

Mapping system to reveal Australia's mental illness hot spots

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A world-first mapping system that will pinpoint areas of high male self-harm and suicide, as well as hot spots for men with poor mental health, has been unveiled today as part of National Mental Health Week.

Monash University Professor Dan Lubman and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Director will lead the National Ambulance Mental Health Project in collaboration with ambulance services across the country. The information will be used to help reduce Australia's suicide rate, which currently sees about five Australian males take their lives every day.

Funded by beyondblue with donations from the Movember Foundation, the project will collect data from incidents such as suicide attempts, overdoses, panic attacks or call-outs relating to [mental illness](#) such as anxiety or depression. The information from incidents attended by paramedics will be mapped to identify when, where and how men present in crisis.

Professor Lubman said a training program would be developed for paramedics to enhance their skills when dealing with presentations of [mental health](#), self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

"Our work shows that one in five ambulance attendances are for [mental health issues](#). But frequently men do not link with services for ongoing support despite contact with emergency services," Professor Lubman said.

"This is the only project of its kind in the world and will have enormous benefits. We will develop and test a range of low-cost approaches to help men access ongoing support. This includes developing resources that are identified as missing or poorly utilised through the mapping work, as well as incorporating existing beyondblue materials and mobile phone technology."

The project expands on a pilot program funded by the Commonwealth government and is set to run in every Australian state and territory, with negotiations still ongoing with Western Australia. This preliminary work was led by Dr Belinda Lloyd, who runs the Population Health Research Program at Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre.

Professor Geoff Webb from the Faculty of Information Technology and Professor Shantha Rajaratnam from the School of Psychological Sciences will add their expertise to the new project, which will capture data for three years from 2015 – while excluding personal details such as names – and has potential to be extended to include women.

Beyondblue CEO Georgie Harman said the project will gather unprecedented information about the mental health of men and identify opportunities to help them in a way that was previously impossible.

"It will reveal the profiles of men paramedics attend, where they are and why they need help. By tracking their progress through the health system, we can also see which men get appropriate treatment, which men don't and why not. There is a desperate need to link more Australian men with [mental health treatment](#) and this will help us to do that," she said.

"This project will show us how to engage with men early and ensure they receive appropriate support. For example, if we identify that a large proportion of men are ringing ambulances for heart attacks when they

are actually panic attacks we can establish ways to link them to the appropriate services. This will give us our best chance yet to ensure all Australian men and young people get timely support for mental health issues before a tragedy occurs."

The [project](#) is one of eight being delivered as part of the Movember Foundation's \$22.3 million Australian Mental Health Initiative. It is focused on men because they seek support less often than women, but are three times more likely to die by suicide.

Provided by Monash University

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