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## MEDIA RELEASE

# How a Modern Mental Health Service is Responding in Western Sydney

## Children and adults of all ages able to access free, flexible mental health support

A ground-breaking mental health service is adapting to the ever-changing nature of COVID-impacted communities by offering accessible, mental health support free of red tape and cost.

'Head to Health' provides timely support for those experiencing a mental health challenge amidst pandemic-exacerbated wait times at conventional health facilities.

*"Because we don't require a referral or Medicare card to be able to see someone, we've been able to support clients during the pandemic who might otherwise fall through the cracks,"* Head to Health Seven Hills Clinical Services Manager James Huynh explains.

*"We are a free service with no age limits, no red tape and we can generally see someone face to face within a week of them calling in, plus we provide a Telehealth option and care coordination where we refer clients to other services in our network."*

Based on the model rolled out during the 2020 Victorian lockdowns, Head to Health pop up clinics are a joint project between New South Wales Primary Health Networks and the Department of Health, designed to improve access to mental health services during these challenging times with both phone and in-person support. From 1 July 2022, the website, phone line and local clinics are available nationally, including age-specific services such as the Adult Mental Health Centres. Announcements are expected soon on the locations for specialty 0-12 Kids Hubs too.

Rebecca Yu is a peer support worker at Head to Health Seven Hills and has experienced her own mental health challenges.

*"It started in high school where I developed persistent depressive disorder which lasted for over two years and it's still going on. I also had study anxiety as well, and from there I went into self-harm and suicidal ideation,"* Rebecca Yu said.

*"I've been on a long journey and I'm on my recovery journey now, so I can meet clients where they're at because I can relate to them...I've been there."*

*"It really helps that they know they're not alone, there is someone who's been through what they're experiencing and there is someone who can help them...guide them through."*

Efraim Rosso is a Senior Clinician at Head to Health's Parramatta clinic and was recently supporting a young man who started his first counselling session by pacing the room.

*"He came to us very distressed and very anxious; his computer system was hacked and he lost some valuable data and lost some money," Efraim Rosso recalls.*

*"So we talked through some of those issues that he had and we made a plan of what he needs to do to have some control over what's happening with him, including gaining control of his respiration and grounding him through cognitive therapy."*

*"After I'd helped him see a GP and get some medical support, in a very short period of time he had a strong reduction in his symptoms and was able to start thinking about going beyond that point where he was deeply affected."*

*"Four weeks after the initial incident, his severity of symptoms dropped dramatically, and he was about 80% better than what he was."*

The Head to Health initiative recognises that only a small proportion of people struggling with a mental health challenge need psychiatric or hospital care.

*"In our Western Sydney region, 20% are at risk of a mental health condition or challenge, but only a small fraction of those people require care in a hospital environment," said Ray Messom, CEO of WentWest, the Western Sydney Primary Health Network.*

*"When you ring the Head to Health number an initial assessment of your need is done so that services can be customised and targeted to your unique needs – through the phone call you can be linked into all of the different services across Western Sydney whether those be the services we commission or services provided by our partners."*

*"We spend a lot of time figuring out what services are available and which services are most appropriate for whom to ensure the care is appropriate and carefully matched to the communities they serve."*

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### **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