GP, Exercise Physiologist, and Dietitian support program improves wellbeing of complex mental health patients

Dietitians Australia President and Exercise & Sports Science Australia President are renewing their calls for the Government to expand opportunities for people with mental health conditions to access accredited exercise physiologists and accredited practising dietitians as part of their treatment plans.

It comes following the results of a new Primary Health Network-based program for people with complex mental health conditions found providing free access to just eight sessions with an exercise physiologist and dietitian significantly improves mental well-being, physical activity and nutrition quality intake.

The **Mindgardens Neuroscience Network**'s **Keeping the Body in Mind Primary Care** program, funded through the Central and Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network, is the first of its kind in Australia, allowing General Practitioners to collaborate with exercise physiologists and dietitians to treat people living with a range of complex mental health conditions.

As a direct result of the exercise and diet and nutrition support guided by exercise physiologists and dietitians, participants well well-being measurements increased on average by 16 per cent during the program.*

“The Keeping the Body in Mind Primary Care program is one of Mindgarden’s flagship projects and has demonstrated significant improvements to participant wellbeing and quality of life,” said Professor Jackie Curtis, the Executive Director of Mindgardens Neuroscience Network.

We are extremely pleased with the program’s success, including the feedback from both participants and practitioners,” Dr Curtis said.

“People living with severe and complex mental health conditions benefit enormously from a tailored program that identifies and meets their unique nutrition and physical activity support needs.

Patients involved in the program were found to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption by an average of 271 per cent and decreased their intake of foods high in salt, sugar and fat by 40 per cent.

“This is an exemplary model of multidisciplinary primary mental health care, leveraging the power of diet and exercise professionals to improve the lives of people with complex mental health conditions,” Dietitians Australia President Tara Diversi said.

“The individual support and guidance from dietitians and exercise physiologists, in a limited number of sessions has significantly empowered these individuals to nourish their minds, bodies and brains and boost their mental wellbeing,” she said.

The program found patients, on average, increased their moderate to vigorous physical activity from around 2 minutes to over 18 minutes per day.

“Exercise needs to be taken seriously as a first-choice approach in managing mental wellbeing,” ESSA President Dr Brendan Joss said.

“Even a small amount of physical activity is enough to make a positive change to mental health,” he said.

“We need to increase the accessibility of exercise services to make sure more Australians can access the benefits of physical activity.”

The Presidents are urging the Government to support more Primary Health Networks around the country to pilot similar models of care for complex mental health conditions.

For interviews:

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Note to Editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice in nutrition and dietetics, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia.

Details:

** Since inception in 2021, 99 people have participated in the KBIM Primary program.*

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale was used to monitor mental wellbeing throughout the program. Wellbeing increased on average by 16% (6.5 points) across the duration of the intervention.

Preliminary data analysis for the participants that completed a follow up assessment indicates an improvement in mental wellbeing, physical activity levels and dietary intake.