

Better understanding of the links between drug use and mental illness

In response to the growing problem of drug use linked with mental illness, Australia's peak body representing general practice, the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) has developed "Can Do". This initiative will further develop GPs and other health workers skills in dealing with these complex issues.

'Can Do' was launched today by Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing the Hon Christopher Pyne.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said this pilot program is focussed on managing commonly co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders in general practice.

"There are misconceptions about substance use and mental health problems. It's not just the patients who are injecting illicit drugs or doctor shopping for benzodiazepines who need treatment.

"More often than not, the patients who need additional help are those who visit their GP for general health concerns. They may have depression or anxiety and could be consuming large amounts of alcohol or taking recreational drugs.

"It is essential that we, as health professionals, are able to recognise these links and diagnose and treat patients under best practice guidelines.

Identifying these links as early as possible is essential to ensure timely intervention before the problems spiral out of control. GPs are at the front door of the primary health care system and have the opportunity to help patients before they arrive at the accident and emergency wards of hospitals.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said we know that rates of substance use are higher among those with mental health problems.

"This initiative will allow GPs and their peers to access education and training that will better equip them with the knowledge, skills and networks to identify, treat and support patients with mental health and substance use problems.

"AGPN is proud to deliver another health solution to Australian communities through general practice.

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