

## Media Release

**Embargoed until Midnight Saturday March 1, 2003**

### **Health services need to be ‘youth-friendly’**

Young people are generally more healthy and less vulnerable to disease than both adults and children, but they have not enjoyed the same improvement in health status as other sections of the community.

Adolescence is a time of physical and psychological development, where the concept of ‘self’ and life’s boundaries are continually being explored. A result of this is that young people may engage in experimentation and high-risk-behaviour with serious long-term health consequences. These sorts of behaviours include binge drinking, substance abuse, dangerous driving, unsafe sex, self-inflicted injury and suicide. All of these behaviours are potentially preventable and early intervention can improve the long-term health outcomes of young people. Injury is the leading cause of death in young people and is preventable in almost all cases. Males aged 15-24 years are at greater risk of death from injury, and in Australia, motor vehicle accidents account for more than one third of deaths in young people. Suicide is the second major cause of death amongst young people in Australia, and 14-20% of adolescents report moderate to severe depression. Nutrition and dietary behaviour amongst young people is also of increasing concern, particularly eating disorders in young women.

Young people are most likely to be both the perpetrators and victims of violent crime, and it has been estimated that one out of five women younger than 25 has been the victim of sexual abuse (which often goes unreported). Also of concern is the increasing prevalence of illicit substance and mental health problems in adolescents. One main reason for this lack of improvement in health status is that causes of ill health for most young people are social, rather than biological. Young people have issues and concerns that are affected individually during development, and needs that change as they grow older. They are also often ill-informed about health issues and the options open to them for seeking assistance.

Warren Bartik and Peter Massey investigated the factors that influence young people’s access to health services and potential strategies for improving this level of access, and found one of the major obstacles preventing young people from accessing health services was that they did not find them ‘youth friendly.’ Mr. Bartik and Mr. Massey suggest the development of a Youth Friendliness Assessment Tool, with a view to better tailoring health services to the needs of young people in Australia, particularly in rural / regional areas.

**Warren Bartik and Peter Massey will present the findings of this research in greater detail at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference, which will be held at the Grand Chancellor Hotel in Hobart from March 1-4. Their presentation will be delivered at 4.35pm in the Ballroom South Meeting Room on Sunday March 2, 2003.**

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Media Contact: Marilyn Chalkley 0418 624 304 ah and during conference. Office (02) 6260 6500  
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7<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference, 1 – 4 March 2003, Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart  
National Rural Health Alliance, Deakin, Canberra ph: 02 6285 4660 [www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)