



MEDIA RELEASE

Sunday 13 September 2020

HeadtoHelp: 15 new mental health hubs to support Victorians during COVID-19

The Minister for Health, Greg Hunt MP today confirmed the locations of 15 mental health hubs, set up by Primary Health Networks across Victoria as part of the Commonwealth's \$31.9 million mental health support package for the state.

HeadtoHelp hubs will offer clinical advice, referral and wraparound care for Victorians struggling to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The hubs, which are needs-based and recovery-focused, will support people in mental health distress by providing access to multidisciplinary teams of mental health workers, including psychologists, mental health nurses, social workers, and alcohol and drug workers.

The development of **HeadtoHelp** followed concerns over rising incidents of self-harm, and a spike in the use of services like Beyond Blue, Lifeline and Kids Helpline by Victorians.*

Now, anyone struggling with the impact of COVID on their lives can find the best mental health support by calling **1800 595 212** between 8.30am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

In the Murray PHN region, our first hubs will be located in Bendigo and Wodonga, with our partners Bendigo Community Health Services and Gateway Health. The state-wide **HeadtoHelp** phone line opens tomorrow (Monday) at 8.30am and services are **free** to callers.

Murray PHN CEO Matt Jones said the hubs would provide additional mental health capability to help Victorians find the right mental health service for their needs. **HeadtoHelp** will provide onsite support for those who need it, along with telehealth for anyone across our region.

"Our focus will be to provide help for people who need support with their mental health, often for the first time in their lives," he said. "**HeadtoHelp** will work closely with existing providers including GPs and hospitals, referring people to more intensive mental health care or social supports if they need that level of help."

Bendigo Community Health Services CEO Gerard Jose said he welcomed the opportunity to further



support people in need in our community through the new **HeadtoHelp** hub.

"We are well aware there are people out there struggling through this coronavirus pandemic who are not getting the help they need, and this initiative is the opportunity to reach out to them and provide that valuable support," he said. "Our staff are committed to **HeadtoHelp** and we believe this can make a real difference in the community."

Gateway Health CEO Leigh Rhode said Gateway was looking forward to the opportunity to participate in the Commonwealth initiative to improve access to mental health services.

"We are already actively involved in providing counselling, alcohol and drug services and other programs relating to mental health and wellbeing," she said. "The need for support right across the region has never been greater. This service will enable us to continue to work closely with other service providers to respond to that need."

HeadtoHelp will start operations with nine hubs in greater Melbourne and six hubs across regional Victoria. The 15 **HeadtoHelp** Hubs, which all begin operation at 8.30am tomorrow (Monday 14 September) are located in Melbourne in Broadmeadows, Wyndham Vale, Brunswick East, West Heidelberg, Yarra Junction, Officer, Hawthorn, Berwick, Frankston and in the regional areas of Bendigo, Wodonga, Geelong, Ballarat, Warragul and Sale.

Mr Jones, who is also the chair of the Victorian Tasmanian Primary Health Network Alliance (VTPHNA) paid tribute to the work of the state's six PHNs, which formed collaborative teams of clinical, data, finance and communications specialists to establish the **HeadtoHelp** hubs in less than four weeks. "As independent primary health care organisations with extensive local system networks, we are able to support the Government's mental health goals on the ground, in the most effective way.

"The **HeadtoHelp** hubs have an innovative and flexible model of care that is needs-based and recovery-focused. With early professional support, mental health issues do not need to escalate. **HeadtoHelp** will support Victorians on their journey back to good health."

National Mental Health Advocate of the Year, Jo Rasmussen, conducted a lived-experience consumer panel last week on the **HeadtoHelp** concept. She said consumers were pleased to see a consistent statewide model with a single phone number, making it as easy as possible for people to seek help.

"One participant said **HeadtoHelp** was exactly what they needed when they were unwell," she said. "The consensus in the group was that if COVID had been good for one thing, then the **HeadtoHelp** service was it."

HeadtoHelp Hubs

www.headtohelp.org.au

1800 595 212

For further information: Amity Bradford, Communications Specialist, Murray PHN 0436 820 014

*If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we work and live. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We also recognise, respect and affirm the central role played in our work by people with lived experience, their families and/or carers.

HeadtoHelp hubs are a collaborative partnership between Victoria's six Primary Health Networks and an initiative of the Australian Government.