

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Mental health assessment in the GP waiting room

Murray PHN is partnering with the Black Dog Institute to roll out a mental health “check up” service in ten GP practices across the Murray region, helping people get the right care, in the right place and at the right time.

Using tablets in each GP’s waiting room, patients will be able to complete a short, voluntary survey, that gives them an instant assessment of their mental health. The application emails that assessment directly to the patient with a range of targeted self-help resources, and to the patient’s GP, with treatment suggestions.

Matt Jones, CEO of Murray PHN, said fear of the stigma of mental health prevented many people seeking help at the earliest stage.

“We know that most Australians with anxiety and depression do not seek treatment,” he said. “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 digital technology was increasingly recognised as a positive tool to help people suffering from mood related disorders, such as depression. “We are delighted to be partnering with Black Dog to introduce the innovative *StepCare in General Practice* program to GPs in our regional area.”

Professor Helen Christensen, Director and Chief Scientist of the Black Dog Institute, said illnesses such as depression and anxiety could lower quality of life, increase the risk of suicide, and worsen outcomes of other physical and mental health problems.

“This Black Dog StepCare in General Practice program is the first of its type in Australia, and we know of no others in mental health worldwide,” Professor Christensen said. “We also know nearly half (45%) of Australians will experience a mental illness at some stage of their life and that rates are higher among rural areas.”

“Not only is the assessment quick to do, it helps patients who have been uncomfortable to speak up, or who were unaware they had mental health symptoms, to access the treatment and support to help them lead more fulfilling lives,” she said.

In trials in other parts of Australia, 90% of patients, practice staff and GPs rated the online assessment as an acceptable service to undertake. Murray PHN will introduce this program to 10 GP practices initially but, if effective in the region, it will be rolled out more widely in future.

Murray PHN is seeking Expressions of Interest from General Practices across its catchment. More details on the funding opportunity can be found on Murray PHNs page of the TenderSearch portal: [eprocure.com.au/murrayphn/](https://eprocure.com.au/murrayphn/)

For further information on Black Dog’s StepCare program: [blackdoginstitute.org.au/e-mental-health#stepcare](https://blackdoginstitute.org.au/e-mental-health#stepcare) and for recommended online therapy programs: [blackdoginstitute.org.au/getting-help](https://blackdoginstitute.org.au/getting-help)

### *Murray PHN background*

Murray PHN is one of 31 Primary Health Networks established by the Australian Government to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services, particularly for those individuals who are at risk of poor health outcomes, and to improve coordination of care. National objectives and key priority areas set by the Government include mental health, suicide prevention and potentially preventable hospital admissions.

### *Black Dog background*

Founded in 2002, The Black Dog Institute aims to improve the lives of people affected by mental illness through the translation of research into clinical treatments, to increase accessibility to mental health services and the delivery of long-term public health solutions. A focus is placed on those with specific mental health needs like young people, Indigenous communities, men, and high-risk workforces and primary areas of mental health research and treatment include: depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, workplace mental health, adolescents and young people, suicide prevention, e-mental health, and positive psychology and wellbeing.

### **Contact details**

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