

29 March, 2020

Beyond Blue welcomes funding for new COVID-19 support service

Beyond Blue welcomes the Australian Government's \$1.1 billion immediate investment in more telehealth, mental health and family supports for those affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

As part of a \$74 million mental health package, Beyond Blue will receive \$10 million for a dedicated national mental health support service related to the coronavirus outbreak.

The new COVID-19 Mental Health Support Service, from Beyond Blue, will offer free information, counselling and referrals online and by phone.

It will provide options ranging from coping and wellbeing advice to digital self-help tools and counselling by mental health professionals for all Australians around the clock.

Beyond Blue will rapidly build and launch the new service, in partnership with Medibank Health Solutions and Accenture. The service will be continually updated with new information, and enhanced with other tools and supports, over the coming weeks and months.

Over the past week, there has been a 30 per cent increase in calls and emails to Beyond Blue's existing 24/7 Support Service and one in three contacts were from people directly impacted by the coronavirus.

In addition to the Commonwealth's \$10 million, Beyond Blue will direct a \$5 million donation by Medibank to the new COVID-19 Mental Health Support Service to provide as much capacity as possible to support Australians.

The Commonwealth's broad package, announced today, also includes \$669 million towards Medicare subsidies for telehealth, including mental health consultations for all Australians, and funding for Lifeline, Kids Helpline and a range of family violence and emergency relief supports for households.

Beyond Blue Chair, The Hon Julia Gillard AC, welcomed today's announcement, saying demand for mental health and wellbeing support and advice was growing.

"This pandemic is having profound impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of many Australians – we are seeing that with our current services," Ms Gillard said.

"People are looking for support to cope with the effects of widespread anxiety and uncertainty, self-isolation and loneliness, family stress, and business collapse, job loss and financial hardship caused by COVID-19.

"I commend the Prime Minister and federal Health Minister for committing to urgent, practical action at this very difficult time and we take the responsibility given to us very seriously."

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said it was normal to feel intense anxiety and stress, and to feel worried or overwhelmed in these unique times.

"We all react to stressful situations in different ways. Now more than ever, Australians need very accessible, concise and practical advice and support," Ms Harman said.

Ms Harman welcomed the expansion of Medicare subsidies to include mental health treatment by telehealth for all Australians, and encouraged people to reach out for support if they needed to.

“We’re all acutely aware of the potential for the virus to affect our physical health, and many Australians are doing the right things to protect themselves, their families and the amazing people on the frontline keeping us safe, treating us if we get sick, and keeping essential services going.

“And if we can help people to actively manage and seek support for their mental health now, we can stop that becoming more significant and overwhelming for people, families, communities and services down the track. This is about prevention.

“While the Beyond Blue Support Service will continue, this new and dedicated service, which we will work around the clock to build, will offer 24/7 online self-help tips and tools to help people cope and manage, professional counselling by phone, easy access to Beyond Blue’s online forums for peer-to-peer support, and navigate people to a range of other services and tools.

“We know that prevention and early intervention can reduce the impact of mental health issues, so a dedicated service that gives people easy to access support is vital, especially in these extraordinary circumstances.”

Beyond Blue has created a range of resources about COVID-19 and mental health at beyondblue.org.au

The online forum [Coping during the Coronavirus outbreak](#) discussion thread is already up and running and is attracting an average of 2000 views a day.

Mental health professionals will continue to be available on the Beyond Blue Support Service 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).