

MEDIA RELEASE

Saturday 19th September, 2015

Tasmania to Trial an Epilepsy World-First

Tasmanians living with or affected by epilepsy will soon benefit from a world-first telephone-based peer support service, following a successful grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund (TCF).¹

At any given time, as many as **1 in 100 Australians** will have epilepsy. This equals more than **5000 Tasmanians**. The actual number of people affected is estimated to be 4 times this amount.

Research has shown that people with epilepsy endure family dysfunction, reduced social and leisure opportunities, increased levels of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.²

As **Lance Franklin from the Sydney Swans** understands all too well, onlookers also often assume that someone having a seizure is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

With the hope of dispelling these myths and providing support, Epilepsy Tasmania - in conjunction with the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Community Fund - will soon offer **telephone-based peer support for every Tasmanian** living with or affected by epilepsy.

This new service - **Epilepsy Connect** - will be based on a successful and well established Australian model for people affected by cancer and will be the first of its kind relating to epilepsy anywhere in the world.

"Peer support is known to be beneficial in reducing the psychosocial burden of epilepsy,"³ said Epilepsy Tasmania's Executive Officer, Phil Baker.

"We already offer face-to-face peer support groups in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie, but people living outside these centres may miss out.

"This new telephone-based peer support service will give all Tasmanians a chance to access support, no matter where they live."

With the funding now in place, it is anticipated that Epilepsy Connect will be available from March 2016. It will be coordinated by Dr Simone Lee, Centre for Rural Health at the University of Tasmania and managed by Epilepsy Tasmania.

¹ The independent community funding body, the Tasmanian Community Fund was established following the sale of the Trust Bank in 1999 to give back to the community proceeds from the sale of a community asset. Since that time the TCF has allocated approximately \$58.6 million to approximately 1700 statewide projects.

² Jacoby A, Baker GA, Steen N, et al. The clinical course of epilepsy and its psychological correlates: findings from a UK community study. *Epilepsia* 1996;37:148-61.

³ Elafros MA et al. Peer support groups as an intervention to decrease epilepsy-associated stigma. *Epilepsy Behav.* 2013 April ; 27(1): 188-192)

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MORE INFO: Claire Burnet on 0448 585 947 and www.epilepsytasmania.org.au

SPOKESPEOPLE:

- Dr Simone Lee - Centre for Rural Health at the University of Tasmania
- Mr Michael Ferguson - Minister for Health
Mr Mark Fishwick - Board Member, Tasmanian Community Fund
- Mr Phil Baker - Executive Officer, Epilepsy Tasmania

ABOUT EPILEPSY TASMANIA:

We are a not-for-profit association improving the quality of life and community participation of Tasmanians living with or affected by epilepsy.

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