

Transcript of the speech given by the NSW Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health), Barbara Perry

Well, I'm actually very privileged to be here, can I just say that. I would like to thank Gordon and Peter for their leadership in this area, their vision, their commitment, their passion to people and their humanity. So thank you so much and thank you for all the work that's done here at the Black Dog Institute. I said to Gordon earlier that I was just so proud of what you do here. Thank you very much, on behalf of our community. To our distinguished guests, to our award winners and to everyone that participated in this fantastic competition, to our esteemed judges – welcome. The judges have done a wonderful job and really it's been a process for you that's been one of inspiration and of growth. Every time I come to an event like this it's one of growth for me as well, as a person and a politician. So, I feel quite privileged to be a minister in this government for that very reason - that I get to witness, that I get to hear people's lives and that inspires me and I hope that inspiration goes into the policy areas that we deal with. I'd like to acknowledge, before I start, the traditional custodians of this land and I acknowledge their elders both past and present. I guess it's quite interesting the theme of this year's competition – Tackling Mood Disorders in the Workplace – because I think it's something that we really haven't thought about as a community. We've been very good at thinking about the severe side of things, we're still getting there, but we've been very good at trying to destigmatise particularly the severe side of things. As mentioned earlier, Beyond Blue and the Black Dog Institute and a lot of other groups have gone a long way into destigmatisation, but as much as we'd like to think that, I think there is still a lot of stigma out there and it's competitions like this that really help. Yesterday, I was speaking at the Workplace Health Promotion Network Forum on the importance of employers looking after the mental health of their workers. Can I say that yesterday's initiative and today's initiative demonstrate, in my view, the growing support for organisations to take a keen interest in the wellbeing of their staff. We're all familiar with the current global financial crisis and other pressures that are impacting on mental health of workers and there's no more important time to be working together on this very issue - educating people in the ways they can support the mental health needs of employees in their workplace and accepting that difference, accepting that diversity. Yes, we have been very good at talking about cultural diversity, but we're not that good at talking about mental health diversity and I think that stands out to me today and it stood out to me yesterday. It was interesting to see in some of the submissions that they too identified education as a key driving force to raise awareness of the issues as well as the need for shared ownership of policies and clear communication between leaders and managers and staff. I also thought there was an important point to be made in sharing your illness with a fellow workmate who can look out for you in the workplace and that's what it's all about. We all have a role in looking out for each other in the workplace, we all have a role to play in respecting each other and respecting our differences. With the high level of stress placed on staff at every level, workplaces must look at how they can support and maintain good mental health among their employees. Not only that, I think they have an obligation to also look at and think broadly about how they can encourage people into their workplace, to join their workplace, to obtain a job with them, who might have a mental health issue. Generally speaking there are six million days lost by Australian workplaces each year because of the effects of mental illness, so it makes sense for employers to implement policies and strategies that

support and protect the mental health of their employees. So, ultimately, if you want to talk about it in employer language, these efforts often sustain productivity and they reduce costs. But it's more than that – we, as a society, whether we're employers, politicians, no matter who we are, we actually have a moral obligation to support our community and anyone in our community who has a mental health issues. For me, employers have a moral obligation to support the wellbeing of people in their workplace. So, today, we're here about acknowledging and celebrating some outstanding writing that's given us a very unique and a very privileged insight into this issue. Can I thank you for your openness, your courage to be open because it's your openness that's going to break down that stigma that's going to encourage change. It's also great to see the wide diversity in the submissions which were received from right across Australia and New Zealand and as you all know, there is a great deal of ignorance and stigma in our community surrounding mental illness, but by sharing your thoughts, your experiences, you offer new understanding of what it's like to live with a mental illness, and importantly, we're encouraged to take a new look at how we treat people with depression, with bipolar disorder, and other mood disorders. Now, of course this is greatly supported by Professor Parker and Peter Joseph and the team here at the Black Dog Institute and can I thank you for your organisation of this competition. I'm very privileged to say that the government does support the Black Dog Institute in their valuable work. We know that depression can have a devastating effect on the lives of people as well as their family and friends, and again, through competitions such as this we know that people living with mental disorders like depression and bipolar have much to offer to help us better understand these illnesses. Can I congratulate you today, can I acknowledge you, can I pay tribute to you in the most genuine of ways, but importantly thank you and all the contributors who provided their inspirational stories. Once again, thanks to our judges Graeme, Jo-anne and Sally. I know that you had a difficult task of choosing winners among these incredible quality entries. I feel confident that these collections of writings will help many people gain valuable insight into life with the Black Dog.