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Subject National education program to address mental health issues in high schools

A unique program that equips teachers to better understand and help young people with mental health issues will be rolled out to secondary schools across Australia, thanks to a new partnership between the Black Dog Institute and nib foundation.

A \$500,000 grant from nib foundation will enable the Black Dog Institute to train 1,500 high school teachers in the innovative *HeadStrong* program over the next three years, helping to reach 90,000 students, with a particular focus on rural and remote locations.

HeadStrong is a ground-breaking teaching resource that uses a series of engaging, humorous cartoon images to convey complicated subjects to students and is supported by classroom activities and teacher development notes.

Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Helen Christensen, said the program was an important social initiative that provided a creative way of thinking, talking and teaching about mood disorders.

“One in five Australians will experience a mood disorder in their lifetime and up to 75 per cent of mental health issues emerge during the turbulent adolescent years,” Professor Christensen said.

“This resource is designed to target the needs of young people, with the visual format of the materials making it accessible to students of all intellectual abilities, as well as those from a low literacy or non-English speaking background,” she added.

Topics discussed include teen challenges, mood disorder facts and statistics, at-risk personality types, coping strategies, fears of seeking help, finding the right help, the benefits of good therapy, family and school support, and how to build resilience.

nib foundation Chairman, Terry Lawler said the foundation supported the national expansion of *HeadStrong* following a successful pilot of the program in New South Wales.

“The pilot program received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 96 per cent of teachers agreeing that the activities were engaging for students and helped achieve their learning outcomes,” Mr Lawler said.

“By providing students with an increased knowledge of mood disorders, their symptoms as well as how and when to seek help, the program aims to help reduce the impact of mood disorders on young people leading to an improvement in their overall health and wellbeing,” he added.

The rollout will begin in New South Wales secondary schools early this year, before expanding to Queensland in the second half of 2012. National implementation will be completed by 2014.

Developed in line with the New South Wales Personal Development, Health, and Physical Education Stage 5 syllabus (Year 9-10), the program will be tailored to the relevant curriculum requirements of other states and territories.

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