



Tackling suicide rate

HEALTH

BY JONO PECH

Warrnambool

THE south-west sporting community has been encouraged to join a grass-roots effort to tackle suicide through a free training program.

The Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) in Sports program aims to reduce suicides and suicide attempts through the sporting community by training participants to identify signs and risk factors, such as increasing substance abuse, feelings of hopelessness and low social support.

The Greater Green Triangle University Department of Rural Health (GGT UDRH) will deliver the two-day workshops in Warrnambool in February and March, with support from sports star experts and program ambassadors Jordan Lewis and Sarah Wall.

GGT UDRH mental health academic Chris Healey will run the training sessions in February and March. He said the program was a proven intervention model helping

participants become more willing, ready and able to intervene with someone at risk of suicide.

"ASIST in Sport is about having more people able to recognise someone at risk and to have the skills to keep them safe until they can get the assistance they need," he said.

Mr Healey said all past participants had found the workshops beneficial.

"The feedback was unanimously positive with 100 per cent of participants saying they would recommend ASIST to others," he said.

Funding support from the Rotary Club Central of Warrnambool has removed the \$300 workshop fee. Those interested in participating in the training on February 18 and 19 and March 21 and 22 can contact Lifeline service development manager Megan Walsh on 5559 0555.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among people aged 15-44 and is more likely among men. More than 1200 calls are made in south-west Victoria to Lifeline each year. In 2012 more than 2500 people died in Australia by

suicide and an estimated 65,000 people attempted to end their own life.

The GGT UDRH, funded by the Department of Health, is a partnership between Flinders and Deakin Universities. The Warrnambool workshops have support from Lifeline South West Victoria and the Hampden Football Netball League.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis, call Lifeline's 24-hour support service on 13 11 14.



EMPOWER: Mental health academic Chris Healey will help train people in the sporting community to identify signs of suicide risks. **Picture: Vicky Hughson**