

# New research shows more seniors get depression info online

Victorian Seniors Festival 7-14 October 2012

beyondblue CEO Kate Carnell AO says beyondblue's Depression Monitor survey shows that in the past seven years, the number of older Victorians turning to the internet to find information about depression has increased three-fold... up from 10 % in 2005 to 30 % in 2012.

"This is fantastic news because we know that older people are often reluctant to talk to friends and family about their mental health. If they can use a computer and search the internet, there is a wealth of reliable information online about depression and anxiety including interactive checklists and e-health programs that they can look at privately.

"We also know that older people tend to focus on their physical health and are comfortable accepting treatment for those ailments, but often they don't want to talk about their mental health. However, what they might not realise is that some physical ailments may be symptoms of depression or anxiety, and these problems can be alleviated with the right treatment," she said.

Older people can be at risk of developing depression and anxiety for a range of reasons including physical health problems, chronic pain, medication side-effects, social isolation and feelings of loss associated with reduced independence, work and income, mobility and relationships.

Besides having a low mood or feeling sad, other signs of depression include feeling restless, disturbed sleep, changes in appetite, headaches and unexplained pains, and general slowing down. Symptoms of anxiety include excessive worrying, increased heart rate, feeling shaky and short of breath.

Ms Carnell said: "beyondblue is aware of the importance of having information available online specifically for older people. Other figures reinforce what the Depression Monitor tells us, that internet usage by people over 50 is rapidly increasing, so we're endeavoring to meet their needs."

According to research by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Swinburne University of Technology, older age groups experienced the most growth in internet usage between 2007 and 2009 with the 50-64 group going from 66.1% to 79.2% and those aged 65 or over, up from 29.8% to 40.0%.

Besides [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) having a dedicated information page for older people, beyondblue has online:

Checklists to check symptoms of depression or anxiety [www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=103.99](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=103.99)

An interactive awareness exercise (designed for use in the workplace, but suitable for everyone) that will test your knowledge about depression and anxiety <http://learn.beyondblue-elearning.org.au/BeyondBlue/>

The Shed Online [www.theshedonline.org.au](http://www.theshedonline.org.au), an online version of a Men's Shed where men can be part of a community, socialise, share information and chat to new mates

An e-mental Health Directory which links to a range of self-help internet-based programs aimed at helping people to prevent, treat and manage depression and anxiety [www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=107.1203](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=107.1203)

"We know that being isolated and feeling lonely may contribute to depression, so connecting with people online is a great way to stay in touch, find information and even try some online therapy, but I suggest, once you've done your research, you visit a GP or another health professional to discuss the treatments that are available," Ms Carnell said.

While the precise rates of depression and anxiety in older people are not yet known, a recent study commissioned by beyondblue suggests between 10-15% of older people living in the community experience depression symptoms and approximately 10% experience anxiety. Rates of depression in residential aged care facilities are thought to be much higher, with another Australian study showing 34.7% of aged care residents experience depression.

\*During the Victorian Seniors Festival, beyondblue will have a stall at Federation Square and will hold two information sessions at the Festival Hub, Melbourne Town Hall on Monday 8 October at 11 am and 1 pm.

\*For more info about events and activities go to [www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au](http://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au)

\*For info about Council on the Ageing's FREE depression & anxiety info sessions, call COTA VIC – 9654 4443

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