

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 13th September, 2016

Tasmanian initiative **Epilepsy Connect** is the world's first telephone-based epilepsy peer support service.

Tasmanians living with or affected by epilepsy will benefit from a world-first telephone-based peer support service following today's official launch in Hobart by the Minister for Health.

At any given time, as many as **1 in 100 Australians** will have epilepsy. This equals more than **5000 Tasmanians**, with the actual number of people affected estimated to be four 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.¹

To help reduce these problems, Epilepsy Tasmania in conjunction with the University of Tasmania's Centre for Rural Health, with a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund are proud to now offer **telephone-based peer support to every Tasmanian** living with or affected by epilepsy.

The new service **Epilepsy Connect** has been based on the successful and well established Australian model for people affected by cancer and is 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,"² said Epilepsy Tasmania's Chief Executive Officer, Wendy Groot.

"The face-to-face support groups we run in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie are a great opportunity for people to discuss issues and support each other in person, however until now people outside these centres have missed out," she said.

"Epilepsy Connect is an exciting initiative that gives Tasmanians the chance to access peer support, no matter where they live," said the Minister for Health, Mr Michael Ferguson at this morning's launch.

Epilepsy Connect is being coordinated by Dr Simone Lee, Centre for Rural Health at the University of Tasmania and managed by Epilepsy Tasmania.

The phone number for Epilepsy Connect is 1300 852 853.

¹ 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.

² 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:

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www.epilepsytasmania.org.au

LAUNCH:

The official launch of Epilepsy Connect will take place at 7.30am on Tuesday 13th September at the Elizabeth Street Pier in Hobart.

GUEST SPEAKERS:

- Mr Michael Ferguson - Minister for Health
- Dr Simone Lee - Centre for Rural Health at the University of Tasmania
Ms Lynn Mason - Chairperson, Tasmanian Community Fund
- Ms Wendy Groot - Chief Executive Officer, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Ms Kym Meers - Australia's Golden Light Award winner

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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Hashtag: #epilepsyconnect