

Media Release

newsroom.unsw.edu.au

media@unsw.edu.au

Fostering Compassionate Communities for Mental Health: Nominations Open for the 2024 Australian Mental Health Prize.

As nominations open for the Australian Mental Health Prize, experts are uniting to underscore the critical need to foster compassionate communities. Recent tragic events have heightened emotions across Australia, particularly fear, despair and sadness. In these difficult times it is even more important to nurture compassion and open dialogue, to better address the multifaceted challenges surrounding mental health across our nation.

“As the community navigates these challenges, it is crucial to acknowledge the impact on the loved ones of victims and to recognise the tireless efforts of first responders and healthcare teams. Together, we must continue to uphold one another during these trying times,” says Lucinda Brogden AM, Co-chair of the Australian Mental Health Prize Advisory Committee. “Tragic events within our communities often serve as a stark reminder of the fragility of mental health and the profound impact it has on individuals and society as a whole.”

Professor Valsamma Eapen, an expert in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry from UNSW Medicine and Health, says our compassion should also be front of mind in our age-appropriate conversations with our children as well. “Speak to children about tragic events in a simple, reassuring manner. Let them know it’s okay to feel sad or confused. Be ready to answer questions calmly, acknowledging that they might hear about it from friends. Reassure them you’re there to talk and support them. It is important to look out for any change in behaviours such as reluctance to go out, being withdrawn, having sleep issues or acting out.”

Professor Allan Fels AO, Co-chair of the Prize, has family lived experience of complex and enduring mental health. He says that we must engage in responsible conversations that challenge stigma and misinformation.

“Recent events have heightened concerns, especially among those with mental health issues. Notably, 45% of Australians will face mental health challenges in their lifetime. We must handle discussions about mental health carefully, ensuring they are responsible, inclusive, and free from harmful stereotypes.

Recognising that those with mental health issues are often victims, not perpetrators, let's avoid assumptions and stigmatising individuals with severe mental illness and their support networks."

Professor Kimberlie Dean, Chair of Forensic Psychiatry at UNSW Sydney and member of the Prize's Advisory Committee, underscores the intricate nature of mental health challenges.

"In grappling with the complexities of mental health, we must acknowledge the absence of simple solutions. Communities are instrumental in fostering environments of understanding, support, and destigmatisation. Yet, we must also confront the reality of service gaps and limitations. Mental health funding remains disproportionately low relative to the burden of disease, necessitating increased investment and reform in the mental health system."

"It's equally vital to acknowledge that mental health struggles often intertwine with broader societal issues such as substance abuse, trauma, and systemic discrimination. The aftermath of COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges, intensifying strain on an already burdened workforce. This underscores the urgent need for sustainable solutions. Marginalised individuals bear a disproportionate burden, often lacking access to support services and resorting to the justice system as a last resort."

The Australian Mental Health Prize was established in 2016 by UNSW Sydney. Henry Brodaty AO, Scientia Professor of Ageing and Mental Health at UNSW Medicine and Health, states "During these challenging times, the Australian Mental Health Prize serves as a reminder of the importance of recognising individuals who have made significant contributions to mental health promotion, advocacy, and service provision. Moreover, it underscores our collective responsibility to prioritise mental well-being and work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive society."

Key Information:

- Nominations for the 2024 Australian Mental Health Prize open on April 22 and will remain so until July 8, 2024.
- The winners will be announced on the 23 September 2024.
- To nominate, answer three questions about the nominee's mental health contributions and impact on the online form at www.australianmentalhealthprize.org.au. Categories include Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, lived experience, professional, and community hero.

Issued by Lanham Media on behalf of the Australian Mental Health Prize – UNSW Sydney.

Media Contacts:

Fleur Townley | fleur@lanhammedia.com.au | 0405 278 758

Greg Townley | greg@lanhammedia.com.au | 0414 195 908



UNSW
SYDNEY



AUSTRALIAN MENTAL
HEALTH PRIZE

NOTES FOR MEDIA:

Available for interview:

- Lucinda Brogden AM, Co-chair of the Australian Mental Health Prize Committee
- Professor Allan Fels AO, Co-chair of the Australian Mental Health Prize Committee
- Scientia Professor Henry Brodaty AO, Scientia Professor of Ageing and Mental Health, UNSW Medicine & Health Sydney.
- Professor Valsamma Eapen, an Expert in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry from UNSW Medicine and Health.
- Professor Kimberlie Dean, Chair of Forensic Psychiatry at UNSW Sydney
- 2023 Winners of the Australia Mental Health Prize:
 - <https://www.australianmentalhealthprize.org.au/past-awards>
 - Megan Krakouer (Fremantle, WA) – Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander category.
 - Dr Geoffrey Toogood (Frankston South, VIC) – Lived experience category.
 - Professor Maree Toombs (Coogee, NSW) – Professional category.
 - Ali Faraj (Auburn NSW) – Community hero category.

BACKGROUND:

The Australian Mental Health Prize

The Australian Mental Health Prize was established in 2016 by UNSW Sydney. It recognises Australians who have made outstanding contributions to either the promotion of mental health, or the prevention/treatment of mental illness.

The importance of mental health in Australia

Mental illnesses are common and highly disabling. In any one year, one in five adult Australians and one in seven children aged 4 to 17, will experience some form of mental illness. One in three Australians will have a mental illness in their lifetime.

- Mental illness impacts severely on a person's capacity to work, to earn a living and to maintain close relationships.
- A quarter of Australians aged 16-24 are experiencing a mental illness at any given time. Many people who live with mental illness first experience symptoms during adolescence.
- Suicide rates are unacceptably high, with more than 3000 Australians taking their own life each year.
- Men are at greatest risk of suicide but least likely to seek help.
- In any one year, around one million Australian adults have depression, and over two million have anxiety. Depression has the third highest burden of all diseases in Australia.
- Indigenous Australians experience much higher rates of psychological distress than the general population, and lower access to mental health services.



- LGBTIQ+ people experience very high rates of depression and psychological distress and are the most at-risk group in Australia for suicide.
- Women are more likely to experience depression and anxiety during pregnancy and the year following birth.

Why establish the Australian Mental Health Prize?

Australia has led the way internationally in many aspects of mental health such as community awareness, public advocacy and innovative services. This includes innovative programs such as *beyondblue*, a mental health and wellbeing support organisation, and *headspace*, the national network of youth mental health services. Our open public discourse involving politicians and high-profile individuals occurs in few other countries.

The Australian Mental Health Prize:

- Acknowledges and recognises the important and ground-breaking work that many Australians are doing for mental health
- Raises public awareness on the importance of mental health and
- Provides an incentive to improve services and outcomes for people with mental illness.

What are the criteria for the Australian Mental Health Prize?

The Prize is awarded annually to Australians who have made *outstanding contributions to the promotion of mental health or the prevention or treatment of mental illness – in areas such as advocacy, research or service provision*. (Nominations of individuals who were previously nominated, but were not winners, are welcomed).

Who is involved with the Prize?

The Prize has been established by a group of eminent Australians in partnership with UNSW. Co-chaired by Lucy Brogden AM and Professor Allan Fels AO, the Prize Advisory Group comprises: Sophie Scott, Erandathie Jayakody, Melinda Upton, Jeremy Coggin, UNSW Scientia Professor Henry Brodaty AO, UNSW Professor Kimberlie Dean, UNSW Scientia Professor Philip Mitchell AM and UNSW Professor Valsamma Eapen.

