Embargoed until June 26, 2017

Launch of 2017 Australian Mental Health Prize

Greta Bradman turns spotlight on mental wellbeing of performers

Award-winning Australian soprano and mental health advocate, Greta Bradman, will launch the 2017 Australian Mental Health Prize on June 26, seeking nominations to recognise Australians who have made outstanding contributions to either the promotion of mental health or the prevention and treatment of mental illness in areas such as advocacy, research or service.

Greta Bradman, who is a classical singer, radio broadcaster and provisional clinical psychologist, was recently appointed to the Prize Advisory Group.

"I am delighted to join the Australian Mental Health Prize Advisory Group and launch the call for nominations this year. I am very passionate about being part of the conversation around mental health for a number of reasons. I've experienced first-hand how debilitating mental illness can be and I understand personally and professionally that while it can take time to find a treatment plan to suit an individual, effective treatment is out there," said Ms Bradman.

"I have witnessed the impact of mental health issues on people who work within the performing arts too, an area that until recently has received little to no attention from researchers, let alone tailored interventions or positive psychological tools for supporting good mental health.

"Unfortunately, Australian adults who work within the performing arts sector are twice as likely to attempt suicide and five to seven times more likely to consider suicide than the general population. There are much higher rates of sleep dysfunction, substance use and alcohol intake, greater lifetime mental illness and more symptoms of depression and anxiety too. There are also other areas of the community that are disproportionately represented with mental health problems, including emergency services workers.

"Australia has an opportunity to be a real leader in the area of mental health. There is so much important work underway and so much more to be done including further research, advocacy and service provision towards the treatment and prevention of mental illness, and also towards supporting and promoting positive mental health in the community and in the workplace. These might be community driven, online or grass roots.

"That is why the Australian Mental Health Prize is so important. I strongly encourage people to nominate those making a difference as recognition of people who contribute to the mental health of Australians is critical."

Professor Philip Mitchell, Head of the UNSW School of Psychiatry, said the University established the Prize to raise awareness on what is working in the field of mental health for the sake of those who are living with the burden of mental illness every day.

"Mental health needs to be treated as a national priority. It is destroying lives and has a profound and enduring impact on families, loved ones and society as a whole.

"The statistics are startling and unacceptable. One in three Australians will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. Suicide is the biggest killer of young Australians and accounts for the deaths of more young people than car accidents. In fact, Australians are more likely to die by suicide than skin cancer.

"We need to acknowledge those who are doing ground-breaking work in this area. We call upon clinicians, health professionals and the public at large to nominate the people they feel should be recognised for their work," Professor Mitchell said.

Chair of the Australian Mental Health Prize Advisory Group, Ita Buttrose, hopes the Prize will help reduce the stigma around mental illness as well as help improve mental health care in Australia.

"The number of people with mental illness accessing treatment is half that of people with physical disorders, mainly due to stigma and lack of awareness of treatment options. We urgently need to turn this around so that people feel comfortable seeking help. Access to treatment and early intervention can make a huge difference and save lives.

"We urge people to nominate someone making a significant contribution in this field to be considered for the Prize."

Last year's inaugural winner, Kim Ryan, President of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses says winning the Prize has helped to elevate the important role of mental health nurses.

"The Prize provided me with the opportunity to showcase the pivotal work of mental health nurses and how they improve the health outcomes of Australians with mental health illnesses."

To enter, nominees must provide a CV and 200 words outlining the work being undertaken and how it is making an impact. Nomination forms can be obtained from: http://australianmentalhealthprize.org.au/

Entries close on August 31, 2017. Six finalists will be chosen with the winner being announced in November.

Seeking help was life changing

Natalie Robinson, a 25-year-old freelance producer from Randwick, will share her story at the launch. She began to experience mental health issues during high school and says seeking help for her mental health was life changing.

"In senior high school with the pressures of the HSC combined with family issues, everything came to a head. I was at my lowest and felt isolated and depressed. Speaking to my school counsellor was the first time I had told anyone how I was feeling. I remember waiting outside the door feeling like an imposter because I didn't think my problems were serious enough. It took me a long time to find the courage to speak to someone but when I did it changed my life. Having someone really listen to me and show empathy for my experience without telling me to 'get over it' was hugely positive.

"Just acknowledging that I didn't want to go it alone and telling someone about how I felt allowed me to feel validated. I hope I can help someone else have a similar beneficial experience by talking to a family member, friend or professional.

"When I was growing up I didn't have access to mental health services outside of school or I simply didn't know about them. There are so many people in regional areas at risk of falling through the cracks. I hope that services for people in regional areas continue to improve. Mental health treatment should not be a privilege."

Background

The Australian Mental Health Prize
The Australian Mental Health Prize was established in 2016 by UNSW through its School of Psychiatry, Australia's pre-eminent psychiatric research department, and recognises Australians who have made outstanding contributions to either the promotion of mental health, or the prevention/treatment of mental illness.

The importance of mental health in Australia
Mental illnesses are common and highly disabling. In any one year, one in five adult Australians and one in seven children aged 4 to 17, will experience some form of mental illness. One in three Australians will have a mental illness in their lifetime.
- Mental illness impacts severely on a person's capacity to work, to earn a living and to maintain close relationships.
- A quarter of Australians aged 16-24 are experiencing a mental illness at any given time. Many people who live with mental illness first experience symptoms during adolescence.
- Suicide rates are unacceptably high, with more than 3000 Australians taking their own life each year.
- Men are at greatest risk of suicide but least likely to seek help.
- In any one year, around one million Australian adults have depression, and over two million have anxiety. Depression has the third highest burden of all diseases in Australia.
- Indigenous Australians experience much higher rates of psychological distress than the general population, and lower access to mental health services.
- LGBTIQA+ people experience very high rates of depression and psychological distress and are the most at-risk group in Australia for suicide.
- Women are more likely to experience depression and anxiety during pregnancy and the year following birth.

Why establish the Australian Mental Health Prize?
Australia has led the way internationally in many aspects of mental health such as community awareness, public advocacy and innovative services. This includes innovative programs such as *beyondblue,* the national depression initiative, and *headspace,* the national network of youth mental health services. Our open public discourse involving politicians and high profile individuals occurs in few other countries.

The Australian Mental Health Prize:

- Acknowledges and recognises the important and ground-breaking work that many Australians are doing for mental health
- Raises public awareness on the importance of mental health and
- Provides an incentive to improve services and outcomes for people with mental illness.

What are the criteria for the Australian Mental Health Prize?
The Prize is awarded annually to an Australian who has made ***outstanding contributions to either the promotion of mental health, or the prevention/treatment of mental illness – in areas such as advocacy, research or service provision***. It recognises contributions undertaken in Australia that are of national significance.

Who is involved with the Prize?
The Prize has been established by a group of eminent Australians in partnership with UNSW. Chaired by Ita Buttrose AO OBE, the Prize Advisory Group comprises: UNSW Scientia Professor Philip Mitchell AM, Professor the Hon Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, Judy Brewer AO, Professor Allan Fels AO, Adam Gilchrist AM, Jack Heath, Professor Patrick McGorry AO, Jessica Rowe AM, Sophie Scott, Greta Bradman, UNSW Scientia Professor Henry Brodaty AO, UNSW Professor Valsamma Eapen, UNSW Scientia Professor Perminder Sachdev AM.

Greta Bradman Bio
Greta Bradman is an award-winning Australian soprano, ABC Classic FM presenter and provisional clinical psychologist. She is content advisor to the Arts Wellbeing Collective, patron of St Matthew's Music Foundation and an ambassador for Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne.

Timeline: June 26: Launch of the Prize and call for nominations (http://australianmentalhealthprize.org.au)
August 31: Applications close
October 8-14: Mental Health Week Announcement of six finalists
November: Award ceremony and announcement of winner (UNSW, Sydney).

Issued on behalf of the Australian Mental Health Prize – UNSW School of Psychiatry. Media Contact: Fleur Townley 0405 278 758