MEDIA RELEASE

Date: 24 March 2020

A new Emotional Wellbeing for Older Persons Service providing much-needed mental health support for Northern Sydney people living in Residential Aged Care Facilities

Many older people experience mental health symptoms upon entry to a residential aged care home as they grapple with the loss of their independence, health, social networks and even loved ones.

Anglicare's Emotional Wellbeing for Older Persons Program, a new service funded by the Sydney North Health Network, is addressing this issue by delivering mental health supports to older people living in residential aged care homes.

Ann Gaffney, Anglicare's Senior Mental Health Clinician and Manager of the Emotional Wellbeing in Older Persons Program, says, "Over half of permanent aged care residents experience some degree of depression, yet there is a gap in mental health service provision within registered aged care facilities.

"Mental health issues in older people are often misdiagnosed, yet with specialist mental health support, recovery is possible. Our service improves access to good mental health care for those living in aged care homes," says Ms Gaffney.

The program aims to reduce anxiety and improve the mood and ability of older people to cope with life's changes.

The service draws on an evidence-based approach and offers psychosocial (rather than pharmacological) interventions. Residents in the program are allocated a case manager who works with them to discuss their care and recent losses of loved ones. Together with a case manager, residents are helped to learn relaxation methods and strategies to assist with memory. Group therapy is offered as part of the program as well as skills-building workshops to enable staff to better identify and support residents with mental health symptoms.

"With over 120 RACFs within our Northern Sydney region, this new service has the potential to positively impact the lives of many older people in local residential aged care for the better," says CEO of the Sydney North Health Network, Lynelle Hales.

Until now, people living in residential aged care homes have been unable to access the same subsidised mental health services as people living in the general community. To address this, the Australian Government has invested $82.5 million over four years to improve access to mental health treatment services for people living in residential aged care homes. Northern Sydney Primary Health Network, operated by Sydney North Health Network, has funded Anglicare to deliver the service in the Northern Sydney region.

"With over 120 residential aged care facilities within the Northern Sydney region, this new service has the potential to positively impact many of our older citizens living in residential aged care.

"We're grateful for Anglicare's skilled mental health team in implementing the program along with the funding from the Australian Government Department of Health. The recognition of the value of such a service at a national level has enabled this program to begin," says Ms Hales.

"This program is an important step in recognising and treating the complex health needs of older people. We hope that through this program we can develop a model that can be rolled out across the whole aged care network," says Anglicare's Head of Mental Health, David Ip.

-     ENDS   -

The following people are available for interview:

- Lynelle Hales, CEO, Sydney North Health Network
- Kahli Mason, Commissioning Manager, Sydney North Health Network
- Glenda Devlin, General Manager for Community Services, Anglicare
- Ann Gaffney, Manager, Emotional Wellbeing for Older Persons Program

Media requests

Sydney North Health Network is managing all media requests.

To request an interview, please contact: dlong@snhn.org.au

Damien Long – telephone 02 9432 8231 or after hours: 0403 821 307

ABOUT: Anglicare

Anglicare exists to serve people in need in our community, enrich lives and share the love of Jesus. Anglicare offers life-enriching care and compassion for each person, meeting material, physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs. Anglicare's services promote dignity, safety, participation and wellbeing for people in their relationships, homes and communities. www.anglicare.org.au

ABOUT: Sydney North Health Network

The Northern Sydney Primary Health Network, operated by the Sydney North Health Network – a not for profit organisation, is one of 31 Primary Health Networks (PHNs) established by the Australian Government to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. Our focus is on patients who are at risk of poor health outcomes. We work to improve the co-ordination of their care, so they receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time. www.snhn.org.au