

5 February 2019

## Educators flag mental health concerns for students

Teachers and early learning educators believe mental health issues are among the biggest health concerns facing children and young people in Australia, a new survey reveals.

A Beyond Blue snapshot survey completed by 431 educators shows more of them rate mental health issues among the major health concerns for children and young people than obesity and substance abuse.

Eighty-six percent of respondents named mental health issues among the top three major health concerns for children, compared with 65 percent who identified obesity and 54 percent who named drug and alcohol abuse.

Two out of three educators believed anxiety was the most common mental health issue for children and young people. One in five named depression.

The results come as **Beyond Blue Chair The Hon Julia Gillard, AC**, today visits her former secondary school, Unley High School, in South Australia.

Coinciding with the start of the new school year, Ms Gillard will visit Unley High to speak about Be You, Beyond Blue's new mental health initiative for schools and early learning services across Australia.

Unley High is one of more than 4,400 schools and early learning services that have signed up to Be You since it was launched in November 2018.

Ms Gillard said the online survey, conducted by Ipsos, showed that overwhelmingly, educators want to support students' mental health and wellbeing.

"Educators understand that mentally healthy kids learn better; that academic learning goes hand in hand with social and emotional learning; and that mentally healthy learning communities achieve the best outcomes for everyone – students, staff and families," Ms Gillard said.

Findings include that:

- 97 percent of survey respondents recognised the importance of working in an environment that valued staff mental health;
- Almost half – 46 percent – said they had difficulty knowing when it was appropriate to provide support to children and young people;
- While the majority (63 percent) said they have the confidence to address the mental health needs of their students nearly half said they needed the tools and resources to help them do so.

**Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman** said that Be You is specifically designed to address the concerns highlighted by the survey results.

"Be You will equip busy educators, principals and early learning professionals with the tools and information they need to handle the issues they are confronted with every day and to look after their own mental health," Ms Harman said.

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“We have to make it simple and easy; to give educators what they need so they can focus on teaching.”

Funded by the Commonwealth Government and delivered by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, Be You offers schools and early learning services free access to expert staff, strategies, accredited professional education and information about how to support good mental health and wellbeing, and when and how to support students who are struggling.

Ms Harman said: “In any given year, 560,000 young people in Australia experience a mental health issue and half of all mental health issues emerge before the age of 14. The earlier we step in and offer support, the better.

“Educators are not counsellors – and nobody expects them to be – but they know and care about the children and young people they teach. They are often the first to recognise when something’s not right and they want to know the best way to respond.”

Educators can claim completion of Be You learning modules towards their professional development requirements. Be You is available free to all 24,000 schools and early learning services in Australia. The initiative spans mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention and also provides a critical incident response service in the event of a suicide.

The Be You website [www.beyou.edu.au](http://www.beyou.edu.au) is the portal for all professional development, tools and services, and links to evidence-based programs, as well as the 70-strong support team on the ground to help learning communities day-to-day.

*Mental health professionals are available at the Beyond Blue Support Service via phone 24/7 on **1300 22 4636** or via [www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support) for online chat (3PM – 12AM AEST or email responses (within 24 hours).*

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