

Participant Information Statement

Family and friends supporting the mental health of paramedics

Thank you for your interest in *Minds Together* for family and friends supporting a paramedic experiencing mental ill-health or suicidal distress. This project is being conducted by researchers from Everymind with funding from Movember (through the Veterans and First Responders Mental Health Grant Program, provided through a collaboration between Movember and The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride).

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to examine an online program for family and friends who provide support to paramedics with symptoms of mental ill-health or suicidal distress. The program seeks to build the capacity and capability of family and friends in their role to support paramedics impacted by mental ill-health or suicidal distress, and to promote and support the mental health and wellbeing of family and friends themselves.

We seek to know your experiences with the program in order to evaluate it for accessibility (suitable online access), acceptability (if it is fit for purpose and relevant), and benefit (stress, coping, quality of life, mental health and wellbeing) for the support person, which will have a positive impact on the paramedic they support.

The results from this study will be used to help researchers further understand the mental health, wellbeing and coping of family and friends of paramedics.

Who can participate?

We are seeking family members or friends supporting a paramedic (currently or previously employed) who is currently experiencing mental ill-health or suicidal distress. To participate, you need to:

- Be 18 years or older
- Live in Australia
- Be supporting a currently employed or previously employed paramedic experiencing mental ill-health or suicidal distress. The person being supported does not need to have a formal mental health diagnosis.
- Be comfortable reading and writing in English
- Have access to a computer, tablet or phone and be comfortable using web-based programs.

Family members or friends (supporting a paramedic) who are currently experiencing high levels of distress should consider whether this is an appropriate time to participate in this program. Other appropriate options may be seeking one-on-one support with a mental health professional or psychologist.

Exclusion criteria:

Anyone who has previously accessed the *Minds Together* online program for family and friends supporting someone experiencing depression or anxiety should not complete this program.

What choice do I have?

Participation in the study is voluntary and all responses will remain confidential. Participants can decline to answer or complete surveys, participate in a telephone or Zoom based interview or participate in particular sections of the program. However, please note that it is a requirement that you complete the baseline survey to gain access to the online program. You can exit the program, surveys or interview at any stage without any negative consequences.

What will you be asked to do?

All participants in this study will be asked to complete an initial survey taking approximately 20 minutes. The surveys will include questions about yourself and the person you are supporting, your experience as a caregiver, and your mental health and wellbeing as a caregiver. You are not required to answer all questions on the online surveys.

We will then randomly allocate you to a group. Random allocation means that you have an equal chance of being placed in either group.

Group A: You will receive access to the program after you have completed your first survey. You will be able to use the online program for eight weeks. We will email you a link to the online program so you can log in whenever you want to use the program. We will also encourage you to use the *Minds Together* online forum, but this will be optional. After completing the program, you will then be asked to complete a second online survey. Finally, six months after completing the first survey you will be asked to complete the third and last survey. You will also be invited to participate in an optional telephone or Zoom based interview.

Group B: You will be asked to complete a second survey after eight weeks. Once this survey is finished you will receive access to the program - we will e-mail you the link to the second survey and then a link to the online program. You will be able to use the online program for eight weeks. We will also encourage you to use the *Minds Together* online forum, but this will be optional.

Participants who complete the second online survey will be entered into an optional prize draw (two prizes, one for Group A and one for Group B) for a \$200 grocery voucher. Participants from Group A who complete

the six-month follow-up survey will be entered into an optional prize draw (one prize) for a \$200 grocery voucher.

Program overview

The online program consists of four online sections, with the option of completing additional in-depth topics. The online program will be accessed through Everymind's *Minds Together* digital portal and will follow the [Everymind Privacy Policy](#). Each core section takes about 30 minutes to one hour to complete and each optional in-depth topic takes about 5 - 10 minutes to complete (if you choose to do them). You will first see a welcome section which will explain what you can expect from the program and how to use it.

The goal of Section 1 is to improve your general mental health literacy, and to learn about the symptoms/conditions that your paramedic family member or friend may be experiencing (including depression, anxiety, trauma, PTSD and suicidal distress).

The goal of Section 2 is to explore your paramedic's journey, how mental ill-health can lead to changes in their life, to explore the challenges and rewards of providing support, identify when you might need some support for yourself and learn more about looking after yourself.

The goal of Section 3 is to deal with the challenges of supporting your paramedic, including responding well to powerful emotions, communication and relationships.

The goal of Section 4 is to focus on identifying when your paramedic might need help, building your team, and providing practical strategies to help maintain wellbeing as part of your support person role. This includes self-care information and strategies, links to further resources, and practical advice from family and friends supporting the mental health of paramedics.

In-depth topics include more information on stigma, self-care, responding to suicidal distress, relationships, talking about suicide, and values and why they matter.

The program will be delivered through a mixed media format including text, short videos and infographics. There will also be a 'journal' section within each section where participants will have the option to complete reflection activities. The reflection activities will be optional and no grade will be given for any of the exercises. At the end of each section participants will be asked to answer a reaction question regarding whether the section helped further their understanding of the content with a yes/no/maybe response.

How will your privacy be protected?

The research team will adhere to the following protocol to ensure each participant's privacy and confidentiality is maintained throughout the research:

- All information from this study's survey results and interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only the person coordinating the project, and a research

team involving people from Everymind will have access to this information. The online program will be accessed through Everymind's *Minds Together* digital portal and will follow the [Everymind Privacy Policy](#).

- Participant details will be stored in a separate file to the survey and interview data collected.
- Any information that is published will be grouped information only, so participants will not be personally identifiable in any publications or reports based on the research.
- Your data will be collected and managed using [REDCap electronic data capture tools](#) hosted at HMRI. REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) is a secure, web-based software platform designed to support data capture for research studies.
- Data will be stored securely for a minimum period of 15 years from completion of the research and will be stored in accordance with the HNELHD's Data Storage Policy.
- *Minds Together* is a SANE Forums Partner. The *Minds Together* social forum data will be stored following SANE's [Privacy Policy](#).

Who will be conducting the research?

The research will be conducted by experienced project and research officers at Everymind:

- Dr Sally Fitzpatrick, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Dr Jose Cuenca, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Yohana Franklin, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Dr Philippa Ditton-Phare, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Kristen Vallender, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Lyndon Bell, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Elana Glasic, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Chloe Brown, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Emma Norton, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District
- Ella Delarue, Everymind, Hunter New England Local Health District.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Participation in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time by not completing the program or surveys. If you complete the online program or surveys, but then choose to withdraw from the research, that is fine. Please contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Sally Fitzpatrick (by email at

Sally.Fitzpatrick@health.nsw.gov.au or by phone on 02 4924 6900), within two weeks after completing the program or survey so we can withdraw your data from the study.

How will the results be reported?

The data collected will help us to evaluate the new online program and will also be sent to the external evaluation team at the Health Research Institute, University of Canberra, funded by Movember. The information collected may also be published in scientific journals and be presented at relevant scientific conferences. Individual participants will not be identifiable in any reports arising from the project. After completing the study we will publish a summary of the results on the Everymind website. We will ask if you would like to receive a summary of the results of the study at the end of the first survey.

What are the risks and benefits of participation?

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of people participating in the *Minds Together* program to evaluate the program for accessibility, acceptability, and benefit for the support person.

The *Minds Together* program aims to provide information and tools to better understand and respond to paramedics experiencing symptoms of mental ill-health or suicidal distress, and to establish positive self-care and coping practices to improve your wellbeing. You may not receive any personal benefit from participating in this research project.

Whilst we do not expect the study to cause distress, sometimes dealing with themes related to mental ill-health, suicide and wellbeing can cause people to become upset. If you feel that you may find questions about these themes upsetting, you may prefer not to participate in this research. Please remember that if you are distressed at any time during or following participation in this research and need support, please contact the services below:

24-hour support

Lifeline – 24-hour telephone crisis counselling service and online counselling.
13 11 14, text 0477 131 144 or www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue – 24-hour telephone support and online chat service.
1300 224 636 or www.beyondblue.org.au

13YARN – 24-hour confidential crisis support run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
13 92 76 or www.13yarn.org.au

Other support services

FORTEM Australia – Counselling service for first responder families.
1300 33 95 94 or www.fortemaustralia.org.au

Head to Health – Mental health information and resources from leading health organisations.
www.headtohealth.gov.au

WellMob - Online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
www.wellmob.org.au

QLife – Australia-wide anonymous, LGBTI peer support. 3pm to midnight every day.
1800 184 527 or [www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)

Embrace Multicultural Mental Health - Mental health information and resources for Australians from multicultural backgrounds.
www.embracementalhealth.org.au

The program will have the contact numbers for key mental health services available to you in the navigation bar of the digital hub. There will also be a directory with contact details of support services, and links to these services included in the program.

What should you do if you wish to participate?

Please read this Participant Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, you can contact the project research team to ask questions.

Further information

If you require further information or have any problems concerning this study, you may contact: Dr Sally Fitzpatrick (Chief Investigator), by e-mail at Sally.Fitzpatrick@health.nsw.gov.au or by telephone on 02 4924 6900.

Research ethics and complaints

Ethics:

This research has been approved by the Hunter New England Human Research Ethics Committee of Hunter New England Local Health District, Reference 2022/ETH02317.

Governance:

The conduct of this research has been authorised by the Hunter New England Local Health District to be conducted at the HNELHD – *Everymind* site.

Complaints about this research:

Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, please contact the HNE Research Office, Hunter New England Local Health District, Level 3, POD, HMRI, Lot 1 Kookaburra Circuit, New Lambton Heights NSW 2305. Telephone: 02 4921 4140. Email: HNELHD-ResearchOffice@health.nsw.gov.au and quote the reference number: 2022/ETH02317.

In summary: what you will be asked to do?

- Participation is voluntary – you may withdraw at any time
- Complete a pre-program survey (15-20 mins)
- Complete the program of four core sections, and up to seven optional in-depth topics over eight weeks (30-60 mins for each core section, and 15-30 mins for each optional in-depth topic)
- Access the online social support forum (optional)
- Receive weekly reminder emails
- Complete a two-month follow-up survey (10 mins)
- Complete a six-month follow-up survey (10 mins – if allocated to Group A).
- Participate in an optional telephone or Zoom based interview (15-20 mins – if allocated to Group A).