



Kevin Humphries MP

Minister for Mental Health

Minister for Healthy Lifestyles

Minister for Western NSW

MEDIA RELEASE

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HONOURING DON'S COMMITMENT TO SUICIDE PREVENTION ON R U OK?DAY

The 'Angel of the Gap', Don Ritchie OAM, will be remembered for his efforts in saving the lives of hundreds of people at risk of suicide with a new annual award to be named in his honour, NSW Minister for Mental Health, Kevin Humphries, announced today, on R U OK?Day.

Mr Humphries said the Don Ritchie Award would recognise extraordinary acts of service and commitment to suicide prevention.

"Mr Ritchie was an incredible man whose generosity of spirit, dedication and compassion saved the lives of hundreds of Australians," Mr Humphries said.

"Mr Ritchie's passing in May this year left a legacy of a commitment to suicide prevention that the community and Government must strive to follow.

"Through his simple acts of kindness Mr Ritchie set an inspiring example for the rest of us, which will be reflected in the annual Don Ritchie Award."

Mr Humphries said announcing the award on R U OK?Day highlighted the fact that by reaching out to someone to ask whether they are ok, you could potentially help save a life.

"For over 50 years Mr Ritchie saved an extraordinary number of lives simply by offering a smile and a kind word," Mr Humphries said.

"Today I would encourage people throughout NSW, from all backgrounds and walks of life, to participate in R U OK?Day events being held across the State, and most importantly, to ask family, friends and colleagues: 'Are you OK?'"

"Reaching out to one another today and starting a conversation is a small way people can help break down the stigma that still surrounds suicide and connect with those among us who for whatever reason may be at greater risk of suicide."

Mr Humphries also announced an online survey that will allow people right throughout the State to help shape the direction and focus of the NSW Government's approach to suicide prevention policy.

He said the online survey followed a series of suicide prevention forums held recently throughout the State that enabled people to identify ways in which the Government can better support their local community to help prevent suicide and self-harm.

“Every death by suicide is one death too many. With 550 lives tragically lost to suicide each year in NSW, it has never been more important to work with our communities to reduce the number of suicides and attempted suicides throughout the State,” Mr Humphries said.

“Since coming into Government many people have told me they wish there was a way in which they could help. The recent suicide prevention forums and the online survey were born out of this desire from communities to work together to turn the tide on this extremely important issue.

“Through improved understanding, resilience and support, we can make a difference, and I will continue to work with our communities to develop responses based on their unique needs and reduce the number of suicides and attempted suicides in NSW.”

The online survey will be available from today at www.health.nsw.gov.au.