



MIND the GaP

MENTAL ILLNESS IN NOWRA DISTRICT:
GOALS AND PREVENTION

Each year, almost one in every five Australians experiences a mental illness. Research indicates that people in regional and remote areas are less likely to seek help for mental illness than their metro counterparts and help may be less available to them. Suicide rates in rural communities are avoidably high.

"This initiative is a key opportunity for regional innovation and research translation in an important local context. I expect it will make a substantial economic and health difference to the lives of our communities."

- Professor Paul Wellings CBE
Vice-Chancellor,
University of Wollongong

WHAT IS MIND the GaP?

Working together to improve mental health in the Shoalhaven and Beyond.

This initiative addresses the innovation challenge of improving mental wellbeing of regional communities by enhancing community support and preventive mental health care through the translation of research innovations into applied practice.

The MIND the GaP initiative will be housed in a new, purpose built facility at the University of Wollongong's Shoalhaven Campus in Nowra, which will commence development in mid-2016.

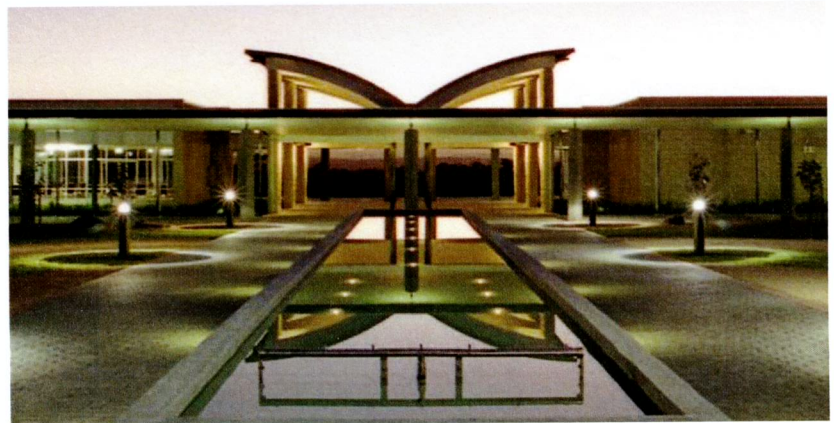
The Facility, which is jointly funded by Commonwealth Government through the National Stronger Regions Fund (\$1.229M) and the University of Wollongong (\$1.230M), will form a Mental Health and Wellbeing focus for researchers and community service providers to collaborate in the development and delivery of new 'best

practice' mental health care initiatives delivered on a regional basis.

The initiative will be led by Shoalhaven City Council and the University of Wollongong, and it's consortium of partners including Lifeline South Coast, Lifeline Australia Research Foundation, Coordinare, the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD), Noah's Shoalhaven, and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI).

This Consortium of partners will harness their expertise and skills to deliver innovative research, best quality health care practice and community engagement strategies.

Ultimately the success of the initiative will be measured by the improvement in the lives of vulnerable people in the Shoalhaven, and the consequent economic prosperity of the region.



WHY THE SHOALHAVEN REGION?

The Shoalhaven area has a higher burden of mental health conditions than all other communities within the Illawarra-Shoalhaven catchment area and greater than NSW and national levels. However, the uptake rates for allied health services provided by psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists for example, is lower than the rates in other communities in the Illawarra-Shoalhaven region.

The opportunity for interdisciplinary mental health research and education is strong in the Shoalhaven. With a higher burden of mental health conditions and a large, but dispersed

population, it provides an ideal place to work with community to deliver innovative regional strategies in mental health and wellbeing relevant to a regional and rural context. Such strategies are expected to be transferable to other parts of regional and rural Australia.

The MIND the GaP initiative will build on the established presence of the University's Graduate School of Medicine and School of Nursing currently based on UOW's Shoalhaven Campus and benefit from the pre-existing links to the community that these operations possess while also catalysing new ones.