R U OK? Day

Australians have been asking “are you ok?” since 2009, when the first RUOK? Day was held. This year, RUOK? Day will be held on Thursday 10 September, coinciding with World Suicide Prevention Day.

R U OK? Day is held annually in September to remind people to ask family, friends and colleagues the question, “R U OK?”, in a meaningful way, because connecting regularly and meaningfully is one thing everyone can do to make a difference to anyone who might be struggling.

R U OK? works collaboratively with experts in suicide prevention and mental illness, as well as government departments, corporate leaders, teachers, universities, students and community groups.

The RUOK? website and Facebook page have a host of incredible resources to give individuals the support and tools they need to start the conversation whether they’re at school, in an office, at uni, or working remotely.

RUOK?’s 2015 campaign ‘Thanks for asking’ encourages individuals to write, show and share the love. They’re giving a big old-fashioned thanks to the people who asked “are you ok?”. RUOK? is encouraging us all to give our thanks and show Australia the power of a conversation.

Visit www.ruok.org.au to view some of the amazing stories others have shared.

While RUOK? Day activities are planned for September 10th, we are reminded that everyday should be the day we ask someone we care about “are you ok?” – it could be the conversation that changes – or saves – a life.

Supporting those that provide support - release of the Mental Health Peer Workforce Development Plan for the Gold Coast 2015 - 2020

Improving recruitment, retention and development are the overarching priorities to better support the mental health peer support workforce, following the release of the Mental Health Peer Workforce Development Plan for the Gold Coast 2015-2020.

The plan has been developed by the Gold Coast Partners in Recovery Peer Workforce Reference Group that includes Gold Coast Primary Health Network, Gold Coast Health, FSG Australia, Aftercare, Mental Illness Fellowship Queensland, Headspace and the Consumer and Carer Workforce Group.

Initial conversations with the Gold Coast Consumer and Carer Workforce Group combined with a Literature Review and the recognised opportunities for growth of the workforce identified the need for a Peer Workforce Development Plan. Key issues and needs from a national and international perspective provided the foundation for the local analysis of peer workforce development.

It is a significant piece of work because it provides clear direction for agencies and non-government organisations who provide mental health and alcohol and drug services, about management and career progression for peer support workers, who are often instrumental in assisting those with a mental illness in their recovery journey.

The plan covers a range of areas which includes strategies for:

- Expanding workforce numbers
- Improving recruitment and employment practices
- Supporting inclusive workforce practices
- Providing greater opportunities for training and development for peer workers and other staff
- Developing organisational support for peer workers
- Sector development, advocacy and education

Evidence has shown that a well-supported peer workforce can produce positive outcomes for individuals and families and reduce some of the pressures on the mental health workforce.

Organisations who employ a peer support workforce in the mental health sector, are encouraged to download copies of the plan, and adapt for implementation in a move toward a stronger, supported and larger peer workforce on the Gold Coast.

For further information contact:
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World Suicide Prevention Day

‘Preventing Suicide: Reaching Out and Saving Lives’ is the theme of the 2015 World Suicide Prevention Day which takes place on 10th September each year. It serves as a call to action to individuals and organizations to prevent suicide. This year, the theme encourages us all to consider the role that offering support may play in combating suicide.

The act of showing care and concern to someone who may be vulnerable to suicide can be a game-changer. Asking them whether they are OK, listening to what they have to say in a non-judgmental way, and letting them know you care, can all have a significant impact. Isolation increases the risk of suicide, and, conversely, having strong social connections is protective against it, so being there for someone who has become disconnected can be life-saving.

Please, reach out and save lives.

In Australia:
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians aged between 15 and 44.
- There are almost seven deaths by suicide in Australia each day.
- Men are four times more likely to die by suicide than women.
- Almost twice as many people die from suicide than road deaths.
- For those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, the suicide rate is 2.5 times higher for males and 3.4 times higher for females.
- For every completed suicide, it is estimated that as many as 30 people attempt - that’s more than one new attempt in Australia every 10 minutes.
- It is estimated that around 250 people make a suicide plan every day and around 1,000 people think about suicide every day.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide. Choices we make today can help prevent suicide.

For 24 hour crisis support call 13 11 14, or visit www.lifeline.org.au/crisischat (8:00pm-4:00am AEST).

Why does someone consider suicide?
According to Lifeline, life can be painful and problems can seem overwhelming at times. Some people may think about suicide but do not act upon it. For others, suicide seems like the only way out of their situation or the feelings they are experiencing - feeling very alone and hopeless, that nobody can help or understand what they are going through.

There are many reasons why someone considers suicide:
- Relationship break-ups
- Family problems
- Sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Drug or alcohol problems
- Mental illness, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression
- Eating disorders like Anorexia
- Major loss and grief such as a death or the suicide of a friend, family member, public figure
- School, uni or work problems
- Unemployment or being unemployed for a long time
- Feeling of not belonging
- Financial or legal problems

Almost everyone who takes their own life gives some clue or warning. Never ignore suicide threats. Take people’s suicidal thoughts and feelings very seriously and help them find effective help.

What you can do to prevent suicide:

1. Reach Out - Ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide. It needs to be a direct question that can’t be misinterpreted.

   “Are you thinking about suicide?”

   Most people with thoughts of suicide want to talk about it. They want to live – but desperately need someone to hear their pain and offer them help to keep safe.

   Don’t be afraid to ask someone if they are thinking about suicide. This shows you care and they’re not alone.

2. Listen - Allow the person to express their feelings. Let them do most of the talking. They will often feel a great sense of relief someone wants to talk to them about their darkest thoughts.

3. Check their safety - If you are really worried don’t leave them alone. Remove any means of suicide including weapons, medications, drugs, alcohol, even access to a car. Get help by calling Lifeline 13 11 14, or emergency services on 000. You can also take them to the local hospital emergency department.

4. Decide what to do and take action - Talk about steps you can take together to keep them safe. Don’t agree to keep it a secret, you shouldn’t be the only one supporting this person. You may need help from someone else to persuade them to get help. You can also help by finding out information on what resources and services are available for a person who is considering suicide.

5. Ask for a promise - Thoughts of suicide may return, so ask them to promise to reach out and tell someone. Asking them to promise makes it more likely they will tell someone.

6. Get help - There are lots of services and people that can help and provide assistance.
   - GP (doctor)
   - Counsellor, psychologist, social worker
   - School Counsellor
   - Emergency Services 000
   - Community Health Centres
   - Crisis support services like Lifeline, Kids helpline
   - Seek support from family and friends, youth group leader, sports coach, priest, minister or religious leader etc.
TheMHS Conference

On August 25th, Janelle Reeves and Sami Hall left the warmth of the Gold Coast to go to our nation’s capital, Canberra to attend and present at the 25th TheMHS Conference. The theme for this year’s conference was “Translating Best Practice Into Reality”.

Exercise Your Mood Month

Exercise Your Mood Month is a national campaign from the Black Dog Institute designed to increase community awareness of the importance of regular exercise for maintaining good mental health.

They’re urging all Australians to get involved by being active this September. It doesn’t have to be tough, it can be fun. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

• Set yourself a personal fitness goal. It could be to walk to school or work each day for the month of September or to take the stairs instead of the lift.
• Participate in one of the hundreds of events around the country.
• Organise a group activity such as a pedometer challenge, mini Olympics or football game.
• Raise awareness and funds for mental health research and programs.
• Create a fundraising page at GoFundraise and get your friends, family and colleagues to sponsor you.
• Donate to the Black Dog Institute.
• Improve your mood through exercise.

A large volume of research has found that exercise can significantly reduce mild to moderate depression. Exercise can help boost serotonin, which plays a key role in the brain in regulating mood, sleep and appetite. It can increase your levels of endorphins, which have natural mood-lifting properties. Exercise can also provide a distraction from worrying and provide an increased sense of control while promoting social interaction.

Exercise doesn’t have to be extremely strenuous to provide a benefit. Even a brisk walk each day can make a real difference. If you feel daunted, start small and find something you feel good about doing. Get some great exercise tips to help beat depression from two of their ambassadors, Scott Gooding and Luke Hines.

For more information, including an Exercise and Depression fact sheet, visit http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/public/getinvolved/exerciseyourmood.cfm

Voicebox 2 Launch

It’s going to be a wrap this month on the Voicebox 2 project. Participants look forward to showcasing their work at the Gold Coast launch on September 17.

Following on from the successful first incarnation, Voicebox 1, held in 2014, Voicebox 2 was a series of local workshops aimed at giving participants a voice in the mental health sector through training in media, creative documentation, art, public speaking and more. The launch will give participants the opportunity to publicly showcase the digital stories they produced.

The poignant and thought provoking stories produced during the Voicebox 2 include insights into what it is like to be the carer of children diagnosed with autism, the challenges of experiencing mental illness, the importance of support and of successful programs which can change lives and explorations of some ways mental illness could perhaps be prevented.

“Voicebox has provided an important platform for participants to use digital media to raise awareness and promote a key message that they believe in, it’s been fantastic seeing everyone’s ideas come to fruition,” said Andrew Gibbs, Creative Director at Human Ventures. The videos will soon be available on www.pirgoldcoast.com.au, our Facebook page, as well as a DVD.
Naomi’s Story

By Ian McDougall

If Naomi was a piano, her life has hit plenty of dud notes. But in plinking away on her beloved keyboard she is composing her own overture of life to herald in a happy future.

Recently Naomi took delivery of a brand spanking new keyboard, thanks to funding from Partners in Recovery. And thanks to a deal from the store and a small loan from her partner, it’s a better model than she originally chose. “It sounds like a grand piano ... I just love it,” a chuffed Naomi told me.

It now dominates her small flat and her life. Like her smile, it commands your attention when you walk in the door.

“I had a keyboard at age 21, mucked around on it for a few years until it eventually wore out. It was on my bucket list to buy another keyboard and learn to play properly before I turned 50.

I’m 44 now and recently got the urge to start playing again. I saw it in my mind... Chloe (PIR facilitator) made it happen.”

John Lennon’s Imagine has been a constant inspiration to Naomi. “It speaks of peace and love – it speaks to me.”

Naomi has had a rough life, starting in childhood. “Family life was dysfunctional. Domestic violence. I developed anxiety because I was always walking on eggshells. I started pulling my hair out, literally - trichotillomania it’s called - at age five. My stepfather would punish me for it. Soon after the tricho started, mum had me off to my first, of what was to become many, sessions with a psychiatrist.”

“My parents weren’t big drinkers but there was usually a cask of wine in the fridge, mainly to have with dinner guests at weekends. By the age of 10, I was often sneaking a glass for myself here and there.”

A few years later, her parents were divorced.

“At 15, I was working at Woolies so had money to burn on booze and partying and my boyfriend supplied the drugs. I got married at 21 and had a baby boy. I settled down for a couple of years but by 23 I was depressed and suicidal. My husband took me to the mental health unit at the local hospital.

During my stay, there was talk of manic depression in the group therapy sessions. I related to it ... I had thought my ups and downs were a normal part of life.” She left the hospital undiagnosed, having only been treated for depression.


“I had my second son to another father when I was 31. We’d decided to have a baby together but after the relationship broke down, I left him early in the pregnancy and skipped town. I got in a very dark place. I was planning on suicide and taking the kids with me. Running the car into a tree seemed like the best option to end it all.”

“I wasn’t drinking so I had no coping mechanism. I was a rageaholic ... screaming all the time. Neighbours called Child Safety. They arrived at my door and I admitted I needed help.

They recommended a pastor: he was a Pentecostal Christian.

“I was taken into the church community and its network of support, was born again as they say and immersed myself in the church.”

Naomi eventually shifted back to the Gold Coast. She got involved with the local church, spent money on healthy organic food for her little family and was helping feed the homeless.

“But, yep, slipped back into booze and drugs. I entered a Christian rehab program but they didn’t take mental health into consideration: it was all demons to be expunged. I didn’t need the laying of hands on me - I needed help!”

Upon bursting out of rehab, she landed in a refuge. “It was then I met a wonderful doctor whom I still see today.” Naomi was diagnosed with bipolar and borderline personality disorders. She was medicated and attended AA every morning for the next year to remain abstinent from the drinking.

She was soon to meet her current partner who is very supportive and has some work experience in mental health. Naomi was then able to function reasonably well and enjoyed a social drink occasionally.

Last year, she was volunteering with an environmental council and loved it, but in September her drinking was out of control again. She ended up back in detox.

Then came the wake-up call she needed - her son asked her to stop drinking for good. She was then connected with Partners in Recovery.

“I am so grateful for my Facilitators Ursula and Chloe. They have been so supportive and have connected me with some other really helpful counselling and support services.

“I am now in recovery. Sober five months. Functioning ok. Learning to manage anxiety and panic attacks, and volunteering one day a week back at the environmental council.

“My son is now so proud of me.”

When we spoke, Naomi was pumped, preparing to take her second son on a trip down south to see his big brother for a few days who is in the military service. These days they don’t get to spend much time together. “They are good boys. I am so proud of them both,” beams Naomi.

During our chat Naomi’s eyes flit back and forth to the keyboard. She’s getting fidgety and leans across to put her fingers on the keys. “Music is therapy for the soul. One day I’d like to compose my own relaxation music.”

I have no doubt she will.

We bid our farewells and before I get to the car, I can hear the ivories tinkling away and for a moment I imagine all the people, living in peace for today, a brotherhood of man sharing the world as one.
Dementia Awareness Month is held from 1 September to 30 September across Australia. The theme for the month is *Creating a Dementia-Friendly Nation*.

The goal is to encourage Australians to become dementia-aware, have a better understanding of what it is like for a person to live with dementia, and ultimately be encouraged to create communities where people with dementia are supported to live a high quality of life with meaning, purpose and value.

To see what events are happening near you, visit [https://fightdementia.org.au/national/campaigns/dementia-awareness-month](https://fightdementia.org.au/national/campaigns/dementia-awareness-month)

According to Alzheimers Australia, dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of illnesses which cause a progressive decline in a person’s functioning. It is a broad term used to describe a loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and physical functioning. There are many types of dementia including Alzheimer’s disease, vascular dementia, frontal temporal dementia and dementia with Lewy Bodies. Dementia can happen to anybody, but it is more common after the age of 65.

- There are more than 342,800 Australians living with dementia
- Each week, there are more than 1,800 new cases of dementia in Australia; approx. one person every 6 minutes. This is expected to grow to 7,400 new cases each week by 2050
- There are approximately 25,100 people in Australia with Younger Onset Dementia (a diagnosis of dementia under the age of 65; including people as young as 30)
- Dementia is the second leading cause of death in Australia and there is no cure
- On average symptoms of dementia are noticed by families three years before a firm diagnosis is made

Depression and dementia
Depression is very common among people with dementia. Depressive symptoms have been reported to occur in approximately 40-50% of people with Alzheimer’s disease. People in long-term residential care appear to be particularly at risk of depression.

Other factors that may be contributing to a person’s depression may be:

- The side effects of medication
- Physical illness
- Reaction to diagnosis and perceived impact on lifestyle
- Social isolation
- Fatigue
- Environmental factors, such as the inability to screen out unwanted stimulation of loud noises and crowds

It can be very difficult to know if a person with dementia is depressed. Some typical signs are:

- Loss of interest and pleasure in previously enjoyed activities
- Lack of energy
- Poor sleep
- Loss of appetite and weight
- Expressing feelings of worthlessness and sadness
- Being unusually emotional, crying, angry or agitated
- Increased confusion

However, many of the symptoms of dementia and depression are alike and it can be difficult to tell the difference.

If you suspect that depression may be affecting a person with dementia, talk with the doctor who will be able to carry out a thorough examination to rule out other medical problems. Medication such as an anti-depressant may be prescribed and can be very helpful in improving the symptoms of sadness, and may improve appetite and sleep problems. The doctor can also arrange for any appropriate referrals such as to the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT), or for specialised psychiatric assessment.

Treating depression can make significant improvements in a person’s mood and their ability to participate in activities. It is important to investigate and treat depression whenever it is suspected.

Alzheimers Australia have a raft of helpful information and fact sheets for those of all ages living with dementia as well as their loved ones and carers. Visit [https://fightdementia.org.au/](https://fightdementia.org.au/)

They also offer the National Dementia Helpline, a free and confidential service, which is available **9.00am to 5.00pm** across Australia, Monday to Friday excluding national public holidays. **Call the National Dementia Helpline now on 1800 100 500.**
Equal Pieces in the Puzzle

Local artist, Melissa Latimer, is constructing a large interactive jigsaw puzzle to help promote understanding that people experiencing mental illness are equal pieces in the puzzle of life and our community.

Melissa is working with five other budding artists at The Hub in Southport on a design to show how people fit in to society and come together as one. All participants have a lived experience of mental illness.

“One in two Australians experience a mental illness at some stage of their life, so it’s time we shook off the stigma and normalised it,” Melissa said. “As well as containing positive messages about mental health, the puzzle will remind us that we’re all the same, regardless of our abilities or illnesses.”

The colourful puzzle will be on display at the Wellness Festival at Southport’s Broadwater Parklands on Saturday October 10. People will be able to take the puzzle apart and reconstruct it. After the Festival the puzzle will continue to travel around Gold Coast communities as an interactive activity to engage for young people and adults alike.

Glitter Festival

Monday 28 September - Sunday 5 October

GLITTER is the Gold Coast City’s inaugural Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, A-sexual, Pansexual +everyone else festival being held on the beautiful Queensland city between 28 September and 5 October 2015. The program includes cabaret, theatre, art gallery displays, films, community, events and much more.

To keep up-to-date and to join in the conversation around this fabulous festival, follow Glitter Festival on Facebook and Instagram (@glitterfestivalgc) or visit http://www.theartscentregc.com.au/whats-on/glitter-festival

Gold Coast Wellness Festival

9am-1pm, Saturday 10 October

Access information and assistance and learn about the importance of physical and mental wellness at the 2015 Wellness Festival!

Come and join in the fun at Southport Broadwater Parklands. FREE entertainment and activities as well as food, drink and coffee available for purchase.

The Gold Coast Wellness Festival is an annual event that concludes the celebrations of Mental Health week. Features include:

The Wellness Space
A place which provides a safe environment for Physical, Emotional and Mental Wellness, through fostering awareness, well-being, healing and connection. This will include yoga, falun dafa, learning circles, craft, pop-up poetry, talks, music, sensory therapy and much more.

For more information contact 07 5588 7350 or visit ‘Our Events’ at: www.fsg.org.au.

Biennial GC Infant Mental Health Conference

9am-4.30pm, Friday 25 September

Travelling around the circle
“Ensuring emotional support for child and carer”

Theme: Circle of Security for better or worse: Evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence for infant mental health: How do we achieve “best practice” using attachment-based interventions?

Where: The Crown Plaza, 2807 Gold Coast Highway, Surfers Paradise QLD 4217

Cost: $220 (incl. GST)

Please register and provide dietary or other needs by emailing gcimhc@benevolent.org.au.

Click here to download the registration form.

Contact us

If you’d like to know more about Partners In Recovery Gold Coast, or would like to work with us, get in contact: P: 1300 130 339 E: pir@gcphn.com.au

The PIR Intake Line is open: Monday-Thursday 9am-5pm, Friday 9am-4pm. Individuals are welcome to call PIR directly. Services, carers and family members should seek the consent of the individual before calling regarding their involvement in the PIR Program.

PIR does not offer a crisis response. For 24 hour specialist mental health care advice and crisis support call Gold Coast Health 1300 64 2255. Call Triple Zero (000) in an emergency.