



NEW RESEARCH PROJECT FOCUSES ON AGEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

A new study beginning this week focuses on how to promote better mental and physical health in people over the age of 65 years.

The Beyond Ageing Project will be conducted over the next two years, by the Centre for Mental Health Research at ANU which is supported by the Australian Foundation for Mental Health Research.

The Director of the Centre, Professor Helen Christensen, said the project would study the lives of 2000 people aged from 65 to 74 years interested in fostering positive mental health for themselves.

"This will be a randomised control trial aimed at determining the most effective methods of promoting well being and preventing depression," Professor Christensen said.

"Previous efforts to examine well being and mental health have largely focused on young people, but depression often occurs later in life. Older people face some risk factors, such as leaving the workforce and illness, which may make them more vulnerable to depression," she said.

"The project will look at a number of interventions which may be useful in promoting positive health – the use of folate and vitamin B12, physical activity, access to information about depression, healthy eating and managing pain.

"We are particularly interested in looking at how physical activity promotes successful ageing. There is certainly evidence that engaging in physical activity (walking and weight training) is useful in lifting mood. However, the positive effect of activity is relatively understudied, especially if we want to know what happens in the long term."

The study will involve volunteers from Canberra, Wagga and Sydney and is funded by beyondblue.

"The project is one of a number being undertaken and planned by the Centre for Mental Health Research to investigate the causes and how to manage mental illness in Australia," Professor Christensen said.

"One in five Australians will suffer from a mental health problem every year. One of the aims of our work is to assist those sufferers through a number of on-line initiatives including MoodGYM (www.moodgym.anu.edu.au) and BluePages (www.bluepages.anu.edu.au)," she said.

"Other projects currently being undertaken or planned will find out why Australians are suffering from mental health problems, making people aware of the risk factors, and stopping mental illness, especially depression, before it starts."

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