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Major funding boost for the treatment of personality disorders

In December 2014, the NSW Minister for Mental Health, the Hon. Jai Rowell announced a \$115 million funding boost to mental health services in NSW. Today at Sutherland Hospital he announced that the package would include \$1.8 million over the next two years to extend the Project Air Strategy for Personality Disorders work with more health services in NSW.

Based at the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute on the University of Wollongong campus, the Project Air Strategy (www.projectairstrategy.org) is the outcome of a competitive tender won by the University of Wollongong in 2010 to create a more personality disorders-friendly health service through the application of evidence-based research and the development and evaluation of treatment guidelines and resources. The strategy has since become a clinical centre of excellence for the assessment and treatment of personality disorders, providing high-quality training, consultation and resources to health staff across NSW.

The Minister announced that, during this financial year, \$600,000 would be spent on implementing Project Air training programs (which recognise National Health and Medical Research Council's Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Borderline Personality Disorder) in NSW hospitals and setting up dedicated rapid-response psychological clinics for people in crisis. Further expansion during the next five years is planned.

Australian data from the national survey of mental health and wellbeing shows that personality disorders affect about 6.5 per cent of the population, with one in six hospital admissions to NSW mental-health units each year involving personality disorders. Due to the extreme emotional distress caused, up to 80 per cent of those with personality disorders self-harm.

The Director of the Project Air Strategy, clinical psychologist, Professor Brin Grenyer, said that people with personality disorders face significant challenges holding down jobs and relationships and getting the help that they need.

"People with personality disorders tend to present with histories of trauma, interpersonal breakdown and comorbid problems including drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm and suicidal behaviours," he said.

"Fear and stigma also remains a significant issue for this patient group, not only from the community but by hospital staff who don't always know what to do when they are faced with patients displaying annoying or manipulative behaviours.

"The good news is that new, holistic, person-centred approaches can help people re-build their relationships, self-esteem and capacity to work. A significant priority of the strategy is early intervention with young people with emerging problems. Similarly, the impact of the disorder on carers can be intense and can affect their own mental health, so it is important to provide resources and support for family and carers.

"The funding announced by the Minister will allow us to continue our important work and expand the reach of the training to all services across NSW. This is good news for sufferers, their families and health professionals who seek to support them".

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About IHMRI

The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) is a joint initiative of the University of Wollongong and Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District.

IHMRI's goal is to foster, support and grow health and medical research in the Illawarra by connecting and supporting academic and clinician researchers around research problems of relevance to the region and the world. IHMRI provides research leadership, coordination, infrastructure and facilities to more than 700 academic and clinical researchers throughout the region.

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