

Press Release

EMBARGOED TILL MONDAY 3 DECEMBER

Ministry of Health Launches **thelowdown** Website to Tackle Youth Depression

On Monday 3 December 2007 the Ministry of Health will launch **thelowdown.co.nz** website as part of its National Depression Initiative (NDI). The website is an interactive online space that has been created to help young New Zealanders understand and recover from depression.

Depression is a leading preventable cause of death and disease, but it is not well recognised and people often don't get the help they need. About 1 in 7 young New Zealanders (aged 16 – 24 years) will experience serious depression over the next 12 months.

Young people have higher rates of depression than the general population, with suicide being the second most common cause of death for young people.

thelowdown is part of a national public health campaign created to reduce the impact of depression on the lives of New Zealanders, and a component of the Government's approach to suicide prevention.

The NDI launched in October last year and has included the television commercials featuring John Kirwan talking about his personal experience of depression, and encouraging people to seek help. To date the response to the campaign has been astounding, with over 25,000 calls made to the Depression Helpline.

However, research shows that even though 78% of young people recalled the ads, they are less likely to respond to these commercials by seeking help than adults. They tend not to visit GPs and are less likely to use helplines, preferring to get support from other sources such as their friends, family, the Internet, magazines and school counselors.

The online platform of **thelowdown** has been selected to be user-friendly for youth. The site was developed and designed in consultation with youth, and includes online support services.

Candace Bagnall, Ministry of Health NDI spokesperson, says of the project launch, "With the sobering statistics for youth depression and suicide it is crucial that we help young people to deal with and recover from depression. **thelowdown** has been created for them to get help as quickly as possible. If they can develop their skills in coping with what life throws at them, they can have more control over their future. "

thelowdown aims to help young people recognise and understand depression. The site encourages and enables them to seek appropriate help, or puts them in touch with trained professionals. The site promotes the use self-help strategies such as exercise, which can be helpful for dealing with mild and moderate depression. Through encouraging early treatment of depression the NDI intends to reduce the impact depression has on the lives of young New Zealanders, now and throughout their adult lives.

About thelowdown

Targeting the 13-24 year age group, **thelowdown** website has been developed in consultation with young people for youth who are experiencing depression. It provides information that will allow users to identify depression in themselves and others, better understand it and get help for it through a variety of interactive online tools.

A welcoming community environment, the site features high profile Kiwi role-models, who youth relate to, talking about experiences with depression that they, or friends and family, have had and how they managed this. The contributions from musicians, sports people, and TV and radio celebrities help remove the stigma around depression and encourage young people to get help.

The website features several innovative functions to help visitors navigate the site and more importantly, help them feel they are not alone. They can choose from 4 online guides to show them around the environment. They can view video stories from role-models, and their peers, talking about their experiences of depression and offering words of encouragement and support.

Another key feature of the site is the online support facility where visitors can get expert advice from qualified counsellors. After sending a message by email or text to a counsellor they will receive a personalised response as quickly as possible, and within 12 hours.

The website also has a forum where visitors can join **thelowdown** community and talk to each other about how they are feeling. People can share their experiences and offer support to their peers. To ensure that users are kept safe, the forum will be monitored by an online moderator.

It is important for people who are experiencing depression to get help as early as possible, it is also important for them to find a treatment that works for them. To assist this process a host of useful information and advice is available, with fact sheets, Frequently Asked Questions, a self assessment questionnaire and details of other help services.

ENDS

www.thelowdown.co.nz

For further information on **thelowdown** please contact:

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Notes for Editors

- **Celebrities contributing to thelowdown**

P Money/ Scribe/ Brooke Fraser/ Dave Gibson - Elemeno P/ Brad Carter – Steriogram/ Angelo Munro – The Bleeders/ Jason Kerrison – Op Shop/ / Tau Manukia – Spacifix/ Young Sid/ Awa– Nesian Mystik/ Junior – Nesian Mystik/ Paul Roper – Mint Chicks/ Joel Little – Goodnight Nurse/ Tim Arnold – Pluto/ PNC/ Francis Kora – Kora/ Jon Austin - 48 May/ Victoria Girling-Butcher – Lucid 3/ Ben Read – 8 Foot Sativa/ Savage – Dkonz/ Aidee Walker – Outrageous Fortune Actress/ Antonia Prebble – Outrageous Fortune Actress/ Nisha Madhan – Shortland Street/ Lee Donaghue – Shortland Street/ Kimberley Crossman – Shortland Street/ Jaquie Brown – TV Presenter/ Sonia Gray – TV Presenter/ Jane Yee – C4 Presenter/ Phil Bostwick – C4 Presenter/ Tamati Coffey – Breakfast Presenter/ Mike Puru – The Edge DJ/ To'ofiga Fepulea'i - The Laughing Samoans Comedian/ Ma'a Nonu – Ex All Black/ Lisa Li - Miss Chinese NZ