

# Media release

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## Mental health training boost for Tasmania's residential aged care facility staff

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A new statewide training drive will help people working in Tasmanian aged care facilities identify and support residents at risk of declining mental health.

Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) announced today it had selected national not-for-profit organisation STEPS Group to deliver more than 70 training sessions to residential aged care facility staff across the state, following an open tender process.

It's hoped the training boost will help reduce the impact of mental illness on older Australians in residential care, who are up to five times more likely to experience mental health issues than those living independently.

The mental health training program will boost the capacity of facility staff to:

- identify residents at risk of decline in mental health
- identify and respond to altered behaviour
- interpret and safely implement relevant policies and procedures
- safely implement mental health first aid
- understand self-care strategies.

Primary Health Tasmania spokesperson Susan Powell said the Australian Government-funded training boost was a vital, locally delivered step towards better mental health outcomes for people in residential aged care.

"Residential aged care facility staff can be an excellent barometer for any sudden or notable changes in a resident's mental wellbeing," Ms Powell said.

"In some ways, this training is about giving staff the confidence they need to act on those instincts, so they can take the necessary next steps to help someone they identify as being at risk of deteriorating mental health."

The Federal Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians, Senator Richard Colbeck, said the training drive was another important initiative aimed at improving the delivery of care for senior Australians.

"This is an important opportunity for aged care staff across the state and a tangible step forward to ensure the elderly and vulnerable receive the care they deserve," Senator Colbeck said.

STEPS Chief Executive Officer Kerry Staines said local staff were eager to grow their skill sets and increase their ability to deliver timely, appropriate care.

"Residential aged care facilities are communities in and of themselves, and a well-run community is one where everyone plays their part," Ms Staines said.

"This training drive is about giving staff good, evidence-based strategies that they can apply directly to their day-to-day work.

"While they're not GPs or psychologists, facility staff can be empowered to get the ball rolling if they notice something's wrong, and that can make a big difference to protecting the mental welfare of our residential aged care population."

The training opportunity will be made available to staff from across Tasmania's 72 residential aged care facilities, with more than 1200 people to be invited to take part in north west, north and south-based sessions.

The workforce training complements a previously announced mental health program funded by the Australian Government and commissioned by Primary Health Tasmania last August, which is exploring a new model of care designed to improve access to psychological treatment services for people living in aged care facilities.

Local not-for-profit organisation Richmond Fellowship Tasmania delivers that program, and has partnered with a residential aged care operator in each region of Tasmania – south, north, and north west – to offer residents a range of evidence-based treatment options to be delivered within the facilities.

It's all part of Primary Health Tasmania's work commissioning psychological support services designed for people living in residential aged care, intended to complement the personal care, accommodation, physical and social support they receive from their facility.

*Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation working to connect care and keep Tasmanians well and out of hospital. It was established under the Australian Government's Primary Health Networks Program to support and enable a coordinated, primary care-focused health system.*

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