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MEDIA RELEASE

Hospital Admissions Avoidable for Vast Majority of Western Sydneysiders Experiencing Mental Ill-health

Blacktown support service saving lives by providing a Safe Space outside of hospital emergency departments

An innovative support service in Western Sydney is helping spearhead a push to provide appropriate care for residents experiencing mental health issues, and in the process avoid unnecessary hospital admissions.

Funded by the Western Sydney Primary Health Network (WSPHN), Blacktown's 'Safe Space' initiative has been hailed as a leader in providing the right care at the right time for people who would typically end up in a hospital emergency department.

"Safe Space is purely non-clinical so we avoid any clinical items, anything which can be triggering for people," explains Safe Space Support Facilitator Amina Sohrab.

"We even avoid any clipboards because that can also remind people of hospitals, doctors and emergencies so it's a very safe, comfortable environment."

"There is no stigma or judgment around their mental ill-health or suicidal ideation, so they are able to connect with the workers here, plus we also support them in finding other services depending on their needs," Amina Sohrab said.

The latest health data for Western Sydney confirms that organisations like Safe Space are hitting the mark when it comes to delivering high-quality, tailored value-based care in the communities where people live.

"In Western Sydney, there are around 200,000 people who experience a mental health challenge every year, with less than 1% of the population requiring hospital admission. However, unfortunately, when there are no suitable services in the community, hospital care may be considered the only alternative. Safe Space is a great service because it's embedded in the community and is able to connect those in need with services nearby, which is the key to building an integrated health system where the consumer is the central focus."

"Safe Space is part of a much broader strategy to reduce the pressure on hospital emergency departments and inpatient units, while delivering primary health care that is better tailored to the individual and which ultimately costs our health system far less," said Ray Messom, CEO of WentWest.

Safe Space was recently accredited against the National Suicide Prevention Standards, one of just a handful of organisations in Australia to achieve this qualification.

Client Amelia Lewis was struck by the homely feel of the service, located just across the road from the Blacktown Hospital in a converted suburban home.

“Oh, I love the house, I love the backyard. We've had lunch in the backyard together and I've even come in and had dinner one night. It was great and the company is amazing,” Amelia Lewis recalls.

“I can honestly tell you that without Safe Space, I wouldn't be here today. I've had my rocky and bad days, but I know that whenever I fall into trouble I pick up that phone and I call Safe Space, or I come in.”

“I was coming in three times a week to start off with, then I dropped down to twice, and then once, and now it's been a couple of weeks, but I ring up if I'm in trouble because I know I have support here,” she said.

Quick facts on the Western Sydney Primary Health Network, operated by WentWest:

- Commissions health services in Western Sydney
- Supports front line primary care providers
- Partners with leaders across the health, social, justice and education sectors to build integrated models of care
- Drives health data and insights in Western Sydney to deliver services that respond to community needs
- One of 31 Primary Health Networks in Australia