

MEDIA RELEASE

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Local mental health leader named as one of Australia's most influential women

Hunter Institute of Mental Health Director Jaelea Skehan has been announced today as a winner in *The Australian Financial Review and Westpac 100 Women of Influence Awards* for 2014. Jaelea has been recognised in the local and regional category for her contribution to mental health and suicide prevention locally and nationally.

Over her 14 years at the Hunter Institute of Mental Health, Ms Skehan has been instrumental in the development of local, state and national programs that are aimed at reducing mental illness and suicide. This has included local leadership to build the capacity of individuals, families, workplaces, schools, health services, media and the community to contribute to the prevention of mental illness and the prevention of suicide.

Jaelea Skehan has been committed to change on a local and national level, working tirelessly to promote mental health and wellbeing. Apart from her local leadership she has been recognised nationally and internationally for her work.

In accepting her nomination, Ms Skehan said she was both excited and humbled noting how important it was to see work in mental health and suicide prevention recognised in national awards like this.

“There would be no person living in Australia who has been untouched by mental illness or suicide. I am privileged to be able to work in mental health and suicide prevention and am pleased to see contributions in this area recognised alongside business and other achievements,” said Ms Skehan.

“Locally and nationally we must have a vision that includes less people developing mental illness and less people experiencing the psychological pain that may lead them to consider taking their own lives.”

“We must also ensure that we increase understanding of the impact that mental illness and suicide has, so we can reduce stigma and ensure that every person gets the support they need and deserve.”

A proud Novocastrian, Jaelea was particularly thrilled to be recognised in the local and regional category of the awards.

“The Hunter Institute of Mental Health is in a unique position because we get to lead state-wide and national programs from our home here in Newcastle, while also working with our local community.”

“Given that much of our funding is for national programs, our local work relies on contributions and commitment from business, service partners, the community and the media.”

Jaelea has led the design and development of flagship Hunter Institute programs including the internationally recognised *Mindframe* National Media Initiative which she led for 10 years, **Conversations Matter** resources to support community discussion of suicide, local community youth arts programs, Workplace Mental Health Interventions, and programs to support families and carers to name just a few.

Now in its third year, the *100 Women of Influence Awards* celebrate outstanding women from a wide variety of sectors across Australia. Entrants into the awards were assessed by a panel of esteemed judges and have been recognised based on their outstanding ability to demonstrate vision, leadership, innovation and action in and beyond their fields.

Gail Kelly, Westpac Group Chief Executive Officer says the breadth and calibre of our 100 Women of Influence for 2014 is remarkable.

“It is such a privilege to be able to recognise and celebrate the outstanding contributions these women are making to Australia. We are blessed to have such great numbers of influential women doing incredible things in many industries and organisations right across our country.”

On Wednesday 22 October, a gala event will be held at Sydney’s Town Hall to celebrate these women and the significant impact that each has made within their chosen field. The ten category winners and overall winner for the year will also be announced on the evening.

For further information visit: www.100womenofinfluence.com.au. Join the conversation at #100WOI

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Available for Interview and Comment:

Jaelea Skehan, Director Hunter Institute of Mental Health



Jaelea Skehan is an internationally respected leader in the prevention of mental illness and the prevention of suicide. She is passionate about translating evidence into practice and building the capacity of individuals, families, organisations and communities to be involved in mental health and suicide prevention.

Jaelea is an advocate for finding better connections between research and practice and for ensuring a national focus on the promotion of mental health and wellbeing, and the prevention of mental ill-health to complement treatment and recovery approaches.

For Jaelea’s full bio, please click [here](#).

The Hunter Institute of Mental Health has built a reputation as a leading national organisation dedicated to reducing mental illness and suicide and improving wellbeing for all Australians. For more than 20 years the Institute has been delivering successful, evidence-based mental health and suicide prevention programs from their base in Newcastle, NSW. These have made a considerable contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of many Australians. For more information visit www.himh.org.au

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