

Kimberley Region shows the way forging links in the Kimberley

An exciting new project is forging links between Healthway funded groups in the Kimberley with the aim of increasing awareness of key health messages across the community.

The long term aim is to improve health in the region by fostering increased communication and co-operation between Healthway-sponsored groups, which will in turn lead to better promotion and understanding of health messages.

The Cross Program Regional Coordination Initiative – Kimberley Project, was developed in response to consultation with key stakeholders during the development of the current Heathway Strategic Plan 2004-2007.

During the consultations, many representatives of Heathway sponsored groups including health, sport, arts and racing, said that they would benefit from more communication with other Healthway-sponsored groups.

They said the benefits of increased communication would include the exchange of ideas on developing and implementing programs and projects and strategies for promoting health messages.

At its April 2005 meeting, the Heathway Board agreed to support a trial of a coordinated approach across Heathway funded health projects and sponsorships in one region.

The Kimberley Region was selected due to the size of the community, the high prevalence of health risk behaviours, the capacity of the region to support the project and previous links to Heathway by organisations in the region.

As a result, the Kimberley Population Health Unit submitted an application to host the project, which was established this year.

Over the three year trial, the project will emphasise the priority areas of nutrition and physical activity in the region and trial a range of strategies to build partnerships between funded groups and generate new applications.

A Heathway funded project coordinator is based in Kimberley Population Health Unit and is responsible for providing support to organisations currently funded by Heathway as well as generating new sponsorship and health promotion projects.

The project is already producing some exciting results..

For example, using the recommendations of the Cultural Grants Review, implemented by the Office of Children and Youth and Healthway (see page 10) which included allowing Indigenous communities to apply for Heathway funding in ways other than formal written applications, the community at One Arm Point was encouraged and supported to submit an application via video.

WA towns in a world first for mental health promotion

People living in six regional communities in Western Australia are participating in a groundbreaking new project that aims to promote positive mental health and well being and reduce mental health problems in the longer term.

The Mentally Healthy WA Project is a three year community-based mental health promotion campaign implemented by a research group based at the Division of Health Sciences at Curtin University.

It is the first of its kind in the world to work with regional communities to find the best and most effective ways to promote positive mental health in individuals and communities.

The project was officially launched in Albany early in October. Guests, who included interested community members and representatives of local community groups and agencies, were entertained by local singer song writer Geoff Waldeck before taking part in a community forum.

Albany is being joined by the communities of Albany, Karratha, Geraldton, Northam/York/Toodyay, Kalgoorlie and Esperance in the Mentally Healthy WA project which has been funded by Healthway with a special Health Promotion Research Grant of \$1.2 million over three years. It is also supported by WA Country Health Services, LotteryWest and Pilbara Iron.

The project director, Professor Rob Donovan, said the burden of mental health problems was rapidly becoming a global and local disaster.

"Western Australia is not immune to the problem," Professor Donovan said.

"The burden of health costs due to mental health problems will soon overtake the burden caused by cardiovascular disease and cancer.

"In social terms, this means, for example, that if we do nothing, there will be more domestic violence, people will make more mistakes at work and endanger their workmates or simply be less efficient and more people will be unhappy which means more smoking and drinking and less exercise and healthy eating which will, in turn, increase the pressure on the health system due to physical ill health."

Professor Donovan said the campaign would begin by measuring the level of mental health and well being in the six regional centres. This will be followed by a two year trial to determine which approaches have the most impact on a person's understanding of mental health issues and are most effective for improving people's mental health and well being.

The project will trial a range of different approaches including providing more opportunities for people to actively participate in their communities and will work with organisations at local level such as workplaces, clubs and schools.

A project officer will be based in each of the regional centres to organise the campaign and liaise with the Curtin research team.

The Mentally Healthy WA Project results from the Mental Health Promotion Scoping Study that was commissioned by Healthway in 2002 and published in 2003.

The scoping study sought to determine Western Australians' attitude to and understanding of mental health issues and their knowledge of ways to promote positive mental health in themselves and others.

Healthway's Director of Health Promotion, Dr Jo Clarkson, said the \$1.2 million grant was one of the biggest grants of its kind awarded by Healthway.

"It is an indication of the importance Healthway places on preventing mental ill-health," Dr Clarkson said.

"Mental health problems affect the entire community and no-one is immune. At any one time, one in every five West Australians is affected by mental ill-health.

"One unique feature of this project is that it will focus on prevention, instead of waiting until people are actually sick to try to fix the problem.

"The saying that prevention is better than cure applies to mental health problems just as it does to physical ones."

The results of the Mentally Healthy WA project will be used to develop a blueprint for a Statewide or national mental health promotion campaign.



Project Officers from the Albany Mentally Healthy WA Campaign, Pam Lincoln (left) and Trish Travers at the public launch of the campaign in Albany. Picture courtesy Albany Advertiser.