

MEDIA RELEASE

Mental health initiative begins in Bendigo

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A service providing mental health “check-ups” in GP clinics begins in Bendigo today.

Murray PHN has partnered with the Black Dog Institute to introduce the *StepCare in General Practice* program to the region, to help people get the right care, in the right place and at the right time.

The program lets patients complete a short, voluntary survey on a tablet that gives an instant assessment of their mental health while they wait in their GP’s waiting room. The application then emails the assessment directly to the patient with a range of targeted Black Dog self-help resources, and to the patient’s doctor, with treatment suggestions.

The White Hills Medical Practice started the program today. Spring Gully Primary Health will introduce the program later this week, while the Bendigo Community Health Service at Eaglehawk, Elmore Primary Health and Echuca Moama Family Medical Practice will commence in the near future.

Murray PHN CEO, Matt Jones, said many people did not seek help for mental health issues because of the fear of stigma.

“Starting the conversation is the first step in helping people, and GPs are often best-placed to do that. This is a focus on early intervention that identifies issues and deals with mental ill health before it can escalate,” Mr Jones said.

“Illnesses such as depression and anxiety have been shown to lower quality of life, increase suicide risk and even worsen the outcomes of other physical and mental health problems,” he said.

White Hills Medical Practice Principal, Dr Fady Henry, said he hopes the program will result in better mental health outcomes for patients at the clinic.

“We are very excited to be involved in this brilliant program. Patients sometimes don’t realise the mental health effect on their physical health, and this program will help us identify some of those who need mental health attention. We are also happy with the information that the Black Dog Institute will offer those who need quick intervention,” Dr Henry said.

Digital technology is increasingly recognised as a positive tool to help people suffering from mood-related disorders such as depression. In trials in other parts of Australia, practice staff and GPs rated the online assessment as an acceptable service to undertake.

Murray PHN is initially introducing this program to 10 GP practices across the region. If it proves to be effective, it will be rolled out more widely in the future.

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