

**Embargoed until 11am Tuesday June 26, 2018**

## **Mental health care can begin with a single conversation**

### ***Lucy Brogden launches the 2018 Australian Mental Health Prize with a personal request for nominations.***

Mental illness has been increasingly in the news recently, sparking many conversations in the media and across the dining room table. Psychologist and chair of the National Mental Health Commission, Lucy Brogden, hopes this will create greater awareness in the community and break down misconceptions around this topic.

Mrs Brogden recently joined the Advisory Committee of the Australian Mental Health Prize. She will launch the 2018 Australian Mental Health Prize on Tuesday, 26 June at UNSW Sydney.

“I am proud to be part of this year’s search 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,” said Mrs Brogden, who brings professional and personal experience to her role. “As many people know, I have personal experience with a family member with mental illness, and throughout the journey, I have seen a strong culture of continuing improvement in mental health services across Australia.

“People can have confidence in the mental health system. There are so many dedicated staff and volunteers who work hard every day delivering high quality services that make a difference to people’s lives,” Mrs Brogden said. “I’d like Australians to recognise their work. This is why I strongly encourage people to nominate these unsung individuals.

“I also want to encourage people to consider looking for a job in mental health and to realise what a valuable career choice it is. Caring for someone with a mental illness can be very rewarding.”

#### **Personal experience**

Mrs Brogden’s husband John, a former leader of the NSW Liberal Party and current chairman of Lifeline Australia, has long spoken about his battles with mental illness. “I know how vital it is that people know they do not need to go it alone,” said Mrs Brogden. “Care can begin with a single conversation. However, many of those in need don’t realise they have a wide range of services available that deliver a high standard of care for them when they are at a vulnerable period in their life.”

One of the biggest challenges Mrs Brogden sees is to reduce the stigma around mental illness. “Stigma stops many people from seeking help,” she says. “I’d like to see an end to this. Addressing misconceptions and discrimination related to mental illness is vital because an astonishingly large number Australian adults will experience a mental illness at some point in their lifetime.”

Ita Buttrose, Chair of the Australian Mental Health Prize Advisory Board, says there are hundreds, if not thousands of people in our community who deserve recognition. “They may be working within the industry, as last year’s co-winner Professor Allan Fels is, or

have become a tireless advocate because of personal experience of living with a mental illness, like the 2017 co-winner, Janet Meagher,” she said. “We urge people who know someone making a significant contribution in this field to nominate them.

“One in three Australians will experience a mental health issue, but those affected by mental illness include everyone in the orbit of an individual – those in their home life, work environment and their general support network. This means there are many millions of Australians touched by mental health issues. Acknowledging those who work or volunteer in the industry is an important part of the process to destigmatising mental illness.”

UNSW established the Prize in 2016. Scientia Professor Philip Mitchell, Head of the School of Psychiatry, said: “The Prize was established to acknowledge those who are doing innovative work in this area, whether they are involved in the industry as a vocation or are advocates because they have been touched by mental illness.

“Anyone who knows of such a person would no doubt appreciate their achievements, but I would encourage them to take it one step further and nominate them for the Australian Mental Health Prize. This allows us all to recognise their work and dedication,” said Professor Mitchell.

### **How to nominate**

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 7 September, 2018. Six finalists will be chosen with the winner being announced in October.

## **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. It 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.
- LGBTIQ+ 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*. (Nominations of individuals who were previously nominated, but were not finalists, are welcomed).

### **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, 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 and Lucy Brogden.

**Timeline:** 26 June: Launch of the Prize and call for nominations

(<http://australianmentalhealthprize.org.au>)

7 September: Applications close

1 October: Announcement of six finalists

19 October: Award ceremony and announcement of winner (UNSW, Sydney).

*Issued on behalf of the Australian Mental Health Prize – UNSW School of Psychiatry.*

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