

MEDIA RELEASE



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Incontinence and the mental health of over 5 million Australians

Incontinence has a profound effect on the mental health of over five million Australians who are today living with bladder and bowel control problems.

World Mental Health Day (Wednesday 10 October 2018) is an opportunity for those people to know that there are effective treatments for incontinence as well as the anxiety and depression that commonly affects up to 1 in every 4 Australians¹.

CEO of the Continence Foundation of Australia, Mrs Rowan Cockerell said that research shows that people suffering from dementia, Alzheimer's disease, anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions have a higher increased risk of also having incontinence problems².

"There is a strong link between incontinence and mental health. We know that mental illness may interfere with a person's ability to get to the toilet on time because of disorganised thinking, confusion or inattention. Other factors include medications and lifestyle choices such as poor diet, not drinking enough fluid or drinking large amounts of caffeine," said Mrs Cockerell.

Incontinence is a common condition that affects more than 5 million Australians and almost 3 million Australians are living with depression or anxiety³. One in five women and one in eight men will experience depression at some time in their life³. On average, one in four people will experience anxiety. Depression is even more common among people living with incontinence⁴.

"Having incontinence can mean people restrict their everyday activities because they're afraid to leave their home in case of leakage. This can result in a loss of relationships, independence, work and income, mobility and flexibility."

Incontinence can also lead to a sense of powerlessness, lack of control and lowered self-esteem, which can put a person at greater risk of anxiety and depression.

"The good news is that there are effective treatments both for incontinence and for anxiety and depression. With careful management, the symptoms of anxiety and depression can be treated along with those of incontinence so they do not interfere with life," said Mrs Cockerell.

Melbourne author and health advocate, Greg Ryan was born with a rare condition called Imperforate Anus which has challenged him with a lifetime of incontinence and connected mental health problems.

"When all my friends had girlfriends, I was too petrified to even think of having a relationship because I had no faith in my bodily functions. As an adult, my fear of inhospitable places became soul destroying. A working environment or a café or a friend's place with no ready access to a toilet filled me with terror," said Greg.

For media enquiries, interviews or to request high res images, please contact:

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Greg found his freedom once he connected with many others experiencing bladder and bowel issues through an online support group he started and his association with the Continence Foundation of Australia.

“I don’t have to live with the burden of ‘my secret’ now, but still must contend with living with the ongoing physical and mental health challenges of my condition,” said Greg.

As with mental health, the first step in treating incontinence is reaching out for help. Even though the majority of incontinence cases can be better treated, managed or even cured, 70 per cent of incontinent people do not seek assistance.

For free confidential advice, information and referrals about bladder, bowel or pelvic floor issues, call the National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66 or go to continence.org.au

References:

1. Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd (2011). *The economic impact of incontinence in Australia*. Melbourne: Continence Foundation of Australia and Deloitte Access Economics.
2. *Incontinence incidence and awareness in Australia (2017)*. Survey of 2,000 general population.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007 (4326.0)*. Canberra: ABS.
4. Steers, William and Lee, Kyu Sung (2001). *Depression and Incontinence*. *World Journal of Urology* 2001, 19: 351-357
5. Avery JC, Stocks N. *Urinary incontinence, depression and psychological factors - A review of population studies European Medical Journal Urology* 1(1):58-67 2016

Available for interview:

- Mrs Rowan Cockerell - CEO of the Continence Foundation of Australia
- Mr Greg Ryan – Melbourne author and health advocate

Continence fast facts

- Over 5 million Australians – 1 in 4 people aged 15 years or over – are incontinent.
- Incontinence impacts self-esteem, motivation, dignity and independence.
- Over 3 million Australians suffer anxiety or depression.
- People with incontinence have a higher risk of also having a mental health issue.
- The majority of incontinence cases can be better treated, better managed or even cured.
- 70% of incontinent people do not seek help.
- 80% of people who report they are living with incontinence are women.
- More than half of those women are aged under 50 years.
- In 2010, the total economic cost of incontinence was estimated to be \$66.7 billion and rising.

About the Continence Foundation of Australia

The Continence Foundation of Australia is a not-for-profit health organisation and the national peak body for incontinence awareness, management, education and advocacy. The Foundation is supported by funding by the Australian Government under the National Continence Program and operates the free National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66.

continence.org.au