

NEWS RELEASE  
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## ***DEPRESSION: FINDING ANSWERS FOR OLDER PEOPLE***

The older generation, their children and people who care for them tell their personal stories in an insightful look into how depression impacts the over 60's in the latest Black Dog Institute writing competition.

One essay writer declared that "to fully understand the varying degrees of depression within our elderly population, it is necessary to take a moment, to put ourselves in their shoes and try to understand the enormous life changes that occur in our later years."

According to Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, the 76 entries in the Australia-wide writing competition have provided a "treasure trove" of advice and experiences.

"I believe older people will find it useful to hear these stories from others, and what they found to be helpful in managing their depression," he said.

"From the outset, one of the prime objectives had been to reduce stigma about mood disorders amongst the elderly, and, at the same time, identify the types of services that are needed to support older people and their carers."

This sentiment was highlighted by the winning entrant with the words: "Lifelong behavioural patterns are hard to break and now, as I write this, I realise it would be good to be open. I make another mental note to do better."

The theme of the writing competition was ***Late Onset Depression: Finding answers for older people and their carers.*** 'Late onset depression' is when someone who has not previously had depression develops the illness as they grow older. An estimated eight percent of older adults in Australia experience depression, though those experiencing late onset depression are a smaller proportion of this group.

Professor Parker said depression amongst the 60 years and older age group is often not diagnosed because older adults and health care professionals may think that it is part of the normal ageing process but suicide rates have always been high amongst older people, particularly men. Depression in this age group reflects a range of biological and social factors.

An independent judging panel comprising David Evans OAM, a New England radio broadcaster; Lew Ford, a retired high school principal and David Atkins, CEO for the Council on the Ageing, selected the prize winners and the highly commended awardees in the writing competition.

The NSW Minister for Ageing, Paul Lynch, presented the first prize cheque for \$2000 and a trophy to Gillian Charlton from Bensville on the NSW Central Coast for her story titled "***You'll love it once you're in!***", during an awards ceremony at the Institute today that coincided with Seniors Week in this State.

In presenting the awards, the Minister stressed how important it was to ensure mental health remained high on the public agenda. "Mental illness is something that affects people of all ages and from all walks of life and older people are often an especially vulnerable section of our community," Mr Lynch said.

The \$1000 second prize was awarded to Yvonne Saw from Bridport, Tasmania for her essay ***Going with the Flow***. In her essay, Yvonne talks openly about how depression first hit her after retiring from work. Appreciating there is no easy answer, Yvonne nowadays finds that creative activities such as music and writing really help. As part of her ritual, Yvonne keeps a journal and records her progress and the day's activities. The \$500 third prize went to Wes Brierley from Rochester in Victoria for his essay ***The Black Dog is Unluckier than Black Cats***. He makes the poignant statement in his essay that:

"If we wish to decrease the level of depression suffered by our elderly it is essential to provide sufficient care staff, activity staff and resources to deliver the quality of care that our people deserve. It should be remembered that residents make the move to ***live*** in aged care not to merely wait to ***die***."

A further seven highly commended certificates were awarded for outstanding essays. Two entrants requested to remain anonymous while the five others to receive highly commended awards are: Norman Bennell from Sylvania Waters; Kerry Osborne from Engadine; Melita Smilovic from Camperdown; Frances Toomeh from Ashfield and Jenny Towndrow from The Rocks in Sydney.

Professor Parker said that, as in past, the Institute would be looking to incorporate the rich source of material gathered during this latest writing competition in a new book to help improve understanding of the impact depression has on our older generation and what can be done to help.

Essays of the first, second and third place-getters and the highly commended in this the Institute's sixth writing competition appear on the Black Dog Institute website [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

Professor Parker also extended a special thank you to all entrants who provided such a wealth of ideas and information in their essays.

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