

# MENTAL HEALTH COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

MEDIA UPDATES

27 OCTOBER 2010



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**Note about Media Updates**

*As representatives of the mental health sector, we are continually working on ways to improve awareness and understanding of mental illness and suicide. The media plays a key role in this work and we try to include articles of interest, relevance and value. While very many offer realistic and sensitive portrayals in their reporting, some do not follow the Mindframe criteria (see [www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)). For reporting/portrayal that doesn't follow Mindframe criteria or if you have any other concerns about material in the media, please contact the SANE StigmaWatch program at [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org) or (03) 9682 5933.*

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*Promoting the mental health of all Australians*

## **Transcript: Call for exercise to combat mental illness**

**Publisher: ABC Lateline**

**Website: <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2010/s3049074.htm>**

LEIGH SALES, PRESENTER: End of year exams have been under way for Australian school students, a sleepless time of the year for pupils and parents alike.

But it's not just swotting that's causing bleary eyes. Among other things, late night computer and mobile phone use take a heavy toll.

Mental health experts say disrupted sleep is both a major trigger and aggravator of mental illnesses such as depression, and greater emphasis on physical education to balance Australia's crowded school curriculum is being prescribed as the best medicine.

Karen Barlow reports.

KAREN BARLOW, REPORTER: Sleep is a precious commodity. But cut into the recommended eight hours and brain and body functions are jeopardised.

Bronte O'Brien knows the desperation of being a young insomniac.

Diagnosed recently with bipolar disorder, lack of sleep did not help her condition.

BRONTE O'BRIEN: I would sleep all day, not go to school. I could sleep for three days at a time, stay awake for three days at a time, which - because I wasn't in the normal cycle of school life or life in general - I missed out on a lot and felt very isolated and alone.

KAREN BARLOW: What were you doing at night time?

BRONTE O'BRIEN: Um... I... What was I doing? What was I doing?

KAREN BARLOW: Anything but sleeping?

BRONTE O'BRIEN: Yeah, basically anything but sleeping. Yeah. Anything but sleeping, yeah.

KAREN BARLOW: Teenage sleep problems are aggravated by late night technology use - Internet, mobile phones and computer games.

By staying awake until almost dawn the circadian rhythms of teenagers are disrupted and mental health experts warn there's a long term risk.

PROFESSOR IAN HICKIE, BRAIN AND MIND RESEARCH INSTITUTE: Disruption of sleep cycles we think is one of the major risk factors - on top of some others like alcohol



and drug use and change in other social factors - that is contributing to increasing rates of anxiety and depression and other mental health problems in young people in developed societies.

KAREN BARLOW: While sleep should happen outside school hours, Professor Ian Hickie says schools have a responsibility to make sure young people get enough of it.

IAN HICKIE: The 24-hour body clock is a 24-hour clock. How well you sleep at night depends on what you do during the day.

So schools are very important in terms of maximising physical activity and social and cognitive activity during the day.

Increasingly we have a concern about lack of physical activity during the day contributing to poor sleep at night, and changing expectations of academic performance and not enough emphasis on physical activity and social activity during the daylight hours to help you get to sleep earlier and sleep better at night.

KAREN BARLOW: But Australian schools have a crowded curriculum. And there's intense competition for academic results.

BRONTE O'BRIEN: Phys Ed at school is often the first subject that kids drop anyway. They did encourage sport at my school and I didn't participate.

I sort of slipped through the cracks with that and found other recreational things to do which were very harmful.

KAREN BARLOW: Current priority areas are English, maths, science and history.

But Jeff Emmel from the Australian Council for Health, physical education and recreation says that academic emphasis is to the detriment of basic exercise which would boost the mind's ability.

JEFF EMMEL, COUNCIL FOR HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION & RECREATION: We know it's important not only to offset health risks but it is important for their brain development and there's so much more research now coming to the fore about how important brain development is and how movement - human movement and physical activity actually stimulates that level of brain development.

KAREN BARLOW: Thirty years ago, there was an Australian model of one hour of daily physical activity. Now the average across the nation for schools is just two hours a week.

JEFF EMMEL: I think that leaves young person at considerable risk. Now we know that schools are not the only places where children need to be active.



But schools must accept a great responsibility for playing their part.

KAREN BARLOW: Professor Ian Hickie believes academic results will actually be improved by less class time.

IAN HICKIE: Schools have it wrong because the curriculum has it wrong. If we're going to have a national curriculum, let's have one that actually has the critical things in it like timing and place of physical activity and social activity - not just more and more academic content, more and more rules about what you should learn than how you best learn.

So two hours a week would be better replaced by two hours a day of the appropriate physical and social activity to drive the levels of activity that you need to sleep well, to learn well and then to perform well.

KAREN BARLOW: Another way to tackle teenager sleep troubles is to start school later.

A recent study in the US has found a small delay improves adolescent alertness, mood and health. But Professor Ian Hickie says adjusting school hours is just shifting the problem.

IAN HICKIE: We have got to be much more thoughtful about the degree of physical activity, appropriate social activity, the way in which it's structured and timed to get the best cognitive outputs as well as the best physical health that we can out of the whole school experience.

KAREN BARLOW: Which would give teenagers a sporting chance as they enter adulthood.

Karen Barlow, Lateline.

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Hawaii receives \$3.6 million mental health grant**

**Publisher: CNBC**

**Website: <http://www.cnbc.com/id/39854931>**

HONOLULU - The state Department of Health says its received a \$3.6 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to fund service provider training.

The grant provides the state with \$730,000 each year over five years.

