The disconnectedness of society means that increasingly, people lack a sense of belonging, or of being part of a family or community. Limited access to services for those affected by depression, particularly in rural and remote communities, has exacerbated the problem.

One in five Australians will experience depression at some time in their lives. The condition can last for weeks, months or even years and affects not only the way a person feels, but also the way they think and behave. It is a mood that they cannot just ‘snap out of’. Depression affects a person’s overall sense of wellbeing and motivation to carry out even the simplest of tasks.

But it’s nothing to be ashamed of. Depression is not a character flaw, nor a sign of weakness. Indeed, as one of the most common problems encountered by mental health workers, depression has been called the “common cold of mental disorders”.

Common signs of depression include:

• Feeling sad or miserable most of the time;
• Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed;
• Changes in appetite or weight;
• Having difficulty in getting to sleep or waking early;
• Feeling tired and lacking in energy;
• Feeling guilty or worthless;
• Feeling lethargic, restless or edgy;
• Having difficulty concentrating or making decisions; or
• Thinking repeatedly of death or suicide.

There are a number of things a person suffering depression can do to get back on the road to recovery:

See your doctor - have an honest conversation with them. Explain how you are really feeling. Look after your physical health and eat healthy meals.

Keep active - increase your level of activity, even slightly. Walking, cycling or swimming helps stimulate your body and your mind.

Do things you enjoy - make a list of things from which you gain pleasure. Try to do one activity each day, even when you don’t feel like it.

Stay in touch with family and friends - they are often the best resource in helping to resolve or reduce the issues that may be causing the depression.

Try to get quality sleep.

Alter the way you think about things - negative thinking can impact on day to day activities and drag you down.

Talk to someone you trust - find a counsellor or health worker. You may develop a clearer understanding of your situation and that may help you move forward in a positive way.

The isolated nature of the world now impacts on suicidality. In Australia, five men die every day and nine...
women die a week by suicide. For 2005, the confirmed national suicide figure is 2,101 deaths, with up to 1.2 million people contemplating suicide. During the same year in Tasmania, there were 82 confirmed suicides. Of that number, 69.5% were males, with the highest proportion being in the 30-44 age group (33%), closely followed by the 45-59 age group (31%).

One way to build better community resilience is to support rural and remote areas in regaining a sense of connectedness. The loneliness felt by some, even in large cities, can be very isolating. That sense of isolation can be overwhelming. There is still a stigma attached to the topic of suicide, and we need to demystify the subject and “make it okay to talk about” in an open, honest and non-sensationalistic way.

Participation by service providers, councils, community groups, schools and service clubs should include awareness of the statistics, the risk factors and the preventative measures. If communities are provided with the opportunity to increase awareness through education and learning, they can become healthier and safer communities. As communities become more aware of the subject of suicide, the stigma reduces, and those who are thinking of suicide are more willing to put up their hand and ask for support.

Most men rely upon their strong determination and strength of character (their stiff upper-lip) when dealing with difficult situations such as relationship breakdown, family court issues, pressures of work, retirement or redundancy, financial loss and drought. The strengths of being resilient, capable, reliable and coping under enormous stress can also be the same reasons men often don’t seek mental health support, or general health care.

This is especially apparent early in their experience of a crisis, highlighting a range of reasons why men tend to use indirect sources of help such as talking to a friend or mate. The general misconception that seeking formal sources of help is a show of weakness, reinforces the reasons why men are often reluctant to get personal support. This can be even more so for men in rural areas where communities are smaller, social networks are intertwined and privacy is reduced. Conditions in rural Australia, especially in times of drought or fire, also have a major impact on men’s mental health. Rural men in particular struggle to acknowledge that they are experiencing problems and/or distress and resist seeking help, choosing often to “suffer in silence”.

Men’s Sheds are known to be an effective way of connecting men and in some rural and remote communities, men are encouraged to get together to share their stories and to get to know the “bloke next door” in more innovative and clever ways such as campfires and barbecues.

A cooperative approach by service providers from all agencies, inclusive of clinical and non-clinical models, needs to be a major focus in the development of preventative and intervention strategies. Funding requirements can often isolate organisations and make them compete for clientele and outcomes. All service providers need to be aware of other services in local communities and refer on where necessary or possible, therefore reducing the impact on the better known and utilised agencies.

Most people who are suicidal don’t want to die, they want their pain to stop - and, if suitably supported, can be helped through their issue. Those at risk feel some sense of loss and aloneness, with times such as Christmas, anniversaries, Easter and birthdays being a difficult time for some.

Often, when we are under significant stress, our thinking isn’t reasoned and logical - it is important we talk it out with someone we trust, someone who can help work through the issue and to find solutions. Individuals can play a significant role by being prepared to get along-side someone else and listen to what is happening for them.

Tasmanian Broadband Development Program

The Department of Economic Development and Tourism is contributing towards the government’s strategic telecommunications objectives for the state, through the implementation of the Tasmanian Broadband Development Program (TBDP). Project Manager, Dr David Anderson from Economic Development and Tourism and Mark Carrington, Project Officer TECC, will be visiting and discussing the potential opportunities for local government to progress broadband development within the state’s regions and communities. Their activities include supporting broadband infrastructure and network rollout, identifying and documenting priority areas, and opportunities for new and/or improved broadband services.

For further information please contact:

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By being a ‘safe person’ to someone else, we are saying we care, we want to understand and we will help all we can. ANY behaviour that is out of character, ANY extreme changes, ANY comment about suicide should be followed through. Ask what is happening - “Is there something wrong for you?” Clarify throwaway lines such as “I don’t want to be here anymore”. Ask, “What does that mean for you?” It is also okay to ask if someone is feeling suicidal, or is thinking about suicide. Loss and/or some sense of aloneness are usually connected with suicidality. By showing you have noticed, you will connect with that person.

**Where to go for help:**

In Tasmania, mental health clinics are conducted through most Community Health Centres or specialist clinics, or contact your General Practitioner. Phone counselling and information services such as Lifeline (131114), Mensline (1300 789 978) and BeyondBlue (1300 224 636) are available. Youth services are available in most areas - through council programs or specialist health and drop-in centres.

Parakaleo is a Tasmanian suicide intervention service providing free crisis counselling services across the state. Counselling staff operate in a non-medical model, referring clients on to other health professionals and agencies as needed, with a network of referral points around Tasmania. Face to face counselling support is offered in all areas of Tasmania.

Parakaleo’s qualified trainers conduct regular Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) courses by arrangement across Tasmania for community groups. Participants learn to recognise when someone may be at risk of suicide and respond in ways that help increase their immediate safety and link them to further help.

Parakaleo also provides an Employee Assistance Program to business and industry throughout Tasmania incorporating counselling services, mediation, critical incident management and workplace training (communication, anti-discrimination, conflict resolution and stress management).

For more information or support, contact Parakaleo on 1300 132 098.

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**Heart Foundation Walking Comes to Tasmania**

**During September, the Heart Foundation will be launching the first walking group in Tasmania in partnership with the Launceston City Council and Active Launceston.**

Heart Foundation Walking offers a network of free community based walking groups led by volunteer walk organisers. The program aims to provide new incentives for the many Tasmanians not meeting basic physical activity requirements of 30 minutes moderate physical activity on most days of the week.

The program encourages groups of walkers in a community to overcome some of the barriers that people have to walking, to motivate and provide incentives to walk on a regular basis and to build community spirit. Heart Foundation Walking is an opportunity for members of the community, no matter what their level of fitness, to get out and exercise with new friends.

If you would like to establish a Heart Foundation Walking group in your area, contact Heart Foundation Health Events Coordinator, Sally Bush, on (03) 6336 5116.
National Ride to Work Day

Councils are being encouraged to be part of Australia’s biggest active workplace event, National Ride to Work Day, held on 15 October.

Local councils have the opportunity to hold community breakfasts to congratulate and celebrate people who choose to ride their bikes to work on the day. Thousands of regular and first-time riders from all states and territories will join in on National Ride to Work Day. Bakers Delight will be supplying complimentary freshly baked breakfasts to all community breakfast events. Event organisers will also receive a promotional pack containing posters, brochures and ideas for promoting your community breakfast and will go in the draw to win great prizes.

To register for National Ride to Work Day as a participant, workplace or community, visit the website at www.ride2work.com.au.