



**Submission to:**

## *Senate Select Committee on Men's Health*

**March 2009**

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*beyondblue: opening our eyes to depression throughout Australia*



## Senate Select Committee on Men's Health

*beyondblue: the national depression initiative* welcomes the opportunity to formally respond via the submission process to the Senate Select Committee on Men's Health. In making this submission, *beyondblue* has focused on **mental health issues**, in particular the high prevalence mental disorders of depression and anxiety, and has responded on areas that are most relevant to our areas of work.

This submission is structured according to the Committee's areas of investigation, namely:

1. level of Commonwealth, state and other funding addressing men's health, particularly prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and depression,
2. adequacy of existing education and awareness campaigns regarding men's health for both men and the wider community,
3. prevailing attitudes of men towards their own health and sense of wellbeing and how these are affecting men's health in general, and
4. extent, funding and adequacy for treatment services and general support programs for men's health in metropolitan, rural, regional and remote areas.

Throughout the submission we provide relevant information on *beyondblue* depression and anxiety activities that relate to the areas of investigation, and provide recommendations where appropriate.

### About *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*

*beyondblue: the national depression initiative* is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia.

*beyondblue* works in partnership with health services, schools, workplaces, universities, media and community organisations, as well as people living with depression and their carers, to bring together their expertise. Specific population groups that *beyondblue* targets due to the high prevalence of depression and anxiety are young people, Indigenous peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in rural areas, men and the elderly.

*beyondblue* has five priority areas that it structures its work around. These are:

1. Increasing community awareness of depression, anxiety and related substance use disorders;
2. Providing people living with depression and their carers with information on the illness and effective treatment options and promoting their needs and experiences with policy makers and healthcare providers;
3. Developing depression prevention and early intervention programs;
4. Improving depression training and support for general practitioners and other healthcare professionals;
5. Initiating and supporting depression-related research.

## 1. Level of Commonwealth, state and other funding – depression

*beyondblue*: the national depression initiative is an independent, not for profit organisation. *beyondblue* was originally funded for five years over 2000-2005 and was extended for a second term (2006-2010). The *beyondblue* Board strongly supports *beyondblue* to continue to operate beyond 2010.

Major sources of funding are the Australian and Victorian Governments, with all other States and Territories funding partners for the second term to 2010. *beyondblue* also receives financial support, donations and in-kind support from numerous non-government organisations and individuals. While men are one of the priority population groups of *beyondblue*'s work, no specific portion of funding is allocated to men through funding agreement arrangements.

Since *beyondblue*'s establishment in October 2000, it has been the policy of the *beyondblue* board not to accept funding from or partner with pharmaceutical companies. None of *beyondblue*'s programs or research activities are funded by pharmaceutical companies. This allows *beyondblue* to retain independence and impartiality and promote evidence-based approaches to depression, anxiety and related disorders across all program areas.

### Men's health and mental health relevant to funding considerations

Men's health and wellbeing is generally poorer than women's. Men have a lower life expectancy than women (78.6 years compared to 83.5 years),<sup>1</sup> and experience 70 per cent of the burden of disease for injuries, including 78 per cent of the burden for suicide, 73 per cent for road accidents and 71 per cent for homicides and violence<sup>2</sup>. Many of the risk factors which cause chronic disease are also higher among men than women. These risk factors include tobacco smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, alcohol misuse, and overweight and obesity.<sup>3</sup>

The prevalence of depression, anxiety and substance use disorders differ for men and women. Men are less likely to experience a mental disorder than women, across all ages, however, this picture changes when looking at different types of mental disorders. Figure 1 below shows that when compared to women, men have:

- higher levels of substance use disorders, across all age groups. The prevalence of substance use disorders decreases with age;
- lower levels of anxiety disorders, across all age groups. However, anxiety disorders are still a major concern, with 15% of men aged 35-44 years experiencing an anxiety disorder;
- lower levels of affective disorders (ie, depression) across age groups, however within the 35-44 year age group the levels are almost equal (8.3% for men; 8.4% for women).

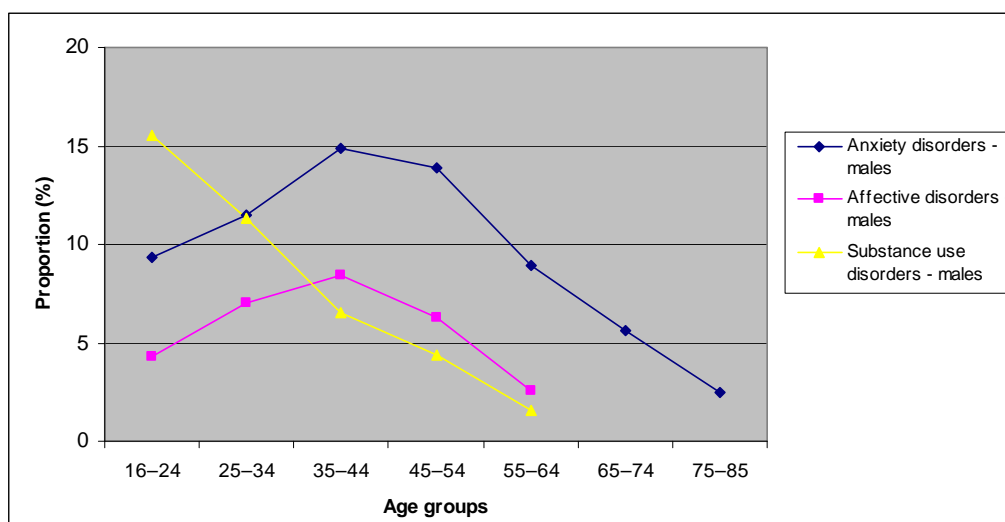


Figure 1: Proportion of men with mental disorder by age group<sup>4</sup>

Of major concern is the significantly higher rate of suicide in men compared to women. Men account for 80% of deaths by suicide in Australia.<sup>5</sup> In 2005, 1,657 men (16.6 per 100,000) and 444 women (4.4 per 100,000) died by suicide.<sup>6</sup> As outlined in Figures 1 and 2 (below), men in the middle years have higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders, and are at greater risk of dying by suicide.

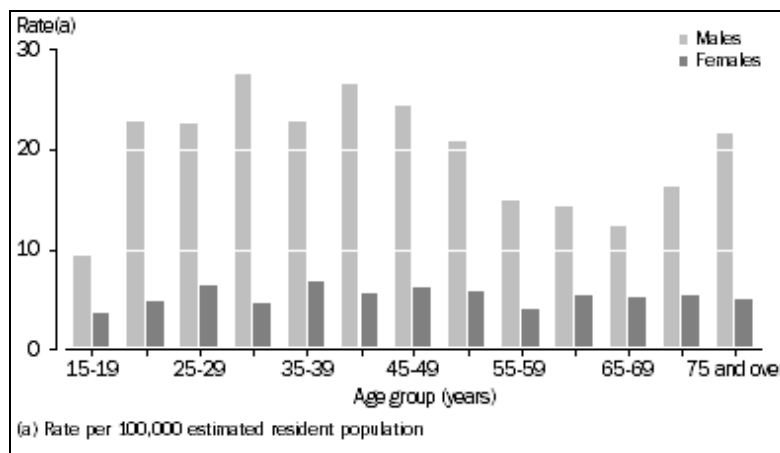


Figure 2: Age-specific suicide rates for males and females (2005), by age group<sup>7</sup>

Relationship breakdown increases the likelihood of men developing depression and anxiety and attempting suicide. While the causal relationship between suicide, mental health and everyday stressors is unclear, having a diagnosed mental illness is a risk factor for suicide. To this end, *beyondblue* has supported research to enhance general practice's capacity to identify depression and suicidal risk factors amongst men (Reducing Suicide in Men through General Practice – the SIM Study<sup>8</sup>).

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### Recommendation

Funding provided at all levels of government for men's health should be appropriate and proportionate relevant to illness and burden of disease. For example, greater resource distribution for:

- mental health interventions in men 35-54 years;
  - risky drinking behaviour in young men 18-24 years;
  - suicide prevention in men in middle years 30-49 years.
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## 2. Existing education and awareness campaigns

Increasing men's awareness of the signs and symptoms of depression remains a key priority for *beyondblue* as there is a low level of awareness of men's mental health problems generally amongst men and the broader community – despite their high prevalence and debilitating impact. Depression, anxiety and substance use disorders have a significant impact on men's health in the community, with 18% of men experiencing a mental disorder (ie, anxiety, affective or substance use disorder) at any one time<sup>9</sup>.

The *beyondblue* Depression Monitor is a regular survey of 3,200 Australians which provides additional information surrounding mental health awareness. In the most recent 2007/08 survey, the data demonstrated that:

- men were less likely than women to rate mental health issues as a major health problem in Australia (6% of men compared to 9% of women);
- men were much less likely than women to mention depression as a major mental health problem (45% of men compared to 66% of women);
- men were twice as likely as women to say they 'didn't know' what the major mental health problems in Australia were (21% of men compared to 10% of women); and
- men were less able to identify most of the signs and symptoms of depression than women.

While there is still work to be done, below are examples of *beyondblue*'s men's mental health education and awareness campaigns that have been, and continue to be successful, in raising awareness of mental health issues amongst men and the general community.

### *Don't beat about the bush! campaign*

The *beyondblue* *Don't beat about the bush!* campaign aims to raise awareness of depression and related disorders in rural communities and provide information on where to get help. The campaign involves a range of initiatives, including the availability of *beyondblue* information materials on Centrelink drought assistance buses, distribution of information and education resources in rural areas, and links with the Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative (MHDI).

MHDI is jointly funded by the Australian Government, is currently being implemented in partnership by *beyondblue* and the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN). Under this initiative, 43 Divisions of General Practice (DGP) in drought affected communities across Australia have engaged a Community Support Worker to provide crisis counselling and community outreach. *beyondblue* is working with the Community Support Workers to raise awareness of depression and anxiety through education and training, provision of rural specific resources, and various other community activities that promote mental health awareness and enhance the capacity of rural communities to deal with the impact of the drought.

As part of this initiative *beyondblue* is delivering Rural Workforce Training workshops to business and community leaders such as local hairdressers, newsagents, publicans and bank managers, who see people regularly and are in a position to know when people are facing tough times.

Evaluation of the Rural Workforce Training undertaken to date shows that:

- 96% of participants reported that they had increased their awareness and understanding of depression;
- 88% of participants reported an increased knowledge of local resources;
- 95% of participants reported that the program provided relevant information; and
- 98% of participants said they would recommend the session to others.

As a result of the workshops many participants have established *beyondblue* Information Kiosks in local community and business sites. These Kiosks offer the general public access to information on depression and anxiety at anytime. These are supported by *beyondblue*'s online Rural Assistance Information Network (RAIN) map which details Kiosk sites, as well as other relevant drought and health agencies such as Centrelink and rural counselling services.

Since the commencement of this program, 50 *beyondblue* Rural Workforce Training workshops have been delivered, 40 Information Kiosks established, and 85,000 Drought Resource Kits have been disseminated to rural communities in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.

### **Men's Sheds**

A Men's Shed is a place that men (particularly older men) come together to socialise, network, make friends, and learn and share skills. Typically, men undertake a wide variety of different activities in sheds – for example, woodwork, metal work, car and furniture restoration, photography, ceramics, leatherwork, arts and crafts. A Men's Shed can also be a safe space where men feel confident in gathering in a gender friendly environment that encourages discussion and sharing of information. *beyondblue* is promoting awareness of depression and anxiety, and providing information and resources, through community-based Men's Sheds (see also 4. Treatment Services and General Support Programs).

To support the Men's Shed program, *beyondblue* has developed a Depression Awareness Training program for shed leaders and facilitators. The program provides leaders of Men's Sheds with the skills to recognise the signs and symptoms of depression, to instil confidence to approach someone who they're concerned about, and to support the person to seek assistance.

The training program was successfully piloted at the Brimbank Men's Shed (western Melbourne), and the Murtoa Men's Shed (regional Victoria). This training program has been evaluated and shown positive outcomes and is now being rolled out nationally.

*"The training reinforced some of my existing knowledge, which in itself is a good thing, and I especially found the group case study discussion really useful, as well as the one around the signs to look out for. These discussions have 'raised my antenna' again and I'm now going to be even more conscious of these issues and approaches as our Shed progresses."*

*beyondblue and Men's Sheds have a great future as partners in our joint efforts to create more happy and healthy men, families and communities."*

Men's shed leader

### **Depression Awareness Activities for Men with Prostate Cancer**

*beyondblue* has partnered with the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia (PCFA) to increase awareness of depression and anxiety amongst men diagnosed with prostate cancer and their partners. *beyondblue* and PCFA have developed a Memorandum of Understanding to guide the collaborative work between the agencies. A joint work plan has been developed to ensure a targeted and comprehensive approach is adopted, and all men who receive a prostate cancer diagnosis and their partners, receive timely and useful information about depression and anxiety.

In 2008 *beyondblue* supported the PCFA community forums and national conference. This included a *beyondblue* speaker promoting awareness of depression and anxiety and providing a suite of information resources.

A prostate cancer and depression and anxiety Fact Sheet has been developed and a comprehensive Information Booklet is currently being produced. This resource is being developed in consultation with men living with prostate cancer, and is drawing on outcomes of a *beyondblue* focus group on the emotional health of men with prostate cancer.

### **SMS Depression Awareness Campaign**

*beyondblue* has partnered with Convenience Advertising to pilot an innovative SMS depression awareness campaign targeting men, incorporating posters and coasters in hotels, bars and general public access areas (eg, airports). As the majority of employees in the mining community are men, the campaign currently includes 60 display points across 11 venues in Kalgoorlie and Broome.

On either the poster or coaster, individuals are invited to text a key word to receive information via SMS, mail or email or to be connected to the *beyondblue* info line (see 4. Treatment Services and General Support Programs for information on this service). Interim results from the three-month pilot program indicate the campaign has successfully engaged men to access information on depression.

### ***Tailored National Workplace Program to national professional sporting organisations***

The *beyondblue* National Professional Sports Program major goals are to increase awareness of depression and related disorders in professional sports people and support staff; and to increase the confidence of sports people and support staff in these areas to assist someone who may be experiencing depression or a related disorder. The program is delivered by sports psychologists.

### ***AFL Training***

The Australian Football League (AFL) and the AFL Players' Association (AFLPA) joined with *beyondblue* to tackle depression, anxiety and related problems among AFL players and staff who work with them. A training session called Tackling Depression was presented to players, coaching and administrative staff clubs across Australia, umpires, AFL staff and the AFLPA throughout 2007.

The *beyondblue* "Tackling Depression and Related Disorders in the AFL Program" won the Australian Institute of Training and Development National Award for 2008 in the "Excellence in Learning Resource" category. This award was deemed to present an excellent adaptation of an existing resource targeting a specific market based on survey data for customisation.

### ***Professional Golfers Association (PGA) Training***

A professional golfing workshop for coaches was developed in partnership with the PGA and the sessions were delivered to over 300 golf coaches nationally in October 2007. A training DVD resource has been developed for the *beyondblue*/PGA golf club workshops. This includes an interview with professional golfer, Steven Bowditch, regarding his experience of depression and recovery.

Distribution of materials was also provided to over 900 attendees at the PGA Golf Show on the Gold Coast. Further distribution of *beyondblue* materials has occurred from May 2008 throughout 700 PGA golf shops. *beyondblue*/PGA co-branded materials have been delivered to all golf clubs in Australia. These include counter stands for golf pro shops or club reception areas and an invitation for the club to book a free workshop for their employees and members.

### ***Australian Cricketers Association***

The Australian Cricketers' Association ran *beyondblue* workshops for players (male and female) and administrators at the beginning of the 2008/09 season. A DVD training resource was produced which includes interviews with well-known cricketers about their experiences of depression and recovery.

The *beyondblue* National Professional Sports Program has also been provided to the Rugby Union Players Association and Wheelchair Sports Australia, with additional discussions underway with a number of other sporting codes regarding the roll-out of the program to players.

### ***Tackling depression in young footballers program***

*beyondblue* and AFL Victoria teamed up to raise awareness about depression among young footballers and inform them how to help a mate who may be experiencing a tough time.

AFL Victoria approached *beyondblue* to develop a program that would:

- help players, coaches, club officials and families to spot signs that may indicate someone in the club is struggling
- give people the skills to support a person experiencing depression
- provide information on where help is available.

The depression-awareness program was piloted in two leagues in metropolitan Melbourne - the Essendon District Football League and the Moorabbin Saints Junior Football League. Over six weeks during July and August 2007, approximately 500 young players attended six information sessions. Based on appraisal and survey data, the program has potential for national application.

## **Movember**

Since 2006 *beyondblue* has been a beneficiary partner of The Movember Foundation. *beyondblue* works with Movember to:

- generate awareness of depression, anxiety and related disorders;
- reduce the associated stigma;
- encourage men to talk about these conditions;
- encourage men to seek help for themselves or their mates for depression and related disorders during Movember.

Movember (held in the month of November) is a moustache promotion charity event that raises funds and awareness for *beyondblue* and Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia on men's health. Movember has been very popular and successful, with over 124,000 participants in 2008<sup>10</sup>. In addition to raising funds to support *beyondblue* and the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, Movember has raised awareness of men's health issues. Research conducted by the Movember Foundation indicates that 73% of Movember participants had discussed depression and/or prostate cancer with family, friends or colleagues and almost 30% had encouraged others to seek medical help. Movember has achieved this success by offering a fun opportunity to support a good cause, and having a high level of social acceptance<sup>11</sup>.

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## **Recommendations**

1. Specific and targeted general health and wellbeing campaigns should be developed for:
  - young men (18-25 years)
  - older men (>60 years)
  - fathers
  - rural men
  - men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
2. Targeted health promotion messages for men should be created in a variety of mediums such as print, radio, television, internet etc to enable increased accessibility.
3. Tailored men's health messages and information should be delivered to men in a broad range of settings, including child care facilities, the workplace and general magazines/reading material that targets men.
4. Awareness of men's health issues to be improved through innovative and targeted initiatives, using appropriate technologies.
5. New campaigns should build on successful examples (eg, *beyondblue*'s campaigns targeting depression) to promote health issues and help-seeking behaviour among men utilising mediums that have resonance for the target group (eg, text message information for young men).
6. Health promotion messages targeting men must address the factors that influence help seeking behaviour including:
  - poor access to and limited knowledge about appropriate services<sup>12</sup>; and
  - the culture of stoicism and self reliance that can result in delays in seeking help until symptoms are severe and disabling<sup>13</sup>.
7. Community-based sporting clubs and facilities should be utilised as a setting to deliver health messages to men in different communities.
8. Targeted health messages for adolescent and young men should continue, however, these should not only focus on health issues but also focus on behavioural and attitudinal factors (eg, risky levels of drinking, sexual activity/behaviour).
9. Agencies should develop resources in consultation with men's health professionals and men who are affected by the health condition in question.

### 3. Attitudes of men toward their own health and wellbeing

#### Help seeking by men for depression and other mental health issues

Figure 3 below shows that over 70% of men with a mental disorder do not access services for their mental health problem and that lower rates of men (less than 20%) see their general practitioner for mental health issues than women (30%). More generally, men use all services within the health care system to a lesser extent than women, and women have a greater acceptance of, and therefore use of, the range of health care services available.<sup>14</sup> This indicates that there are significant opportunities to improve the attitudes of men toward their mental health, wellbeing, behaviours (eg, risky drinking), and their subsequent attitude to help-seeking regarding these issues.

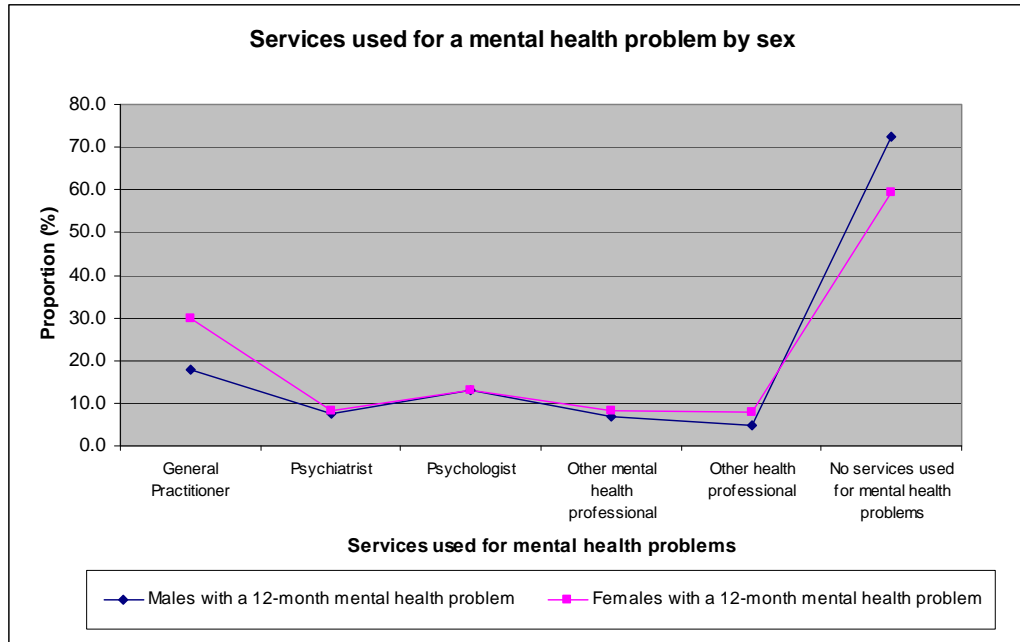


Figure 3: Types of services used for mental health problems (by those with a mental disorder)<sup>15</sup>

The 2007/08 *beyondblue* Depression Monitor survey data in relation to depression and the public's perceptions regarding General Practitioners showed a high proportion of respondents (78 per cent) said they would feel embarrassed to talk about depression with their doctor. Half indicated that this may be because they did not believe their doctor would take their care seriously. In addition:

- one third believed GPs are too busy to deal with depression;
- just over half thought GPs spend too little time with them;
- 17 per cent said GPs feel irritated and annoyed when dealing with depression;
- 42 per cent believed GPs prescribe medication without proper diagnosis; and
- one third thought that when dealing with depression, GPs feel other people are in more urgent need of treatment.

Improving health professionals' capacity and willingness to recognise and manage depression and anxiety may be a key factor in improving the help seeking behaviours of both Australian men and women.

#### Use of high profile men to challenge attitudes

*beyondblue's* community awareness campaigns have utilised high profile men telling their story of depression and anxiety and modelling help seeking behaviours in an effort to influence attitudes and behaviours. *beyondblue* has also developed a DVD to promote the key *beyondblue* issues and messages.

The “Stories of Hope and Recovery” DVD provides personal stories on depression and provides interviews with the following high profile men:

- The Hon Jeff Kennett (*beyondblue* Chairman)
- *beyondblue* Board Director and actor Garry McDonald
- Journalist Craig Hamilton (experience with bipolar disorder)
- Former Olympic swimmer John Konrads (experience with bipolar disorder)
- Former footballer Nathan Thompson (experience with depression)
- Dr Grant Blashki, Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne (clinical perspectives).

Sports stars are in an ideal position to be role models. They have traditionally been perceived as epitomising social ideals and embodying the masculine virtues that are generally held as favourable in Australian society. In addition to this, the sphere of influence sports stars have is ever expanding. A recent article on the role sports stars play in modelling behaviour stated that “the public knowledge of the personal lives of athletes is greater today than it has been in any point in history ... providing a means of social influence to large numbers of people”.<sup>16</sup> Sports stars, therefore, have an enormous capacity to inspire and motivate people to adopt positive behaviour.

### ***Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) men***

Discrimination and cultural factors play an important role in attitudes and behaviours regarding health, particularly mental health. Studies have highlighted that a variety of factors can act as barriers to people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds accessing health services, including:

- lack of knowledge about available services;
- language and cultural barriers;
- GP referral patterns; and
- stigma associated with mental illness.

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### **Recommendations**

1. Priority must be given to increasing awareness and understanding of men’s health issues through campaigns and education (as outlined in Section 2) as an essential first step in changing attitudes and help-seeking behaviour.
  2. High profile men, particularly sportsmen, should be utilised to convey attitude shaping messages to men about their health and health behaviour.
  3. A range of mediums and venues should be utilised to convey health information and messages that reach CALD men within their communities. This may include campaigns and advertising in ethnic media, and the provision of information through ethnic and multicultural organisations and community groups (for example, senior clubs/groups and religious organisations).
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## 4. Treatment services and general support programs

Below is a range of support programs and interventions provided/supported by *beyondblue*.

### *beyondblue* info line

The *beyondblue* info line is a national telephone service providing depression information and referral services to the general public. When established, the info line was promoted strongly to men – particularly those in rural areas, as this group was known to be the least likely to access information about mental health issues. The campaigns have been very successful in generating help seeking amongst men. The *beyondblue* info line receives more calls from men than any other helpline, except Mensline. Men account for more than 46 per cent of calls from regional areas and more than 56 per cent of calls from rural areas to the info line.

People call the *beyondblue* info line for a variety of reasons. The most recent data on caller status show that half of all calls made are from people seeking information for themselves, with a third seeking information for a family member or friend. A further 15 per cent of callers are health professionals seeking information about depression, anxiety and related disorders.

The high level of use, together with the delivery of a quality service, has ensured the continuation and expansion of the *beyondblue* info line.

*"Thank you for helping me. When I called I was suffering from depression, and I didn't realise what I could do about it.*

*Since talking to you, I have seen my GP, and with a combination of antidepressants, counselling and some changes to my lifestyle, I'm starting to feel much better. Thanks to you for turning my life around."*

*beyondblue* info line caller

### *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men experience significantly lower levels of health than the general Australian community. This inequality in health status is evident for both physical and mental health, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being twice as likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress as the general population<sup>17</sup>.

### *Indigenous Men's Sheds/Spaces Pilot Project*

*beyondblue* is working with the Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) to support their *Indigenous Men's Sheds/Spaces Pilot Project* in 2007/2008. The program will evaluate existing Indigenous Men's Sheds/Spaces in seven regional sites in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Local Indigenous men will be employed in the role of Project Associates (PAs) who will use participatory action-research methods to help evaluate how Indigenous men's sheds work at a local level to provide support and information to members, particularly on how chronic illness and depression is understood and managed.

The concept of a 'men's shed' is fluid and highly contextual. Studying men's sheds in a range of sites will lead to the development of a set of protocols for working with Indigenous and other men's sheds across Australia.

*beyondblue* has developed a Men's Shed Kit that includes a range of existing *beyondblue* resources that are relevant and useful to men attending a Men's Shed. The Kit includes:

- Information cards and depression checklists;
- Fact sheets on a range of topics including depression in men; grief, loss and depression; and depression in older people;

- DVDs on *Don't beat about the bush!* (featuring male farmers speaking about depression and mental health) and *Stories of Hope and Recovery* (see *Use of high profile men to challenge attitudes* in section 3);
- Wristbands and magnets;
- Books – *Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family*, *beyondblue Research 2001-2007*, *How to organise a public forum on depression in your community*, and *What Works for Older People*;
- Rural men and depression posters; and
- A *beyondblue* bag.

Since October 2008, 154 Men's Shed Kits have been distributed across Australia.

*"The kits we have already dispensed have been well received at the sheds so far and are an extremely valuable resource – especially the two DVD's – very user friendly for blokes."*

Men's Health Worker

### ***Interventions for men experiencing cancer through supported research***

*beyondblue* is supporting a number of researchers investigating the link between depression and men's cancers, including the development of effective interventions to improve the mental health and wellbeing of men with cancer and their partners.

#### **Living with Advanced Prostate Cancer - A mindfulness group intervention for men with advanced prostate cancer**

This intervention is being developed and delivered in partnership with the Cancer Council Queensland. It is focused on the needs of men with advanced prostate cancer and will identify effective methods of intervention to address their high levels of psychological distress.

#### **Existential Couple Therapy for Men with Early Stage Prostate Cancer and their Partners**

This research is being conducted by a team of Victorian based researchers and aims to reduce the psychological distress and deteriorated social functioning in both members of the couple in the months following diagnosis of early prostate cancer.

#### **An assessment of the prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety and psychosocial distress amongst Australian survivors of testicular cancer**

This new research will lead to better design, focus and timing of interventions to improve long-term psychosocial outcomes. The research is being led by Professor Ian Olver and the University of Sydney, and is being funded through the *beyondblue*/Cancer Australia Priority-Driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme.

#### **Reducing suicide risk in men through general practice (the SIM Study)**

This research was led by Dr Grant Blashki, University of Melbourne. The aims of the study were to:

- Develop a training course for GPs on the assessment and management of suicide risk in men who present to general practice.
- Evaluate the impact of this training on GP knowledge, attitudes and competence in the assessment and management of suicide risk in men.
- Evaluate the impact of the course on GPs' ability to navigate their local mental health system to obtain specialist advice in a crisis situation with a patient at risk of suicide.

The evaluation demonstrated that the training improved GPs' attitude to the management of suicidality in men.

#### **The assessment of the impact of anti-depressants on men's and their partners' sexual desire, sexual functioning and intimate relationship**

This research, led by Professor Leon Piterman at Monash University, demonstrated that depression and anti-depressant use impacts on a couple's sexual desire, functioning and relationship.

## Support Program for Transport Workers

*beyondblue* has formed a partnership with the truck drivers' support group Trans-help Foundation to provide free depression tests and resources during its national road show. Launched in August 2008, the Trans-help Mobile Health and Support Unit is visiting major truck events around the country providing transport drivers with basic physical and mental health check ups. The van is equipped with a computer; enabling visitors to take online health checks, as well as a TV playing *beyondblue's Don't beat about the bush!* DVD. *beyondblue* pamphlets and fact sheets covering depression and anxiety are also available, as is a co-badged Trans-help/*beyondblue* wallet card and brochure (see below).

### Depression in the Transport Industry

At [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) there is a depression checklist which can indicate if you, or the person you're concerned about, may have depression. Go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and click on Symptom Checklists.

It's important to seek help early. A doctor will be able to tell if a person is depressed and may assist the person or refer him/her to a psychiatrist or psychologist for specialist mental health treatment.

#### HOW TO GET TREATMENT

There are some things men can do to get the treatment they need.

**Be proactive:** As with physical health problems, the earlier men get help, the faster they can recover. That's why it's very important to get help at the first sign of any problems.

**Be direct:** It's important to give the doctor or mental health professional the full picture. Writing down feelings or questions before seeing a mental health professional can help men be more direct and makes it less likely they will forget to tell the doctor the important things. As a way of raising the issue when visiting the doctor, it may be useful to take a completed depression checklist along, such as the one on the *beyondblue* website. Go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and click on Symptom Checklists.

Finding the right mental health professional is very important. If people don't feel comfortable with a doctor or other health professional, or suspect their mental health isn't being managed effectively, they should choose another doctor or get a second opinion.

On the *beyondblue* website there is a list of doctors who have completed special mental health training and have expertise in treating depression and anxiety-related disorders. Go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and click on Find a Doctor or other Mental Health Practitioner.

### Depression in the Transport Industry

**Be persistent:** For some people, it can take a while before they feel well again. It's important to stick with treatment plans and let the doctor know when things aren't working or if the person is experiencing side-effects. This is important for a person's long-term recovery. Go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 11 on Antidepressant medication.

With psychological or medical treatment, people can recover. Go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 5 "Why use both psychological treatments and medications for depression?".

#### THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Depression in men is common and treatable.
- Help is available.
- With the right treatment, most people recover from depression.
- It's important to seek help early – the sooner the better.
- Depression is an illness, not a weakness and men shouldn't feel ashamed to seek help.

This fact sheet was produced in association with



**Trans-Help Foundation**  
Support for Australian truckers and their families when in need  
Helpline 1300 787 996  
[www.transhelpfoundation.com.au](http://www.transhelpfoundation.com.au)

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## Depression in the Transport Industry

One in five people will experience depression at some point in their lives.

Find out more about depression, the effective treatments available and how to help someone.

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#### DEPRESSION IN THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Working in the transport industry can be difficult. You are often away from your family and friends for long periods of time, and it can be lonely on the road. Depression affects people from all walks of life, including truck drivers. If depression is not detected, it can't be treated. It then has the potential to become severe and disabling.

It's vital that all transport drivers learn to recognise depression in themselves and their mates because depression is treatable and effective treatments are available.

#### WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness that requires attention.

People with depression find it hard to function every day. Depression can have serious effects on physical and mental health.

#### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF SOMEONE IS DEPRESSED AND NOT JUST SAD?

A person may be depressed, if for more than two weeks they have...

1. Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, OR
2. Lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities

AND experienced symptoms in at least three of the following four categories:

- 1) **Behaviour**
  - General slowing down or restlessness
  - Neglecting responsibilities and not looking after themselves
  - Withdrawing from family and friends
  - Becoming confused, worried and agitated
  - Inability to find pleasure in any activity
- 2) **Thoughts**
  - Indecisiveness
  - Loss of self-esteem
  - Persistent suicidal thoughts
  - Taking negatively e.g. "I'm a failure.", "It's my fault.", "Life isn't worth living."
  - Worrying about finances
  - Perceived change of status within the family
- 3) **Feelings**
  - Moodiness or irritability – this can come across as anger or aggression
  - Sadness, hopelessness or emptiness
  - Feeling overwhelmed, worthless or guilty
- 4) **Physical**
  - Sleeping more or less than usual
  - Feeling tired all the time
  - Unexplained headaches, backache or similar complaints
  - Digestive upsets, nausea, changes in bowel habits
  - Agitation, hand-wringing, pacing
  - Loss or change of appetite
  - Significant weight loss or gain

Everyone experiences some or all of these symptoms from time to time, but when symptoms are severe and lasting, it's time to get professional medical help.

**Early detection and treatment may help to keep depression from becoming severe.**

#### Factors which can contribute to depression in men

- Using drugs and alcohol
- Physical health problems
- Relationship problems
- Employment problems
- Social isolation
- Significant change in living arrangements (e.g. separation or divorce)

Studies show that men are at greater risk of their depression going unrecognised and untreated when compared to women. This is thought to relate to several factors.

Men generally tend to put off getting help for health problems, as they may think they are supposed to be tough, self-reliant, manage pain and take charge of situations. This can make it hard for men to acknowledge they have a health problem, especially a mental health problem. It is also very common for men to manage their symptoms by using alcohol and other drugs which make the symptoms worse.

#### HOW COMMON IS DEPRESSION?

It's very common. Around one million Australian adults live with depression each year. On average, one in six men and one in four women will experience depression in their adult lifetime.

It's important to seek treatment for depression as untreated depression may become more severe, and in some cases, can be a risk factor for suicide.

#### WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION?

**Depression is treatable**

Different types of depression require different types of treatment. This may include physical exercise for preventing and treating mild depression, through to psychological treatments and/or drug treatments for moderate or severe depression.

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## Recommendations

1. Funding and support for dedicated helpline services to men must continue, with an 80% response rate target.
2. To ensure culturally appropriate health services, Indigenous services must be:
  - developed and delivered in partnership with Indigenous organisations;
  - designed using community development principles, where communities are supported to develop and implement local solutions;
  - culturally competent and inclusive in their planning and service delivery, and
  - innovative and use a range of strategies to disseminate information on providing practical support to help people access required health services.
3. Differences between remote, rural and urban Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander men must be recognised and incorporated in to tailored approaches and initiatives/programs<sup>18</sup>.
4. Future programs targeting specific population groups, ie, Indigenous men, men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, must be:
  - provided in locations accessible to the population group;
  - developed and delivered using culturally sensitive and appropriate materials and approaches; and
  - involve the population group in the delivery where possible, through training, education and support.
5. Affordable, translated information and interpreting services must be accessible for CALD men at health services.
6. Governments should support health services to be more responsive to men by:
  - developing practical guidelines and resources to assist health services to understand the needs of men in their region, and tailor the health services to meet these needs;
  - influencing training and education of health professionals to ensure health services are able to effectively engage with men
  - offering health priority screening services with all consultations (eg, blood pressure, diabetes check, depression check, prostate check);
7. Prevention and early intervention programs, including health messages, should be integrated into existing social networks and groups.
8. Age appropriate initiatives such as community-based Men's Sheds should be supported and further developed.
9. Organisations and settings that provide older men with a safe place to gather and share information (eg, health centres, RSL clubs, bowling clubs) must be recognised as legitimate places of health support.
10. Existing program models (eg, *beyondblue* Men's Shed depression awareness training program) should be utilised or modified for general or specific men's health message dissemination.
11. Research that facilitates innovative interventions and responses to men's health issues must be continued as a priority, particularly research into help-seeking behaviours and the psychosocial impact of men's health conditions.

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For further information or discussion, or to work with *beyondblue* on these matters, please contact Ms Yvette Pollard, Manager Research and Policy on 03 9810 6119 or [yvette.pollard@beyondblue.org.au](mailto:yvette.pollard@beyondblue.org.au).

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