

**TASKFORCESUBMISSION:** submission

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**POSITION:** Manager, Research and Policy

**ORGANISATION:** beyondblue: the national depression initiative

**SUBMISSION1:** beyondblue: the national depression initiative supports the three areas of priority for the Taskforce: obesity, smoking and alcohol; however we strongly recommend that mental health be a priority in the next phase of the Taskforce's work in 2009 because the levels of comorbidity and prevalence of depression and anxiety are the leading cause of non-fatal burden of disease in Australia for men (10%) and women (18%) (Begg et al, 2007); with less than half the people with high prevalence disorders receiving care (ABS, 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: first results, 2008).

#### Obesity

Physical activity programs and responses to reduce and/or prevent obesity should not only focus on physical outcomes but also refer to positive psychological outcomes.

Research funded by beyondblue has ascertained that physical activity improves depression in older people and provides additional benefits such as improved physical and psychological health, and quality of life status (Sims, 2005). The study showed that 57% of participants in a resistance training intervention had a reduction in depressive symptoms; the participants were more likely to be sufficiently active to achieve health benefits; and there was improvement in participants' functional status (the ability to perform normal daily activities) at the six month follow-up.

#### Smoking

"Smoking is generally more common in people with depression than in the general population" (Ragg and Ahmed, 2008). Daily smokers are also more likely than recent smokers or non-smokers to report high or very high levels of psychological distress (ABS, 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: first results, 2008).

The range of factors associated with smoking is clearly understood: eg, socioeconomic status, access and opportunity, personality traits, and heritability. The factors are the same for people with a mental illness who smoke as those without a mental illness who smoke. The key point is that more people with mental illness are affected by these factors and poorer health status than are people without mental illness.

Evidence suggests that many people with mental illness can give up smoking, and want to. beyondblue strongly recommends that people with mental illness, especially those with depression and anxiety, be included as a priority target group, along with Indigenous and socio-economically disadvantaged Australians, within the Taskforce's future public health approaches.

Early onset substance use is consistently associated with an increased risk for later development of mental health problems in older adolescents and young adults (Lubman et al., 2007); therefore, beyondblue supports any measure implemented through the Taskforce's strategy to reduce the number of young people taking up smoking and the number of young people currently smoking.

#### Alcohol

The devastating impacts of alcohol abuse on individuals, families, and the community is now receiving widespread interest. The impact of alcohol on mental health is an area that warrants increased attention and prevention measures.

Alcohol abuse is associated with a high prevalence of several mental health conditions including anxiety disorders (eg, social phobia), depression and bipolar disorder. Alcohol abuse leads to poorer outcomes for people who have a mental health problem. It is also known to be associated with worse outcomes in terms of depression course, social functioning, health care use, self harm and suicide.

Latest population data on suicide confirms attention is required for people with comorbid mental health and alcohol abuse issues. Begg et al (2007) report that depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse accounted for nearly three-quarters (73%) of the suicide burden in Australia in 2003.

These findings warrant significant attention be given to strategies and actions targeting those with mental health issues, as well as those at risk of developing mental health issues from problemat

**PRIVACY:** yes

**SUBMIT:** Submit