

## **Senator Ludlam's leave role models how to best manage mental health in the workplace**

WESTERN Australia's peak body for community mental health, the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) commends Greens Senator Scott Ludlam's courage to speak up about his mental health problems and acknowledges the measured and appropriate approach his workplace has taken to managing the leave of absence, while he focuses on his recovery.

The way in which Senator Ludlam's office and parliamentary colleagues have rallied around him and made practical adjustments to accommodate his need to take a break is exactly how mental health issues in the workplace should be managed.

"Taking time out of work to properly deal with mental health challenges is no different to needing to take time out of work for a physical illness or injury," WAAMH chief executive officer Rod Astbury said.

On Friday afternoon, Greens Senator Scott Ludlam announced he was "taking a leave of absence to treat depression and anxiety" stating these were "issues I've been dealing with for a while."

Senator Ludlam went on to write, "I will return to work as soon as I am able to give the commitment the work demands. The team in my office will continue to support and work for the constituents of WA and work with my senate colleagues to manage my portfolio responsibilities. I am fortunate to be getting the very best care from my friends and family, and my health professionals."

Mr Astbury said: "It's very impressive to see the confidence shown by Mr Ludlam to speak up about his mental health issues and take the time off he needs to feel better, reducing any stigma around the decision.

"It's also good to see a modern, best-practice approach from his parliamentary colleagues in providing him with a pair, while he focuses on his recovery."

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As per best practice, when an individual is experiencing a mental health problem and needs to take time out of the workforce, the organisational culture and way it responds to this, plays an important role in helping the person successfully return to work.

According to *Return to Work* guidelines, fostering a supportive work environment that is conducive to good mental health and the enhancement of mental wellbeing can be achieved by:

- Encouraging staff to discuss stress and seek support when experiencing mental health problems
- Creating a culture in which disclosure of mental health problems is accepted
- Taking action to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health problems
- Providing mental health training to all staff to create greater awareness and combat any fear, ignorance or stigmatising attitudes
- Adopting a positive attitude towards those recovering from mental health problems
- The attitudes and behaviours of senior managers often set the tone for other employees and are therefore particularly important in creating a supportive work environment.

#### **About Return to Work**

The *Return to Work* website supports Australian employees to return to work following depression, anxiety and, or a related mental health problem. It provides practical dos and don'ts plus advice for managing mental health-related disruptions in the workplace. For helpful guidelines on managing absence and returning to work, go to: <http://returntowork.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au>

#### **About WAAMH**

The Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) was incorporated in 1966 and is the peak body representing WA's community mental health, with around 200 members. Our vision is to lead the way in supporting and promoting the human rights of people with mental illness, their families and carers, through the provision of inclusive, well-governed community-based services, focused on recovery. In 2016, WAAMH is celebrating 50 years.

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