

12 October 2020

Support-seeking reduces distress and improves coping: research

Online and phone counselling services can reduce distress and enhance coping ability, research has found.

A peer-reviewed study published by the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* found just one phone or webchat session with a mental health professional from the Beyond Blue Support Service had immediate positive effects.

The evaluation, which involved more than 400 people, showed the service to be effective with the majority of participants taking some action, feeling less distressed and less hopeless. Among the findings:

- Three quarters of participants took further action to improve their mental health within three days of contacting Beyond Blue and 85 percent had done so within one month of contacting Beyond Blue;
- Distress levels dropped by an average of 42 per cent after just one contact with the service, and;
- Respondents' ability to cope improved by an average of 32 per cent.

Beyond Blue's support services have experienced strong demand this year, mostly due to the mental health impacts of the summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic.

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said the evaluation showed phone and online support was an effective way for people to begin learning ways to better manage their mental health.

"2020 has been an incredibly tough year and never before have we seen so many people taking that first step and seeking support for their mental health. These results remind us that it's never too early, or too late, to seek support – just one phone or webchat interaction with a Beyond Blue counsellor can provide immediate and effective results as well as a pathway to longer term support," Ms Harman said.

"Of course, this isn't the be all and end all. Some will require ongoing support from professionals, others will benefit from the wisdom of peer workers, while others will benefit from opening up to trusted friends, or using self-guided digital and online therapies that are backed by evidence. Many will benefit from a combination of all these approaches."

The Beyond Blue Support Service, which is funded by donations, is staffed by skilled mental health professionals who provide free counselling, advice and referrals. Ms Harman also encouraged people with concerns specifically about the COVID-19 pandemic, including its associated financial pressures, to access the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service, funded by the Australia Government and delivered by Beyond Blue.

"The Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service links people with mental health professionals online and over the phone to provide immediate counselling and referrals to fit their circumstances," Ms Harman said.

"Counsellors are briefed on the latest financial and small business lifelines available through governments and can refer people to those support networks as needed. The service also includes easy access to online peer support forums and digital self-help tools and advice.

"We will continue to evaluate our services so we can provide the best possible support to all Australians."

The full evaluation, by ARTD Consultants, is available [here](#).

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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.