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(FORMERLY THE VICTORIAN NURSES HEALTH PROGRAM)

nurses' health

A NEW ERA IN NURSE & MIDWIFE HEALTH

Since August 2006 almost 500 of our nursing and midwifery colleagues in Victoria have sought help and support with their sensitive health needs, from the Victorian Nurses Health Program.

The VNHP, originally developed to support our colleagues whose health was impaired due to substance use has also been supporting nurses and midwives with high prevalence mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety and depression since 2007.

The work of the nurses' health Special Interest Group, formed in 2005 and guided by the founding CEO, Heather Pickard and current

ANF federal assistant secretary Yvonne Chaperon, ensured the concept moved from a good idea to a fully functioning support service. Heather, Yvonne and the other SIG members, with the support of our members, the ANF (Vic Branch) and the Nurses Board of Victoria guided, shaped and ultimately created the organisation that exists today.

We know that people are susceptible to impaired health through substance abuse or mental illness. We also know that we are not immune to or protected from these conditions just because we have a nursing or midwifery qualification. The VNHP would argue that being a member of our profession places us at a higher risk than mainstream society. It is for this reason that we urge our colleagues in the field to take care of themselves, be kind to each other and seek support early should they be concerned for their health.

This is a message we have delivered consistently since 2006. Our audiences in this time have included our nursing and midwifery colleagues, directors of nursing and health managers, human resource departments,

unions, students and community members, among others. In this time we have spoken and presented at conferences, workshops, expos and forums spreading these messages.

With the changes that have occurred as a result of the new national registration scheme, the VNHP has taken the decision to formally change its name. When you receive your journal in April the name change would have taken effect and we will be known as the Nursing and Midwifery Health Program, Victoria. The new title more accurately reflects our target audience with the inclusion of 'midwifery' and we intend to actively share our background, history and service model with our colleagues in other states and territories around Australia in the hope that together we can work to develop similar support models in those areas.

This is indeed a new and exciting era for nurse and midwife health in Victoria and something we are keen to extend to our colleagues nationally.

The NMHPV holds a privileged position within our profession. It is a role we each relish and it is a responsibility we each take very seriously. I invite you to take a few minutes to visit our website at www.vnhp.org.au – soon to be www.nmhp.org.au.

Finally, I remind you that we are just a phone call away if you need any assistance with your sensitive health needs or for guidance with a colleague, friend or employee you suspect is experiencing impaired health due to substance use or mental health concerns.

24