

## **BEFRIENDAS Study: The impact of befriending on depression, anxiety, social support and loneliness in older adults living in residential aged care facilities**

Up to half of people living in residential aged care facilities (RACFs) have significant depression symptoms and a higher prevalence of older people in RACFs have major depression compared to those living in the community. The literature provides some evidence for 'befriending' in alleviating depression, anxiety, social isolation and loneliness as well as improving quality of life and wellbeing. Befriending is non-directive emotional and social support that is usually provided by a volunteer. Few studies have been conducted to evaluate befriending for older adults living in RACFs.

Funded by the NHMRC and *beyondblue*, the BEFRIENDAS study is a randomised controlled trial (RCT) comparing a befriending intervention to treatment as usual. The 4 month face-to-face course of befriending will be delivered by trained volunteers with the primary aim of alleviating depressive symptoms and also alleviating anxiety, improving social support and reducing loneliness. An economic evaluation will also be undertaken to examine the costs and benefits of the program. If successful, the befriending model could be translated to the wider aged care sector to support residents and reduce levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness and improve social support.

The project is looking for residential aged care providers and residents to be involved in the study. We are interested in signing up around 500 residents in Melbourne and regional and rural Victoria.

From the aged care providers' point of view, there's very little burden on them being involved in this project because we provide the volunteers, and undertake the training and supervision for the volunteers, whilst making sure that the volunteer works within the guidelines for their particular facility.

We are also looking for volunteers to undertake the befriending. Volunteers will be asked to visit a resident once a week for a period of four months. All volunteers will be required to have a valid police check and undergo training with the researchers prior to starting.

For further information about the project or if you would like to volunteer to be a befriender, please contact:

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