



## Depression and anxiety – Not a normal part of getting older

A new *beyondblue* awareness campaign is encouraging seniors across Australia to learn about depression and anxiety, talk about these conditions to help reduce the associated stigma and to seek help if they think they have some of the symptoms.

The '*Depression and anxiety – It's not a normal part of getting older*' campaign was developed following *beyondblue* research into community attitudes about depression. Generally, the broader community's knowledge of depression has significantly improved since 2002, together with a decrease in stigma, however the same is not true for older people.

*beyondblue* CEO Kate Carnell said it is concerning that common mental health problems remain an uncomfortable topic for many older people.

"Our research shows that stigma relating to depression and other mental health conditions is very common in people over 65," Ms Carnell said.

"Older people are also more reluctant to share their experiences of depression with others, do not view mental health problems in the same light as physical health problems, and tend to ignore symptoms of depression – only seeking professional help when things reach crisis point.

"This is a real worry. We know that depression and anxiety are common – affecting three million Australians every year. Depression or anxiety is not a sign of weakness, and it's not right for older people to think that it's their lot to experience these illnesses just because they're getting older. Help is available and the good news is, with the right treatment, most people recover."

It is thought that between 10 and 15 per cent of older people experience depression and approximately 10 per cent experience anxiety. The rates of depression among people living in residential aged-care facilities are believed to be considerably higher, around 35 per cent.

"If people have noticed changes in mood, unexplained aches and pains, sleeping problems, changes in weight, or have been feeling generally out-of-sorts for more than two weeks, it's a good idea to talk about it with your General Practitioner," said Ms Carnell.

"Unfortunately, depression doesn't always go away by itself. We really need to get the message out that depression and anxiety disorders are health problems – just like diabetes or high blood pressure – they respond to treatment and can be managed."

*beyondblue* is working with Council on the Ageing (COTA) across Australia to raise awareness of depression and anxiety in older people through a free peer-education program called *beyond maturityblues*. To enquire about holding a session, contact the COTA in your state or territory.

To find out more about the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders, call the *beyondblue* information line on 1300 22 4636 or visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**Campaign images are available to accompany this article. For more information or to arrange an interview please contact *beyondblue* on (03) 9810 6100.**