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New dedicated service to support Australia's mental health through COVID-19

A new, dedicated Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service is now available to support all Australians to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health and wellbeing.

The free service, funded by the Australian Government and delivered by Beyond Blue, is available around the clock, delivering clear, evidence-based information, advice and support specifically tailored to the mental health and wellbeing challenges raised by the pandemic.

Through a digital site, the service offers easy access to a broad range of supports from online wellbeing tips, self-help tools to phone counselling from trained mental health professionals and peer to peer support.

The service launches today with information about a range of issues including coping with loneliness and self-isolation, managing your mental health if you have the virus, ways to deal with job loss and financial worries, supporting friends and family, coping as a healthcare worker, and support for essential service workers and small businesses.

People can access the service at coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au

Beyond Blue rapidly built and launched the service in partnership with Medibank Health Solutions and Accenture. It will be continually updated with new information, other tools and support options. In addition to the Commonwealth's \$10 million, Beyond Blue will direct a \$5 million donation by Medibank to the new service to provide as much capacity as possible.

Beyond Blue Chair The Hon Julia Gillard AC said the service would be further developed in the coming weeks and months to guide all Australians through uncertain and trying times.

"We anticipate growing demand for mental health support as this pandemic develops, both from people who are already managing mental health issues and those who have never struggled before," Ms Gillard said.

"We've built this service rapidly because we understand that all Australians need this support immediately and that now more than ever, prevention matters.

"Just as people are looking after their physical health, we're asking people to actively look after their mental health.

"We need to support people to cope and stay well, and we need to intervene early to halt any decline in the conditions of those already living with mental illness so that we reduce the longer-term impacts."

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said the service would evolve to reflect the changing needs of the community.

"At Beyond Blue, we've seen a 30 per cent spike in contacts over the past two weeks and on some days, as many as one in three calls to our existing Support Service is about COVID-19," Ms Harman said.

"People are telling us they're feeling overwhelmed, worried, lonely, concerned about their physical health and the health of friends and loved ones, and anxious about money, job security and the economy.

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“Right now, people are looking for simple, practical information that’s available, reliable and relevant to them.

“There’s no one-size-fits-all answer. Different people will need different types of support for their mental health and wellbeing.

“Some people will benefit from knowing that the strategies they’re already using have good evidence behind them. Others will discover new tips and tactics. Many will benefit from making a phone call to a trained mental health professional who is equipped with the latest information about the pandemic response and referral options.

“At a time when the need for physical distance remains paramount, we’re using all forms of technology to support every Australian.”

Trained mental health professionals are specifically briefed about the evolving public health advice and trained to link callers to other relevant services, such as those relating to financial aid, family violence support and official government COVID-19 information sources. They will make clinical referrals and escalate people to more intensive mental health care as required.

Among the options now available via coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au are:

- Advice and information;
- Digital tools and apps to help people manage their own mental health and wellbeing;
- A phone number for a dedicated support line staffed by mental health professionals;
- Referrals to other services and information as needed, including financial supports;
- Easy links to Beyond Blue’s online peer support forums;
- Links to emergency and crisis supports.

The Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Service is available 24/7 at coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au. Its dedicated phone line, staffed by mental health professionals briefed on the pandemic response, is now open on 1800 512 348.

Beyond Blue’s existing support service will continue to operate alongside the new service. The Beyond Blue Support Service is available via phone 24/7 on 1300 22 4636 or via beyondblue.org.au/get-support for online chat (3PM – 12AM AEST or email responses within 24 hours).