

# Healthy Body, Healthy Mind

The Office of Mental Health and The University of Western Australia School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences have launched a new program tackling poor physical health in people with mental illness.



**t**he HealthRight Project addresses the importance of treating physical health problems in people with mental illness.

People will be engaged through a range of strategies including peer support to make general practitioners more accessible - as well as being urged to take part in a health campaign to increase awareness about physical health.

The project is a response to a report entitled 'Duty to Care' published by UWA in 2001 which highlighted alarming statistics about the physical health of people with mental illness - which affects one in five Australians.

HealthRight Project Officer Ann Bates said according to the report, mental health consumers are two and a half times more likely to die from preventable diseases than the general population.

Often people focus all their energy on treating their mental health and forget about the physical side of things.

"The study found that this group of people are more likely to die from preventable physical illness, such as heart disease and cancer, and that these diseases often go untreated and undiagnosed," she said.

"The key message for people with mental illness is 'get your health right - see a GP for a physical health check'.

"Going to a GP to have regular health checks can help prevent problems before they arise, or treat them so that they don't get worse.

"Ideally, you should have a physical check once a year."

HealthRight's campaign focuses on more than just a yearly visit to the doctor.

It combines the provision of supportive environments with activities to assist in lifestyle and behavioural change.

The first phase involved a recent art project to reach people who have experienced mental illness, by creating images relating to quitting smoking,

physical activity, alcohol and other drug management and nutrition.

The images will be used in related resources and a media and promotional campaign.

The HealthRight project was launched officially by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health at the Healthy Body Healthy Mind exhibition, which showcased the art project participants and their artworks.

One of the winners at the exhibition was Allison Nolan for her image 'Waking up strong in the morning,' which will feature on t-shirts for the project.

Allison Nolan works at the State Library of Western Australia and attends art therapy classes to help her manage depression. It was here that she found out about the art exhibition and the benefits of being involved.

"I found out about the Healthy Body Healthy Mind exhibition through a flyer that had been distributed to the Joondalup Mental Health Clinic," she said.

"I was just finishing a painting that I thought would fit nicely into the theme of the exhibition and so I submitted my application.

"The painting is called 'Waking up strong in the morning' and I was trying to create an inspirational image.

"I wanted an image that would remind me of the benefits of just being outside in the sunshine and especially the joy of an early morning sunrise. It is so easy to forget the nice things in life and become blinded to the beauty around me when I am struggling with the black cloud of depression."

She said becoming involved in activities to boost your physical well-being could help treat your mental health.

"I think anything that brings greater awareness about the body-mind connection is a good thing, and particularly the emphasis that this project has on being physically active as a 'treatment strategy' for mental illness such as depression."



Meagan Shand, Tony Serve, Maureen Maher and John Hyde, wearing t-shirts featuring Allison Nolan's artwork

Other winners for their images were:

- Kay Merrin for her work *Get a life, not a bottle*. She drew inspiration from her experience in overcoming alcohol abuse.
- Pauline Miles created *The Feast* which will be used to promote nutrition and healthy eating.
- Vivienne Lingham's work *Quit and rediscover the world of sensations* promoting smoking control.
- RUAH art group for their creation *Getting Active* promoting physical activity.

The winning artworks are part of a travelling display which is moving around libraries and non-government organisations over the next few months.

They can also be seen on the website set up by HealthRight, [www.healthright.org.au](http://www.healthright.org.au)

The site will be developed to become an information resource to *promote physical health for mental health* to consumers and health professionals.

Mental Health Week is October 7-14 and will promote the need for physical as well as mental health. ■

For more information see [www.healthright.org.au](http://www.healthright.org.au) or [www.mental.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.mental.health.wa.gov.au)