



Media Release

Darren Chester

Federal Member for Gippsland

Thursday August 3, 2017

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR HEYFIELD, MAFFRA AND STRATFORD

A pilot program providing free mental health services to people living in Heyfield, Maffra and Stratford has been announced today.

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester joined Gippsland Primary Health Network (PHN) Chief Executive Officer Marianne Shearer in announcing the new *Quick Steps to Recovery* program.

Mr Chester said the one year pilot would begin this week and provide confidential support to those experiencing the early signs of mental illness.

"It is important that people talk about mental health issues and the services that are available to assist anyone in need," Mr Chester said.

"Too often we hear stories of people who have been affected by mental illness but have been unable or unsure of where to seek help.

"I do think that community attitude toward mental health issues is slowly changing and there is now greater recognition that mental health conditions are just as debilitating as physical health issues.

"While we have become more aware of the complexity of mental health issues and the need to help people who are suffering, we still have a lot of work ahead of us in terms of providing appropriate levels of support."

Chief Executive Officer Marianne Shearer said the Gippsland PHN would partner with within Australia by providing \$130,000 for 12 months to deliver *Quick Steps to Recovery*. The funding is linked to the Federal Government's Response to *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities – Review of Mental Health Programs and Services*.

"Recent discussions with the community, including the Department of Health and Human Services and the Latrobe Valley Authority, have highlighted the needs within the areas of Heyfield, Maffra and Stratford," Ms Shearer said.

"We are working to improve the targeting of psychological interventions to most appropriately support people with, or at risk of, mild mental illness at the local level through the development of low intensity mental health services."

"Within Australia will provide information and support to help the community achieve their best possible mental health, building confidence and the ability for people to make positive changes in their life.

“Being supported to take responsibility for one’s own life and being able to participate in education, employment, recreational, social and other meaningful activities builds self-esteem and confidence.

“The program will include setting goals in their day to day lives through the development of plans that will include supports the person will need to achieve their goals” Ms Shearer said.

The targeted areas make up 33% of the Wellington population including the townships and wider catchment areas, with a total population of 15,500 people. Almost 90 percent of people surveyed within this area as part of a needs assessment stated mental health was an important health issue for them and their family.

The early intervention mental health service will offer help to people who are feeling unwell, uneasy about their work situation, starting to struggle with day-to-day activities and may not be eligible for a mental health plan from their GP.

“This one year pilot aims to support the community and to also work with the mid to long term workforce options currently being explored within smaller and remote Gippsland communities,” Ms Shearer said.

Within Australia Chief Executive Officer Chris McNamara said the pilot program was another positive strategy to minimise the chance of people falling through the service system gaps.

“Our aim is to prevent further deterioration by providing responsive and timely opportunities for people to address their issues early,” Ms McNamara said.

“Our way of working is collaborative and focussed on building the person’s strengths and values, so they can live a fulfilling life.”

The service is free and open to anyone who wants to self-refer or is referred by a support service.

For more information on the *Quick Steps to Recovery* program call 1300 737 412 or visit <http://withinaustralia.org.au/> .