

Inaugural world conference on Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) opens today

The inaugural world COPMI conference on Children of Parents with a Mental Illness to be held jointly with the 6th National Child & Adolescent Mental Health, opens in Adelaide today with speakers addressing the importance of providing support and early intervention to children living in families where a parent has a mental illness.

Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, a director of *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, will both chair and address the opening ceremony of the joint conference starting at 9.00am.

Over 300 delegates from across Australia and the world have gathered to address the issues that affect the 21% to 23%, or just over 1 million, Australian children that live in families where at least one of their parents has, or has had, a mental illness. Between 30% and 50 % of these children (approximately ½ million) are at risk to their mental wellbeing.

Keynote speaker, Dr. William Beardslee, the Gardner-Monks Professor of Child Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and director of the Baer Prevention Initiatives at Children's Hospital, Boston will address the challenges and opportunities for the development and implementation of programs for children of the mentally ill based on lessons learned from the Boston experience.

'This conference brings together global experts for the first time in Australia to address successful principles and practices which can be used by services and individuals in providing improved support for these children and their families to significantly reduce their risk of developing mental health problems,' Ms Elizabeth Fudge, Project Manager of the COPMI national initiative, said today.

Speakers will also highlight the value of developing collaborative partnerships with stakeholders such as governments, parents, consumers and carers, community agencies and health, education, childcare and welfare workers, to successfully address the issues of child and adolescent mental health in the community.

'We are particularly pleased that consumers and carers, including young carers, will actively participate at this conference, along with international and local mental health professionals,' Ms Fudge said.

Co-convenor of the joint conference, Mr Phillip Robinson, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Australian Infant, Child and Adolescent Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA) said, 'We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with our national and international colleagues to address the strategies of promotion, prevention and early intervention in the child and adolescent mental health sector to better support our young Australians.'

As a lead in to the conference, yesterday the Hon. Kate Ellis MP, Federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, launched four new education and information resources, produced by the COPMI national initiative through funding from the Australian Government. Minister Ellis said 'Our children are our most precious resource and we have a responsibility to make sure that they grow up happy and healthy. No child should be held back because of illness, nor should they be held back because of the illness of their parents.'

For media comment:

Ms Elizabeth Fudge – COPMI Project Manager: 0419 027 108

Mr Phillip Robinson – AICAFMHA, Board Chair: 0417 806 765

For media inquiries and information:

David Boots, COPMI Communications Officer: 0448 425 208

Photo opportunity and interviews:

Adelaide Hilton, Monday 26 October, 9.45 – 10.15am, 1st Floor conference rooms.

Keynote speakers: Dr William Beardslee (USA), Professor Clemens Hosman (Netherlands) will be available, also a mental health consumer and a young carer and Darryl Maybery *Associate Professor of Rural Mental Health Monash University who has published recent research findings on children of parents with a mental illness.*

More information on the joint COPMI and CAMH Conference is available on the [COPMI website media](#) page.