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**National Evaluation Results: GPs Provide Frontline Protection
Against Posttraumatic Stress – a Condition that Affects Over
250,000 Australians Every Year**

Approximately 65% of Australians experience a potentially traumatic event at least once in their lifetime. Of these, 10% - 15% will go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition that is debilitating and can be lifelong.

Last year, the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) produced a new easy-to-use brochure aimed at assisting health professionals in the detection and management of PTSD and acute stress disorder (ASD). The results of an evaluation of this brochure will be released today at the opening of the new headquarters of ACPMH in Melbourne by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin.

At the opening, Professor Mark Creamer, ACPMH Director, will describe the PTSD summary brochure as a clear and practical clinical tool for busy practitioners. He will reveal that, since it was made available in October 2008, over 13,000 copies have been distributed to GPs and other health providers. A targeted evaluation of more than 400 GPs and other health practitioners around Australia revealed very positive feedback, with practitioners reporting that it had improved their clinical practice with respect to treating people with PTSD. Importantly, this means better outcomes for Australians affected by trauma.

The brochure, which is free, is based on the NHMRC-approved Guidelines produced by ACPMH in 2007. Development of the brochure was funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

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At any given time, over quarter of a million Australians suffer from PTSD. Whether it is the result of violence, road trauma or combat, there is a need for health professionals to not only recognize the condition in their patients, but to know how to manage and treat the condition.

The Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) authored the Australian national (NHMRC endorsed) guidelines on best practice treatment for PTSD. In collaboration with the Australian Psychological Society, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, ACPMH last year produced a world-first guide – a concise “how-to” brochure for GPs and other health professionals. The PTSD Summary Brochure covers recognition and management of psychological reactions to trauma.

The ACPMH's Associate Professor David Forbes, an author of the Guidelines, said that a succinct summary brochure outlining what to do with a patient with PTSD or ASD was needed for busy health professionals. “We recognized a need for a brief summary brochure based on the guideline recommendations. What we have produced is a succinct guide for GPs and mental health practitioners that can assist them in their immediate clinical decision making,” he said.

The brochure contains information about psychological first aid, appropriate medications, key elements of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), a screening tool and information about referrals. It is divided into general management of patients following a recent trauma (in the past two weeks), those who present with initial symptoms of ASD or PTSD, and individuals who have developed chronic or comorbid PTSD.

General practitioners and other primary care providers are flooded with information on all sorts of health problems. Only rarely, however, is that information subject to a proper evaluation. The evaluation of this PTSD Summary Brochure, which analysed data from more than 400 GPs and other health practitioners around Australia, found that providers found the information to be useful and relevant to their clinical work. They reported improved recognition and management of PTSD and related conditions. Importantly, this means that Australians affected by disaster and trauma are likely to recover better as a result of this initiative.

***For further information please contact Tania Ewing on
0408/378422***