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NEW INITIATIVE TO ENCOURAGE VETERANS TO SEEK HELP FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

A new pilot initiative will be launched on Anzac Day in the Barwon South-Western region of Victoria to encourage veterans and former defence force members with mental health problems to seek help for the first time.

The *How Are You Travelling?* initiative will raise awareness across the region through brochures, postcards and posters with information about services across the Barwon South-Western region.

ACPMH Associate Professor John Pead said community meetings for interested veterans, families and friends would be held in Geelong, Colac and Warrnambool.

“Local mental health providers will be on the phone to follow up enquiries about help from veterans or family members,” A/Prof. Pead said. “The results of this pilot will help us understand better how to provide help to those who most need it.”

A/Prof. Pead said the mental health effects of military deployment have been recognized for thousands of years.

“Psychiatric casualties are as old as war itself,” he said. “The difference is that we now have effective treatments — if we can encourage our veterans to seek help.”

A/Prof. Pead said about one in ten Australians returning home from a deployment would suffer from mental health problems — including depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, or alcohol and drug abuse.

“Around 40 per cent of those veterans do not seek mental health care,” he said.

“Two of the important barriers appear to be that people don’t recognize or don’t want to admit that they might have a mental health problem. Secondly, many are uncertain about what help is available.

“We’re trying to tackle those barriers by getting the word out to veterans, families and friends that if they are concerned about their mental wellbeing, they are not alone. Help is available and really can make a difference.”

Community meetings, where veterans, family and friends can find out more:

Thursday 21 May	7pm	Geelong West Town Hall
Thursday 4 June	7pm	Colac Otways Performing Arts & Cultural Centre
Thursday 11 June	7pm	“Lyndoch” Warrnambool
Monday 29 June	7pm	Geelong West Town Hall

If you need help right now: Talk to your local doctor or call the VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service on 1800 011 046 (24 hours).

How are you travelling? is being led by a partnership between: Geelong Clinic; St John of God Healthcare, Warrnambool; Austin Health Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital Veterans Psychiatry Unit; and the VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service. It is supported by the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) and funded through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

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