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Mental Health Council of Tasmania Media Release

Stigma still a significant barrier for Tasmanians accessing mental health support

In the final weeks leading up to the federal election, the Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) has called on all political leaders to support the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians by increasing focus on prevention and early intervention.

As part of their advocacy campaign for the federal election, MHCT has proposed Tasmania as the perfect location to develop and trial a stigma reduction campaign.

Stigma around mental ill-health continues to be a significant barrier preventing people from accessing the right support at the right time. This can lead to people becoming increasingly unwell before accessing the support they need, which in turn means that when they do eventually seek help, they need more acute levels of support and care.

MHCT CEO, Connie Digolis, said that accessing support early was vital in helping Tasmanians be healthy and happy. "Stigma unfortunately continues to be a barrier to reaching out for support for many Tasmanians. By educating people about their own mental health and wellbeing, we not only help them identify when they might be struggling, but also encourage them to seek support when they do notice their mental health and wellbeing is declining."

With increased demand for psychologist and psychiatrist services across the state seeing waitlists blow out, some people are waiting up to 6 months for an appointment. Ms. Digolis said that empowering people to stay well, rather than focusing on supports that respond only when they are experiencing crisis, would also help to reduce wait lists.

"Not all mental distress needs a medical approach. If more people are accessing support early, before they require more intense clinical support, this not only leads to better outcomes for individuals, but also alleviates some of the pressure on the services that are currently struggling to cope with increasing demand. As a result, when people do need more intense levels of supports, they are more quickly and easily able to access them."

Royal Flying Doctor Service Tasmania's CEO, John Kirwan, agreed that more needed to be done to ensure Tasmanians were accessing the support early, noting that stigma continues to be a significant barrier for many people.

"It's important that we empower all Tasmanians to better understand and value their own mental health and wellbeing, and the many factors that influence it – both positively and negatively. But more than that, we need to also ensure that they feel safe and supported to reach out for help to get back on track when they notice that their mental health and wellbeing has taken a dip," said Mr. Kirwan.

"The best outcomes come from providing successful preventative programs. As with other health conditions, early detection and treatment will also improve outcomes. To achieve this, we need to address the stigma barrier."

The Tasmanian State Government committed funding during the 2021 state election to a mental health literacy campaign, which would be complimented by MHCT's new proposed campaign to reduce stigma and encourage people to seek help early when they notice their mental health is waning.

More information about MHCT's federal election advocacy campaign can be found via www.mhct.org/election2022

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Please include the following crisis support services for any story regarding mental health or suicide:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

beyondblue: 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

More information on safely reporting on mental illness or suicide can be found at:

<https://mindframe.org.au/> and <https://www.tascharter.org/>