



**Australian Rotary Health**

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The Hon Greg Hunt MP  
Minister for Health

Dear Minister

Re Lift the Lid on Mental Illness

It was great to catch up on the phone last week and, following your suggestion, I am writing to you about Lift the Lid. Starting this October, Lift the Lid will become the national fundraising campaign for Australian Rotary Health until at least 2020. With support from the Australian public, we aim to significantly increase mental illness research and, in time, help create a healthier, happier Australian community.

*Background*

Australian Rotary Health started in 1981 as a Rotary charitable fund to research the mystery of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The outcome of Prof Terry Dwyer's research was remarkably successful, reducing the incidence of cot deaths by some 80%. Other research followed, including Aged, Adolescent and Family Health, and in 2000 ARH made its focus Mental Health. Since 2013, we have highlighted Mental Illness Research, focussing on prevention and our younger people.

We are a research driven Rotary entity and, due to the high level of honorary service from the Board and income derived from existing investments which covers all administrative expenses, 100% of every dollar donated goes into our research programs.

*The Challenge*

Since joining the ARH Board in 2013, I have become aware of the magnitude of the impact of mental illness in Australia. Our researchers have shown me alarming statistics, such as:

*One in two Australians will suffer from a mental illness in their lifetime*

*One in five suffer from a mental illness in any given year*

*50% of mental illness starts by age 14*

*More workplace hours are lost through mental illness than for any other reason*

 Research  Scholarships  Education  Awareness

[www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au](http://www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au)

While most people are not aware of the prevalence of mental illness (I certainly wasn't), we at Australian Rotary Health have decided that this is a challenge that can't be ignored. Many eminent researchers have told us that, given time in research, virtually every mental illness will be preventable. Our CEO Joy Gillett OAM and her six staff, along with our honorary Board (of which I will be Chairman from 1 September for three years), are totally committed to making Lift the Lid resonate throughout Australia and increase mental illness research.

ARH has a Research Committee (honorary) that meets, evaluates and allocates grant applications each October. The committee is now chaired by Prof Jane Pirkis (Uni Melb) and last year there were 361 grant applications, of which we could only fund 11. We need to dramatically increase that number.

Once our PhD scholars/researchers have successfully developed their research, they can then apply for major funding by the NHMRC. Without ARH financial support of their initial research, there is little chance that these young scientific minds will be able to find the breakthroughs needed to get any further support.

#### *Lift the Lid ... Rotary and the Public*

In early October, leading into World Mental Health Day on 10<sup>th</sup>, the 30,000 Rotarians in Australia will be invited to approach the general public through a variety of planned activities, including at coffee shops, Bunnings and some transport outlets. Through media advertising company Dentsu Mitchell, which has joined Lift the Lid on a pro bono basis, we will advertise throughout the country. From there we will start an ongoing social media campaign encouraging people to contribute to those areas of mental illness research they wish to support.

#### *The Request*

Greg, I fully understand the vast numbers of very worthwhile charitable activities that are part of the landscape, many of which happen within Rotary itself. However, there is no greater challenge facing us as a community than mental illness.

We are not seeking a federal grant or one off allocation, although I'm sure CEO Joy will happily accept any contribution. And we are grateful for the government support we have received in running mental health forums and our indigenous scholar programs.

My personal philosophy is to 'add value,' and my overwhelming desire during the next three years is to have the Federal Government match dollar for dollar the donations raised through Lift the Lid. Having Australian Rotarians approach the general public re mental illness research is a vital part of Lift the Lid; having you and the Government actively supporting this initiative will provide a great incentive for Rotary and the public to become more involved, and tie everything together.

This Rotary (financial) year we expect Lift the Lid funds raised will be around \$2 million. With government matching this, we will then be able to double our research capacity. This in turn will mean greater quality research submissions to the NHMRC. I am happy to meet with you, and help further develop this into a great Australian community project.

Lift the Lid will provide greater mental illness research outcomes and, in time, will help ease the burden of mental illness in Australia.

Warmest wishes ... be well.



Gregory Ross  
Chairman Elect, Australian Rotary Health