

Media release

Free mental health support for drought affected Blue Mountains region

Drought affected communities across Lithgow and Hawkesbury can now access free mental health coaching support developed by Beyond Blue and delivered locally by Marathon Health.

The NewAccess program will be launched in Lithgow on Wednesday, July 10, and is available to people aged 16 years and over who live in the local government areas of Lithgow and Hawkesbury.

Farming communities in the region remain seriously affected by drought conditions, creating financial uncertainty and stress which can have lasting effects on people's mental health.

To access mental health services, people living in the area must often travel long distances, meaning some people aren't getting the help they need.

With many farmers, small business owners, workers and parents feeling the pressure, it is vital that people receive mental health support as early as possible to prevent their issues leading to more serious mental health conditions.

- In 2017, 17.2 per cent of people aged over 16 in the wider Nepean Blue Mountains area experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress, higher than the NSW average
- In 2016-17, 9,390 people were hospitalised for mental health reasons
- In 2016, the rate of deaths by suicide was 12.5 per 100,000 population, which is higher than the state average (10.3)

NewAccess is available to anyone feeling stressed, anxious, isolated or struggling to deal with difficult work or personal life challenges – getting on top of challenges like these can prevent conditions such as depression and/or anxiety developing further.

The program is funded by the Australian Government via Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (PHN).

NewAccess pairs people with a mental health coach trained in Low Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Over six free sessions, coaches give people the skills they need to get on top of the issues causing their distress.

NewAccess coaches come from a range of backgrounds including teachers, parents and public servants.

Coaches will develop individual recovery plans for each person, empowering them to manage their own mental health especially if those issues arise again.

The program is available in person, by phone and via Skype and Facetime, making it easier for people living in rural areas to access quality support without long delays.

A doctor's referral is not required but general practitioners can refer patients to NewAccess.

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Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said: “Easy and affordable access to local mental health services in our regions is crucial. Having someone who understands the constant pressures of drought on local families and communities can make a world of difference.

“We know country people are resilient, but no one is immune to the kind of stress that comes with life changing events like this drought.

“NewAccess allows people to get mental health support early; it’s free, accessible from home, confidential and it gives people practical ways to regain control of their mental health.”

Federal Member for Calare, Andrew Gee said: “This drought is taking a physical, economic and also a huge emotional toll on our farmers across the region and sometimes being able to talk to someone can make all the difference.”

“I’m proud the Federal Government is supporting our farmers and our regional communities through the NewAccess program because it’s important everyone has the right tools to be able to offer support at this crucial time.”

Wentworth Healthcare CEO Lizz Reay, said: "We know 'one size doesn't fit all' when seeking support for our well-being. What may be helpful or accessible for one person isn't necessarily right for the next. People in rural and remote communities particularly need access to services that don't involve them taking time off the land.

"The NewAccess program is part of a suite of mental health services we are funding to ensure people get the right care, in the right place, at the right time."

Marathon Health Acting CEO Garry Burton said Marathon Health is very pleased to work with Beyond Blue and the Nepean Blue Mountains PHN to deliver NewAccess in the region.

“Considering the struggles in this region, due to the drought and tough economic situation, it’s a timely service that aims to give control back to the people. We hope to empower individuals with the skills to help them get through it,” he said.

To register or to find out more about NewAccess in Lithgow and Hawksbury

- Call (02) 6333 2838
- Go to www.marathonhealth.com.au/newaccess

Lithgow launch details

Wednesday, July 10 – Lithgow Workies Club, 3 -7 Tank Street, Lithgow from 10.30am-12pm

Available for interview:

Beyond Blue CEO, Georgie Harman (upon request)

NewAccess coaches – Shelly Ryan and Prue Mogg

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