

New refuge for eating disorder sufferers

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Thrive Home - Source: ONE News

Desperately ill people with eating disorders now have another haven for help, with Auckland's first residential treatment centre days away from opening its doors.

After years of lobbying, the new facility, called Thrive Home, will add another nine beds to the 19 around the country, and will fill a critical gap in services for the top half of the North Island.

It's part of a \$26 million government push to help chronic eating disorder sufferers after a report three years ago said there was not enough help for the most serious cases.

Around 80,000 New Zealanders are thought to suffer from some form of eating disorder, and illnesses like anorexia have a high death rate.

Until now, chronic sufferers in the upper North Island have had to go without treatment or travel to Australia for help, costing the taxpayer at least \$2 million altogether in the past four years.

It is not only the monetary cost that was a concern, with the distance from home to Australia taking its toll on sufferers.

Former eating disorder sufferer Sarah Stevens, who used to weigh 36kgs, said her trip to Sydney for treatment nearly killed her.

"We're a tight-knit family anyway, and to split that up across two different countries with that kind of stress was a nightmare," she said.

The CEO of Challenge Trust, clinical psychologist Clive Plucknett, said young women suffering from anorexia have a different perception of themselves than what is seen on the outside and they starve themselves to death.

Plucknett said the opening of a new dedicated residential facility will go a long way towards helping people with anorexia and bulimia.

"The whole team worked really well to get this, it's something we're passionate about and we believe we can do it really well," Plucknett said.

The facility will cost \$8 million over four years and will be able to treat up to 36 patients every year.

Northern DHB regional director Ian McKenzie said Thrive Home is financially better and more supportive for patients because it treats people in their own community.

"It allows people to be a part of their families still and allows people to transition back into the community," McKenzie said.

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