

MEDIA RELEASE

'On Track' to staying free of depression

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For many Australians living in the country, getting treatment for problems like depression can be difficult, particularly when the drive to the nearest counselling facilities can take hours.

But some rural Australians who have lived with depression have been able to find solace in a unique program provided by [University of Queensland \(UQ\)](#) researchers.

The program, called "On Track", is delivered by mail and helps support people who have previously been depressed to keep their lives on course and become more healthy and active.

Professor David Kavanagh from [UQ's Discipline of Psychiatry](#) said the program was ideal for people living in rural areas, where treatment facilities are scarce.

"We are particularly keen to tell people in rural and regional areas about this program as we know that it is often hard for them to get enough help for this problem," Professor Kavanagh said.

"The great thing about this program is that it is free and uses a series of letters...this means that people can get some help, no matter where they live.

"It may feel odd for them to ask for help if they are not actually depressed right now, but it is really important that they do something about it, before the depression comes back."

Professor Kavanagh said that without counselling or support, for many people depression can be like a "roundabout" they feel they cannot get off.

"We know that over half the people who suffer from depression will have another episode in the next five years," he said.

Over time, they are also more likely to get physical illnesses, or use alcohol or other drugs."

Professor Kavanagh said the program, which has been running for over a year, was an ideal way of communicating with people who experience depression, as there was "something personal" about receiving a letter.

"The series of letters that our recruits receive will let them know when depression may happen in the future and help them to pick up early signs," he said.

"The letters also get people to consider how they can look after their physical health.

"Each letter gives ideas to try out and shows them how they are going. There is also a toll free number people can use to talk to someone about how they are going."

Heather*, a participant in "On Track", said the program was particularly helpful because it allowed her to retain a sense of anonymity while giving her the skills to take charge of her life.

"I think in city areas it is easier to be anonymous - if you want to go to a doctor it is easy

to go across the city," she said.

"If you are in a rural or country town where you are known, going to the doctor and saying I am experiencing these symptoms is harder to do...I think in some areas there is still a stigma associated with depression.

"For me, I'd find it hard to relate to people face to face."

Heather said it was easy for her to forget about her depression when things were going really well, but through her participation in "On Track" she now had the skills to recognize symptoms early.

"The most helpful things for me in the program have been putting pleasant events into my day, finding my early warning signs for depression, challenging my thoughts, and the mindfulness activities.

"With "On Track" I can work at my own pace and there is always a number to call if I get stuck."

The research project behind "On Track" is supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund and Queensland Health.

To find out more about the program and how to get off the "depression roundabout", call 1300 300 164.

Information and help for depression can also be found at www.beyondblue.org.au, which lists a number of other Australian websites.

*Surname withheld.

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