

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**Thursday 18 September 2003**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Pollies pledge to “Break depression Fast”**

**Parliamentarians from both sides of the house will set aside their differences today to help put mental health at the top of the political agenda.**

The inaugural “*Break depression Fast*” breakfast meeting, hosted by Senator the Hon Helen Coonan, Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer and organised by leading mental health groups will focus on depression, one of the biggest illnesses affecting Australians.

The collaborative efforts of the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), the Australian Foundation for Mental Health Research (ANU) and beyondblue: the National Depression Initiative are driving this new bipartisan approach to mental health reform.

Breakfast Chair Geraldine Doogue AO, one of the country’s most respected journalists, said that every family in Australia is at risk of experiencing mental illness.

“A staggering 14% of children and adolescents and 18% of adults will be directly affected by a mental illness each year,” said Ms Doogue.

“This translates to one in every five people,” she said.

The MHCA is the national, independent, non-government body, representing more than 40 key mental health organisations to protect and promote the mental health of every Australian.

MHCA chairman Keith Wilson said the breakfast meeting was timely, with mental illnesses accounting for nearly a third of the total burden of non-fatal disease.

“It is a shocking statistic that 62% of Australians with a mental illness do not receive any treatment at all,” said Mr Wilson.

“This is an opportunity for interested MPs to take the lead, establish a national forum to drive the mental health agenda and make a real contribution to improving the mental health of this country,” he said.

The Australian Foundation for Mental Health Research supports the research and awareness-raising activities of ANU's Centre for Mental Health Research.

The Centre's Director Professor Tony Jorm said that good quality research is the key to providing evidence-based prevention, treatment and promotion strategies.

“We need to ensure we can deliver proven programs that work to make a real difference to the community.”

Professor Ian Hickie, Clinical Advisor to beyondblue, said “the breakfast is an excellent opportunity to provide a national focus on depression at a government level. A national forum of MPs interested in mental health will provide community leadership to increase the capacity of the broader Australian community to prevent depression and respond effectively to it”.

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Those available for interview include:

- MHCA chairman Keith Wilson on 0417 289 040
- beyondblue Professor Ian Hickie on 0438 810 231
- AFMHR, CMHR (ANU) Kylie Brittliffe on 0421 282 148

**For inquiries on the breakfast, or to assist with arranging interviews contact Gabrielle Crowe, Communications & Policy Officer on (02) 6285 3100 or 0415 415 153.**