

# New innovative program in Indigenous mental health

By Ron Hampton and William McCann

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has a new Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Mental Health and Well-Being (GCIW). The program is specifically tailored for non-Indigenous health and allied health practitioners, including nurses, wishing to further their knowledge of culturally appropriate intervention strategies in the socially important work of Indigenous Australian mental health.

The program is available to graduates in nursing, medicine, psychology, counselling, social work and allied disciplines.

It is offered externally commencing Semester 1 in 2007 and consists of four courses:

- Indigenous Australian cultures and communities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of health
- Indigenous Australian mental health today and
- Culturally appropriate intervention strategies in Indigenous mental health (includes a compulsory 3-day 'weekend' residential school towards the end of Semester 2).

The program has input, in terms of course design and teaching,

from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous health and mental health practitioners, including a psychiatrist and an Indigenous psychiatric nurse consultant. The program has a layered, developmental approach, emphasising the difference and variety in Indigenous Australian cultures.

Students will, as part of their assessment, interact with a local Indigenous community, under the guidance of a supervisor, and then progress to an understanding of Indigenous concepts of health and mental health and the status of Indigenous mental health today. The program culminates in students refining their professional skills in relation to culturally appropriate intervention strategies.

Available evidence suggests that mental health problems and disorders are more prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities compared with non-Indigenous Australian communities. The program recognises that health practitioners need different skills and understandings for working with Indigenous clients as opposed to mainstream clients. It is aimed squarely at improving outcomes in relation to Indigenous Australian mental health,



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supported by professionals advocating the great need for culturally based intervention.

Indigenous psychologist Tracey Westerman (managing director of Indigenous Psychological Services, WA) said the solution to increasing access to mental health services by Indigenous people lies in the integration of specific cultural and clinical competencies within the system and practitioner levels.

Professor of Mental Health Nursing at USQ Don Gorman has a strong interest in Indigenous health. 'I am excited about the introduction of the new program which has the potential to provide mental health clinicians with knowledge and skills that will enable them to translate their clinical skills into culturally appropriate strategies to facilitate improvements in the mental health and well-being of their Indigenous clients.'

Dr Robert Parker, Director of Psychiatric Services for the Top End also supports the new

Graduate Certificate. 'Significant disadvantage continues to affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia with respect to their health status and the social determinants of their health,' Dr Parker said. 'It is very important that health professionals who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an understanding of these background issues as well as the prevailing richness of and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.'

It is anticipated that the new program will articulate with a Masters in Indigenous Mental Health and Well-Being in the near future. The Masters is planned to consist of both coursework and research.

For more information contact Freecall 1800 269 500 or email [study@usq.edu.au](mailto:study@usq.edu.au)

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## Focus Briefs

### Heart death risk

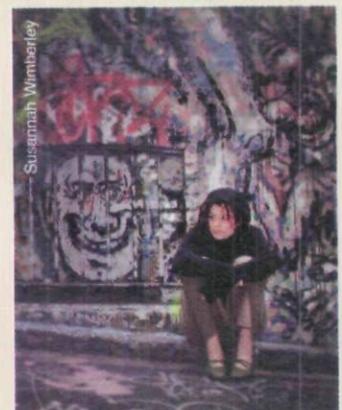
People with severe mental illness are significantly more likely to die from coronary heart disease and stroke, but not cancer. A British study compared the death rates of 46,136 people with severe mental illness and 300,426 people without mental illness. People of all ages were more likely to die from coronary heart disease and stroke if they had a severe mental illness. The increase was greatest in younger people, with those aged 18-49 more than three times as likely to die from heart disease.

### ICE target for Queensland

Shops that sell 'ICE' pipes will face penalties of up to \$10,500 under legislation introduced in Queensland Parliament last month. Amendments to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998 also closed a loophole that had allowed retailers to separate parts of cannabis utensils such as bongos. An Australian National Council of Drugs report released last month estimated around 500,000 Australians had used methamphetamines in the past year.

### Mental health service

A new community-based mental health service on the North West Coast of Tasmania was opened last month. The recovery-based psychiatric service is aimed at assisting the recovery of more than 70 people with mental health problems in the area. Living skills, access to education and employment, and socialisation skills are the main goals of the service. Programs in Hobart and Launceston each have the capacity to support 72 people by mid-year.



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