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## FROM 'LUCKY COUNTRY' TO DEPRESSED COUNTRY

There is an urgent need for more research funding to better understand why so many Australians are suffering from depression and other mental health problems, according to the head of one of the nation's leading mental health research centres.

Depression has become Australia's biggest health issue, the Director of the Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) at ANU, Professor Helen Christensen, said.

"More people are suffering mental health issues in the so-called 'Lucky Country' than the number of people suffering from cancer or heart problems. One in five Australians will suffer from a mental health problem every year," Professor Christensen said.

"There's help for people with depression, through such tools as the CMHR's MoodGYM ([www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)) and BluePages ([www.bluepages.anu.edu.au](http://www.bluepages.anu.edu.au)) websites, [depressioNet.com.au](http://depressioNet.com.au) and organisations such as [beyondblue](http://beyondblue).

"But Australians are facing a new health crisis, and funding for research is desperately needed. Currently, mental health disorders contribute 19.1 per cent to Australia's total disease burden as the major source of disability in Australia - ahead of cardiovascular disease and cancer - but mental health receives only 8.9 per cent of national medical research funding.

"AFFIRM, the Australian Foundation for Mental Health Research, which supports CMHR, is actively seeking private funding to underpin vital research. Crucial community and online programs such as BluePages are at risk because of the paucity of Government and corporate funds," Professor Christensen said.

"CMHR has already undertaken research projects into the relationship between depression, hormonal treatments, exercise and life changing events such as the Canberra bushfires of 2003. Our PATH Through Life Project also studies depression and anxiety, substance use and cognitive ability throughout the adult life span, but an enormous body of research needs to be completed before we can truly understand why so many otherwise healthy Australians are suffering from this debilitating disease.

"Recent cases of high profile people in our community coping with depression confirms our research that mental health problems affect people in every area of Australian life.

"Our job as researchers is to find out what triggers depression and other mental health problems. Meanwhile, internet based websites offer sufferers an important, anonymous source of depression information for the community, including men who have difficulty communicating their problems."

"BluePages offers information on the usefulness of around 40 medical, psychological and alternative treatments for depression. The site currently attracts nearly 10,000 unique visitors a month who use the site to better understand depression and how it can be treated."

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