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MEDIA RELEASE

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COUNCILS FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Councils and staff across the state came together in a webinar yesterday afternoon to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of the NSW local government workforce and the communities they serve.

Minister for Local Government Shelley Hancock said more than 200 council workers, councillors, mayors and general managers joined the webinar with Minister for Mental Health Bronnie Taylor and NSW Chief Psychiatrist Dr Murray Wright.

“The last 18 months has been a very difficult time for everybody, with prolonged restrictions on our daily lives and mounting social and economic impacts, so this webinar was designed to address the many stressful and isolating issues we’ve been encountering,” Mrs Hancock said.

“The webinar provided an opportunity for council staff and councillors to take stock of their own mental health, obtain information on support services, and ask questions and receive advice from the experts.

“While much of the focus for councils has been on providing infrastructure, facilities and services to their communities during the COVID-19 outbreak, it’s important to reflect on the mental health of council staff and councillors in addition to residents.

“Our 128 local councils across NSW comprise nearly 1,300 councillors and more than 48,000 staff, and they too are enduring incredible stress in serving their local communities in the face of unprecedented challenges.

“The Office of Local Government has so far held nine webinars during this current COVID-19 outbreak with key ministers and senior government officials to keep them up to date with the latest developments and restrictions.

“The NSW Government will continue to support our councils and their local communities to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Mrs Taylor said the NSW Government is working on a pandemic recovery roadmap, under which councils and local communities will play an integral part.

“Councils have a big role to play as we navigate our path out of this pandemic, with the community right at the centre of the recovery,” Mrs Taylor said.

“The NSW Government has invested in community-led suicide prevention activity including local drop-in centres, response groups and community based services.

“Local staff are doing an incredible job confronting challenges head-on every day, so it is really important that they are equipped with the tools to, not only support the community but also to be able to recognise when they might need to put their hand up for help themselves.

“This is all about challenging the stigma around with mental illness, encouraging help seeking behaviour and creating connected communities full of healthy, resilient individuals.”

The NSW Government has relaunched its [Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy](#) in response to the significant shift in the way we work due to COVID-19.

It aims to help employers move from a model of only prioritising mental health at work following an incident, to offering targeted and proactive support to their employees throughout the year.

Extensive mental health resources including self-help and online counselling support can be accessed on the Commonwealth Government’s Head to Health website [here](#).

If you or somebody you know needs help, call Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyond Blue on 1800 512 348 or the NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511.

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