



## NEWS

# When men get to talk

## Blokes to share troubles – counsellor

Health | **Anthea Cannon**

FOOTSCRAY-BASED MensLine is helping turn around the 1.5 million working days lost to mental illness in Victorian businesses.

At the recent Top Blokes Talk business luncheon, speakers including the Prime Minister's partner Tim Mathieson, TV doctor Andrew Rochford and crisis support services chairman Nicholas Voudouris spoke of the absenteeism caused by depression and relationship breakdowns, which costs Victoria \$3.7 billion every year.

Dr Voudouris said the idea was to encourage businesses to realise the importance of a mentally and physically healthy workforce.

"The personal stories we hear from the 50,000 men who call MensLine Australia each year mirror Swedish research that highlights a 74 per cent increase in absenteeism among men who are divorced – particularly around the 12-month period of separation," he said.

Program leader Randal Newton-John, who began at the Footscray office as a phone counsellor five years ago, said callers were often

going through the darkest days of their lives.

"As men's health becomes more highlighted, more men recognise the need to seek help when they need it," he said.

"But we still have a fair way to go to get people to ring before an issue becomes a crisis and recognise that it's OK to talk about doubts, and not feeling 100 per cent."

Mr Newton-John said 10 per cent of callers were women, and about the same number were employers.

"Picking up the phone, or going to see someone is often the most difficult part. And despite the myth that men don't talk about their feelings, when they feel comfortable and respected they're actually really open."

MensLine also offers a suicide call-back service which Mr Newton-John said made a lot of difference to those who felt like no one cared.

Callers can also be put in touch with other specialists or local and government services.

► **If you or anyone you know is experiencing depression, anxiety, or relationship problems phone 1300 789 978.**