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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Seven Network, *Sunrise*, Monday, 13 April 2020

Subject Mental health impacts of self-isolation, quarantine, and COVID-19

MONIQUE WRIGHT: There are calls for more mental health checks for people in quarantine across Australia after a man died in a Melbourne hotel yesterday. He didn't have coronavirus, but was in the mandatory 14 days of isolation. The Victorian Premier says there are daily health checks, but the Australian Medical Association wants more of a focus on mental health. For more, we are joined by the President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Tony Bartone. Good morning to you, Tony.

Now, you have said - and these are very powerful words - that COVID-19 has caused depression similar to what was seen during world wars. I think people will actually be relieved to hear that, that what they are going through, other people might be experiencing as well. Which age groups are most at risk?

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Monique. And look, mental health issues know no boundaries when it comes to situations of stress, of fear, of anxiety. Of course, for some of the younger members of the population, we've not seen times like this in our lifetimes, and it's only the older members that can remember the things like the past wars and the depression.

So, we've really got to understand that mental health issues are very prevalent in our community, but at times like this, they become more pervasive, and we've got to have the supports and the connectivity to ensure that no one gets left behind.

MONIQUE WRIGHT: Yes, and it's young people in particular that are finding it difficult?

TONY BARTONE: And look, it comes down to, you know, adaptive behaviours and techniques and supports, and especially in an online world that we lived in and continue to do so, we don't have that support structure to reach out. We've got to stay in touch with those around us. And so staying in touch with your GP by telehealth means is one of the ways, but there are also many other online services available through beyondblue, Black Dog, Lifeline, depending on the level of severity, to help you get through times of stress, anxiety, and fear like we're currently living in.

But it's also important to try and have as much routine through your day to sort of create that normality that we would normally associate. Our TV screens are full of bad messages and bad information and news at the moment, so we've got to sort of try and balance that with exercise, proper dieting, and just breaking it up so that we're not really in that siege mentality and seeing all the doom and gloom.

MONIQUE WRIGHT: Yes. Look, you mentioned a bunch of terrific services there, like beyondblue, that people can reach out to, and also Lifeline. You mentioned also telehealth there. Now, people generally have a relationship with their GP. So that's a great way to start, isn't it? So, do you just ring up and then book yourself an appointment if you're feeling that you're not feeling great in your mind?

TONY BARTONE: So, clearly, a relationship with your GP underpins a really good telehealth consultation. By booking that telehealth appointment the same way as you would book a normal appointment with your doctor, you'll be able to have that consultation and be able to have that assessment and that free ability to speak your mind to explore the feelings that you've got, and to understand if there are issues that need further management; not just from physical health but obviously from mental health and wellbeing point of view. And that relationship is key to that wellbeing - to that being managed appropriately.

MONIQUE WRIGHT: Tony Bartone, you've always got such sensible advice. We appreciate it. Thank you.

TONY BARTONE: Thank you, Monique.

13 April 2020

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