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The festive season can be tough for some, but free mental health support is available

The festive season is not always full of joy and hope for everyone. This time of year can bring back memories of past disasters or can magnify feelings of sadness, loneliness, stress or anxiety. But there is help available.

Wentworth Healthcare, the provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, fund a range of community-based mental health services that are free to access for people of all ages.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that while Christmas can be a time of excitement and joy, for some people, the increased expectations of the season can take its toll.

“Some of our communities are approaching the third anniversary of 2019/20 bushfires, some are still navigating their flood recovery, and almost everyone is continuing to face challenges resulting from the pandemic,” she said.

“The additional cost pressures of this time of year can also magnify feelings of financial stress and could be a barrier for some people to seek help for their mental health. We want people to know that they are not alone, and that free support is available,” said Ms Reay.

Wentworth Healthcare fund the Psychological Therapy Services program that provides 6-10 free psychological therapy sessions per calendar year for eligible people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, carers, children 0-11 years of age, and people effected by bushfires, floods and COVID-19. A GP referral may or may not be needed, depending on eligibility. More information about the program can be found at www.nbmphn.com.au/PsychologicalTherapy

The organisation also fund headspace in Katoomba, Lithgow and Penrith, as well as the headspace Flood Outreach program in the Hawkesbury. All of these services are free and available to young people aged 12-25 years and their families. More information about these services can be found at www.nbmphn.com.au/headspace

“For those people who are unsure about what mental health support they may need, a good starting point would be to talk to your GP about how you are feeling. GPs can refer you to services in the area and can also look at other health factors that may be impacting your overall wellbeing,” said Ms Reay.

“Another option for people who may be confused about what help they need, is to call the free Head to Health phonenumber. When calling the phonenumber, you will be transferred to a mental health professional employed by us. These clinicians know our local region and will take the time to listen to your concerns and connect you with most appropriate local service that meets your needs,” Ms Reay continued.

The Head to Health phonenumber is available on **1800 595 212**, Monday to Friday from 8:30am - 5:00pm, excluding public holidays. Clinicians may refer people to the Penrith Head to Health Centre, the Hawkesbury Head to Health Pop Up service (both services offer telehealth and face-to-face appointments) or other appropriate local services. More information about the service can be found at www.nbmphn.com.au/HeadtoHealthPhonenumber



In addition, the Penrith Head to Health Centre, which includes SafeHaven, located at 111 Henry Street provides walk-in (no appointment needed) mental health support 7 days a week, 365 days a year. This includes Christmas and New Year's Day. The Centre is open every day from 1:00pm-9:30pm (except Tuesdays 1:00pm to 5:00pm). More information about the service can be found at www.nbmphn.com.au/PenrithHeadtoHealth

“If you are experiencing feelings of sadness, hopelessness, stress or anxiety, or just don't feel like taking part in the activities you normally enjoy, then you may benefit from some extra support. Don't be afraid to reach out to get the help you need.” said Ms Reay.

For those seeking urgent mental health care over the festive season, they can also call the NSW Mental Health Line on **1800 011 511** which is available 24/7 including public holidays. Nepean Hospital's Mental Health Triage and Assessment Centre (TAC) is also open 24/7 at Nepean Hospital, Building G. People can present to TAC without an appointment or referral, rather than going to the emergency department. More information is available at www.nsw.gov.au/health/nbmlhd/locations/triage-and-assessment-centre

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