

Date Wednesday 12 August
Subject Million-dollar donation to support mental health

Carers and loved ones are often the forgotten allies in the battle against depression. They will now be the major beneficiaries from a \$1 million partnership between nib foundation and the Hunter Institute of Mental Health (HIMH), through the national *Partners in Depression* program.

The funding has been made possible through the nib foundation's National Grants program, which was launched in March this year.

With one in five Australians experiencing depression at some stage in their life, the partnership between the two Hunter-based organisations will address and provide real solutions to this growing health issue at a national level.

Partners in Depression is a six-week evidence based, psycho-educational group program that aims to address the information and support needs of families and friends of people experiencing depression.

nib foundation's Chairman, Mr Terry Lawler, said he was delighted the foundation was partnering with a Hunter-based organisation that will make such a positive impact on the lives of people right around Australia.

"The Hunter Institute of Mental Health has done a wonderful job for a number of years in supporting what is an ever growing number of people living with mental health issues," Mr Lawler said.

"What attracted the nib foundation to this program was the unique approach it was taking and the support it is providing to those people whose needs are so often forgotten – the carers," Mr Lawler added.

"This funding will allow the Institute to rollout the program across the country over the next three years and make a significant difference to the lives of the loved ones and carers of people experiencing depression," Mr Lawler said.

Speaking at the announcement, HIMH Director Trevor Hazell said the Institute was very excited to now have the funding to conduct a large-scale rollout of what has already been an effective and successful pilot program.

"Research has shown that carers and loved ones of people experiencing depression can themselves be at risk of developing mental illness," Mr Hazell said.

"This prompted the development of a pilot *Partners in Depression* program in 2007, co-funded by HIMH and *beyondblue*, to provide carers with relevant information and self care strategies to significantly reduce the stress in this important support role," Mr Hazell added.

"The program is conducted by qualified health professionals and provides a forum in which participants can receive information and ask questions about depression and the support role.

"The pilot was extremely successful in providing relevant and meaningful support for carers and was also effective in improving the mental health of program participants.

"The funding provided by nib foundation will now enable HIMH to provide free training to 400 qualified health professionals across Australia who will become *Partners in Depression* accredited facilitators.

These facilitators will be provided with professional resources and a range of clinical and administrative support to deliver the program to up to 4500 friends and family members of people with depression Australia-wide over the next three years.

Also speaking at the announcement was Lucy Brogden, the wife of former NSW Opposition Leader, John Brogden. Mr Brogden has had depression for more than a decade.

Ms Brogden spoke of her personal struggle in supporting her husband in what was a very difficult period in both of their lives and reinforced the importance of providing carers with support programs such as *Partners in Depression*.

“When your partner is battling depression they can undergo dramatic behavioural changes, and there are many times when you sit back and think, ‘this isn’t person I know’. This can place enormous pressure on the relationship and the family,” Mrs Brogden said.

“Caring for someone living with depression can be frustrating. There were times I felt totally exasperated, not knowing where to turn for help or support. However, with help the family can learn to live again, laugh again and love again.”

“Programs such as *Partners in Depression* and the support of the nib foundation are vital in helping carers to be more informed in providing support for their loved one and also better prepare them to address their own needs.”

HIMH will commence the training of practitioners in the Hunter from January, 2010 in the *Partners in Depression* program with the program to be rolled out nationally over the next three years.

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About nib foundation

In 2008, nib health funds established the nib foundation – a not-for-profit charitable organisation that will support programs aimed at improving the health and well being of all Australians.

The foundation is funded by a \$25 million donation from nib, which was raised through the issue of new shares at the time of listing nib on the Australian Securities Exchange in November 2007.

About Hunter Institute of Mental Health (HIMH)

The Hunter Institute of Mental Health is a not for profit business unit of the Hunter New England Area Health Service.

The Institute provides a range of best practice programs that focus on mental health promotion, mental illness and early intervention. HIMH also develops and manages a range of training programs for health professionals, to improve the services they offer to people with a mental illness.

The Institute is a leader in the area of suicide prevention and runs a variety of national programs and mental health education and training services.

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