

News Release

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Urgent need for more female-only mental health wards to protect domestic violence victims

1 July, 2024 - Melbourne, Australia – Internationally renowned psychiatrist, Professor Jayashri Kulkarni AM, has called for an urgent change to Australia’s mental health care system to protect vulnerable women.

“The current state of Australia’s mental health care system is gender-blind. There is urgent need for gender-specific approaches around the domestic violence crisis. Women are mostly provided generic care that does not support their unique needs,” says Prof Kulkarni.

Cabrini Health’s Prof Kulkarni warned many women are too scared to seek help: “All too often, vulnerable domestic violence victims are treated alongside aggressive men, which can be very triggering for them and counterproductive to their recovery.

“The problems in mixed wards have been known for years. Women are being sexually assaulted and harassed during hospital stays. England banned co-gendered wards over a decade ago. Australia needs to catch up,” she said.

Professor Jayashri Kulkarni AM is the founding Medical Director of Australia’s first women-only mental health hospital at not-for-profit private health service Cabrini Health. The pioneering program has now treated 1,000 women and is proof of how effective the female-only model is.

Since its inception in late 2021, Cabrini’s Lisa Thurin Women’s Health Centre in Elsternwick has offered gender-sensitive, acute care for conditions such as PTSD, burn-out, mood disorders and addiction. Many of its patients’ illnesses are linked to past trauma – 70 per cent are victims of domestic violence – and 88 per cent of all patients have not needed to be re-admitted and gone on to improve their mental health and their lives as a result.

“We’ve had comments from women saying for the first time they can really talk about their experience,” Prof Kulkarni said.

Cabrini’s program has now garnered attention nationwide and the Centre had received multiple visitors from public and private health institutions looking to replicate the women-only model. The Centre has a recommended length of stay between 7-10 days followed by a community program offering a range of therapies and group sessions. Unlike other private mental health facilities, Cabrini’s service can be accessed via GP referral (no psychiatrist appointment required).

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Notes to editors:

Professor Jayashri Kulkarni AM is the founding Medical Director of Australia's first women-only mental health hospital at Cabrini Health. She has conducted ground-breaking clinical research and is internationally acknowledged as a leader in the field of women's mental health. She has worked for 25 years to improve the quality of care for women with mental illnesses by developing specific treatments that are tailored to suit women's needs biologically, socially and psychologically.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists has also publicly recommended mental health services have women-only wards and is happy to provide additional commentary.

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