Many of the solutions to meet record demand lie in matching a person’s needs to the type of service on offer, how it’s delivered and who delivers it. And with real-time measurement of recovery rates, NewAccess is proven, works for people and is ready to scale.”

“What this tells us is that more of the same is not necessarily the answer. It tells us we need to think differently if we are to support the population’s mental health and wellbeing now and into the future.”

For more information about NewAccess, visit beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess.

The Beyond Blue Support Service is available via phone 24/7 on 1300 22 4636 or via beyondblue.org.au/get-support for online chat (3PM – 12AM AEST or email responses within 24 hours).

The new Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Service is available 24/7 at coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au. Its dedicated phone line, staffed by mental health professionals briefed on the pandemic response, is now open on 1800 512 348.