

MEDIA RELEASE



14 May 2020

Deputy Chief Medical Officer appointment critical to support mental health concerns during and post coronavirus

The Eating Disorder Alliance of Australia (EDAA), applauds the appointment of Associate Professor Ruth Vine, and reiterates the need for the inclusion of eating disorders in responding to COVID-19.

The Eating Disorder Alliance of Australia (EDAA) representing the voice of consumers, carers and health care professionals, today, welcomed the announcement of the first Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Mental Health.

The appointment of former chief psychiatrist of Victoria, Ruth Vine, acknowledges the profound impact that COVID-19 is having on the mental health of Australians, particularly so closely following the bushfires earlier this year.

"Living with the stress and uncertainty of COVID-19, including self-isolation, is challenging at the best times, but for the one million Australians living with an eating disorder and those who care for them, the pandemic adds a whole level of complexity to these illnesses," said CEO of Eating Disorders Victoria, Belinda Caldwell. "Disruptions to food shopping, triggering content on media and social media, food hoarding and increased stress and anxiety can all lead to significant increase in eating disorder thoughts and behaviours."

"The Federal Government is leading the world in addressing the mental health impacts of COVID-19. This comes off the back of significant investment in the area of eating disorders," said Butterfly Foundation CEO, Kevin Barrow. He added, "I am

heartened by the Government's commitment to supporting this most vulnerable community and will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure eating disorders are represented within the mental health plan."

EDAA is supportive of the intention to develop a long-term plan to support mental health and wellbeing, and will continue to advocate for sustained systemic change, ensuring a continuum of care for those with an eating disorder and their carers.

"COVID-19 has had a major impact not just on those experiencing an eating disorder, but also on those who care for them, with 24/7 exposure to behaviours and issues and limited access to certain foods adding to the stress," said Eating Disorders Families Australia Chair, David Garvey. "For those with eating disorders, food is medicine and cannot be denied or limited."

Butterfly has reported a 22% increase in contacts to its national Helpline via webchat since the advent of COVID-19, with the most common themes being heightened anxiety about food hoarding, concerns about access to specific foods and brands, and reduction in motivation to recover and increases in relapse occurrence.

The need to support mental health is particularly important now with the pandemic – there are many unknowns which, combined with the known fact that anxiety, social isolation, and other extended disruptions and traumas can both trigger mental severe mental illnesses such as eating disorders in people who are vulnerable; and can exacerbate existing conditions and impede treatment seeking and access for those with mental illness," said President of ANZAED, Dr Kim Hurst. "It is critical that both protective factors and facilitating help-seeking are considered in any response to COVID-19."

"With the complexity of both mental and physical issues, eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness," said CEO of Eating Disorders Queensland, Belinda Chelius. "We look forward to working with Associate Professor Vine in her new role and engaging with her on the inclusion of eating disorder treatment and support in the new national mental health pandemic response plan,"

-ENDS-

Anyone needing support with eating disorders or body image issues are encouraged to contact:

Eating Disorders Queensland (EDQ) 07 3844 6055 or
admin@edq.org.au

Butterfly's National Helpline on 1800 33 4673

For urgent support call Lifeline 13 11 14

EDQ encourages the media to adhere to the Mindframe Guidelines when reporting on suicide and eating disorders.

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