

Group warns mental illness could get worse

MENTAL illness could become the most common and troubling ailment in Western Australia in 11 years, claim organisers of a new project launched in Kalgoorlie-Boulder yesterday.

Curtin University's Professor Ray James spoke at the launch of the Mentally Healthy WA scheme, highlighting the huge burden mental illness played on so many lives across the State.

Professor James said the mental health of West Australians was well behind those in other States.

"Mental illness will by 2020 be the biggest burden of disease," Professor James said.

"Western Australia is leading the pack, and by 2016, mental illness will be leading the race for things that cause us distress."

He said it could lead to a high number of people being unable to work, as well as other problems such as domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse.

The Mentally Healthy WA



Act now: Mentally Healthy coordinator Emma Brown and Professor Ray James know that a cuppa and a chat can help prevent mental illness. Photo: MIREK ZABIELLO

project, with its Act, Belong, Commit message is a world first for Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Esperance and four other

West Australian towns, and will encourage residents to participate in community activities to prevent them

from suffering from anxiety, isolation and depression.

Professor James said the idea was to focus on the sense

of well-being people received when they helped others in the community.

He said people should be aware of the steps needed for sound mental health.

"People already know what it takes to be mentally healthy but they're not top of mind," he said.

Professor James said people knew how to keep physically healthy but they did not know mental health was about keeping active and making a commitment to community activities such as sport, theatre or volunteer work.

Goldfields Mental Health Action Group president Des Aitken said he backed the Act, Belong, Commit project – which planned to run events over the next two years to boost the mental health of Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

"I'd say it's the first time this idea has been attacked on this scale," Mr Aitken said.

"As far as I can see, it's definitely going down the right track."

TIM SADLEIR