

Media release

Monday 27 February 2023

New after-hours mental health space for Launceston

A new after-hours mental health support option will be available to northern Tasmanians from 27 March as part of an expansion of the Australian Government-funded Launceston Head to Health.

Relocation to a purpose-built site on Canning Street means the adult mental health centre can start offering its full range of services, with a dedicated after-hours space opening from 5pm to 9pm on week days and from 10am to 2pm on weekends.

The CEO of centre operator Stride, **Mr Drikus van der Merwe**, said an after-hours space was always part of the plan for the centre, and was included in the design of the purpose-built site.

"People don't only need help during normal business hours, so we are opening an after-hours drop-in service as an alternative to the hospital emergency department for people experiencing emotional and suicidal distress," he said.

"The after-hours space will have its own entrance and will be staffed by mental health clinicians and peer workers with lived experience who will help ensure visitors receive immediate support and appropriate referral, if needed."

Details of the after-hours service will be provided at the official opening of the purpose-built Launceston Head to Health premises by the Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health, **the Hon. Emma McBride MP**, this morning.

Ms McBride said: "Mental health and suicide prevention are top priorities for the Australian Government, and we are working to ensure that people are supported to access suitable care in all regions of Australia.

"Head to Health is a safe and welcoming place for adults to access mental health information, services and support, without needing a prior appointment or paying a fee.

"With more than 4,000 sessions of service already provided in Launceston, this new, purpose-built premises for Launceston Head to Health means more people will get the help they need when and where they need it."

Launceston Head to Health opened its doors at an interim site on Paterson Street in January 2022, while purpose-built premises were constructed at 62-64 Canning Street. The service relocated to Canning Street in mid-January this year.

Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) received Australian Government funding to oversee development of Launceston Head to Health. The new premises were designed, built and decorated based on input from an advisory committee consisting of local community members.

Primary Health Tasmania General Manager **Mr Mark Broxton** said: "We heard the centre should feel warm, welcoming and inclusive, rather than clinical and controlled. There should be natural light, art that reflects the local community, and quiet, softly-lit spaces where people can connect with peers and other support people.

"It's great to see these suggestions brought to life in this centre, and to hear the feedback from the people it's here to serve.

"Primary Health Tasmania is also overseeing the establishment of further Head to Health services in Hobart, Burnie and Devonport for the Australian Government, and the input of local knowledge and experience will again be a foundation for development of those new services."

Mr Broxton acknowledged Canning Street property developer Pharos Properties, builders JMG Engineers and GLB Constructions, and designers Francis+Burne along with their sub-contractors and partner organisations.

Northern Tasmanian representatives of mental health consumer organisation Flourish were heavily involved in the consultation process.

Flourish CEO **Ms Tash Smyth** said: "The centre is a shining example of what can be achieved when we come together to address a pressing need in our community, and shows the value of involving the lived experience community in the design, delivery and evaluation of the services they use.

"Launceston Head to Health provides much-needed support to individuals in times of distress. It presents a viable alternative to emergency departments during crises, offering a compassionate and comprehensive approach to mental health support."

One of the special guests at today's official opening event is Youngtown woman **Ms Lisa Bailey**, who won a photography competition Stride held as part of its aim to ensure the new site reflects the local community.

Lisa's image was taken at an abandoned train tunnel at Lilydale and is about "facing the light at the end of a tunnel and getting out of a dark place".

"I experience anxiety at times myself, and photography is something that takes me out of that space," she said.

The image has been installed at the centre, taking up a full wall at the end of a corridor.

"I can't describe how it feels to see my image on the wall there," Ms Bailey said. "This was a great opportunity for someone in my position, who uses photography as a way out and to express themselves, to be recognised and feel a real sense of achievement."

Ryan Taylor was runner-up in the competition, and his image of a path leading towards a sunrise at the Tamar Island Wetlands is now behind the reception desk at the centre. The winning images were selected by Flourish.

About Launceston Head to Health

Head to Health adult mental health services are funded by the Australian Government to support people in times of distress. The Launceston centre – Tasmania's first - offers a visible and accessible 'no wrong door' entry point for people who need:

- immediate mental health support
- support to navigate to other suitable mental health services in the local community
- information and advice for family, friends and carers of people in need of mental health support.

The Launceston Head to Health team comprises of both clinical staff and non-clinical staff with lived experience (peer workers) to provide holistic, person-centred care.

The Canning Street site includes several multi-purpose rooms that are used by related service providers and organisations including a trauma counsellor, Reconciliation Tasmania, Flourish, Mental Health Family and Friends, the Brain Injury Association of Tasmania, the Suicide Prevention Network, Anglicare, The Salvation Army, Wellways, Baptistcare and Maxima.

Launceston Head to Health is operated by Stride and supported by funding from Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) through the Australian Government's Primary Health Networks program.

Stride is a national organisation with extensive experience in running integrated, community-based mental health services, including headspace centres as well as Head to Health services. Stride has a strong focus on engagement with communities to ensure its services reflects local needs.

To access Launceston Head to Health, people can:

- **visit** the centre at 62-64 Canning Street, Launceston*
- **call** 1800 595 212
- **email** headtohealth.launceston@stride.com.au

There is no charge, and appointments are not required.

*Current opening hours are 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. From 27 March, a dedicated after-hours space will be open from 5pm to 9pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 2 pm Saturday and Sunday.

More information about Launceston Head to Health is available at www.stride.com.au/who-we-help/adults/head-to-health

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Media contact

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