



THE HON SUSSAN LEY MP

Minister for Health
Minister for Aged Care
Minister for Sport

MEDIA RELEASE

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Dial one phone number for mental health HELP

Australians suffering mental health issues will only have to dial one dedicated phone number to immediately access the help they need under a bold new Turnbull Government reform plan to be announced today.

Minister for Health Sussan Ley said the phone number would form part of a one-stop-shop digital gateway aimed at giving Australians easy access to high-quality mental health advice and resources when and where they need them.

Ms Ley said there were currently over 30 individual Australian Government-supported phone and online mental health services available to the public, which were identified by both the National Mental Health Commission Review and the Government's Expert Reference Group as fragmented, confusing and difficult to access for people needing quick access to a specific support service.

In response, the Turnbull Government will establish a single national mental health phone line that will direct callers to the appropriate phone or online mental health service they need.

"When you are suffering a mental health issue or an episode of mental illness you often need help quickly when and where it strikes," Ms Ley said.

"There are many fantastic phone counselling and advice services in Australia, but with so many different numbers available, it can be difficult for people to navigate themselves to the right service in their time of need.

"That's why we want to improve access to the right help when and where people need it with a trained, helping voice at the end of the line to point people in the right direction.

Ms Ley said a direct help phone service would also help reduce the number of people ringing a service which may not be able to provide the best assistance for their specific needs, which, in turn, could prevent other people getting through.

"Evidence shows that for some phone counselling services, over 300 people each month cannot get through. Other services have answering rates of about 60 per cent.

"That means thousands of Australians can't get help when they need it the most.

"There were also truly distressing stories in the Mental Health Commission's Review of people getting dial tones when they really needed someone to talk to. This prolongs distress and leaves the person feeling helpless.

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“We hope to alleviate some of this pressure by ensuring people are able to contact the right help first time, rather than the first number they find.”

Ms Ley said another benefit of a dedicated mental health phone service was that the operator was able to stay on the line with a person suffering a mental health issue when they were not able to be immediately transferred to their preferred service, rather than them being presented with a ‘busy’ dial tone on the other end of the phone.

It’s estimated between 4 and 5 million Australians suffer some form of mental health issue in any one given year, seeing it ranked the third largest chronic disease in the country, only behind cancer and cardiovascular disease.

The single phone line service is part of the Government’s development of a new ‘digital gateway’ to help people with a mental illness navigate through the myriad of digital mental health services that are currently available.

In the last decade, there has been huge growth in the range of innovative digital mental health services offering a range of products from phone mobile applications that can help to detect the onset of anxiety to professional online counselling and psychological services where people can chat with mental health professionals in a discrete setting.

Ms Ley said the Turnbull Government wanted to harness these digital innovations and provide the easiest possible access to people who may be seeking help.

“These are evidence-based services that deliver real help to people at a low cost. They are easily accessible and allow people who might not otherwise access services to get help in a private, discrete setting.

“Whether people are accessing peer-to-peer forums, self-help information or accessing professional services online, we want to make sure we can direct people to the right service as easily as possible.”

The Federal Government spends over \$42 million annually funding phone and online mental health services. Visit www.health.gov.au¹ for a comprehensive list of funded services

Ms Ley said work would begin on the digital gateway this financial year (2015-16), with being progressively rolled out from 2016-17 as part of the Government’s broader three year reform plan.

Ms Ley said staff would also be trained in emergency situations.

If you, or someone you know, needs immediate help you can call:

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- beyondblue 1300 22 4636
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia 1300 789 978

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¹<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-teleweb>