****

**Paralympics takes gold in mental health support**

**Experts say Paralympics Australia set “gold standard” in mental health care with Quarantine Support Program**

MENTAL health has taken centre stage at this years’ Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics ––with Paralympics Australia helping to lead the charge in providing athletes with extensive mental health support.

At this year’s Olympics in Tokyo, high profile athletes such as US gymnast Simone Biles and Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka were vocal about their own personal mental health challenges. Paralympic athletes such as swimmer Anastasia Pagonis and javelin thrower Reinhardt Hamman also spoke up about the importance of addressing mental health issues.

Dr. Cheri Blauwet, a member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Medical Committee said the narrative of mental health is changing, and seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

“Mental health challenges are actually a normal part of the human experience, and it doesn’t mean that there is something wrong with you, or that people are going to judge you,” Blauwet said. “In fact, if you do feel comfortable talking about it, it is a sign of strength because you are recognising it and you’re doing the things that you need to in order to improve the situation and seek help.”

This year’s Paralympics saw a tangible response to mental health issues faced by athletes, with resources available for athletes during and after the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics such as the Mentally Fit Helpline which offers 24-hour confidential mental health and well-being support, staffed by expert counsellors who provided help, advice, and support in over 70 languages.

In addition to the international support programs, Paralympics Australia implemented an extensive and contemporary quarantine support program for athletes which has been described as ‘gold standard” by mental health experts.

The Paralympians were in hotel quarantine in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, after participating in the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

The quarantine support program included clinical and psychological support, as well as a range of experiential therapies such as art therapy, mindfulness, comedy and more.

Psychologist Jane Enter has extensive experience in group and organisational mental health programs. Ms Enter is one of the Clinical Directors of Raindrum, a private treatment provider in Byron Bay that provided various modules of the program.

She said the quarantine program Paralympics Australia created was exceptional.

“It really is gold standard,” Ms Enter said. “I wish more organisations would take this kind of holistic, patient-centred approach to mental health. It is very inspiring. From pre-games to now post-games, the program they have designed is really thorough and well thought out.

“The pressure on our Paralympians this year has been astronomical.  To have had months of worry of whether the Games would go ahead, lockdown leading into the Paralympics, and now hotel quarantine afterwards.  How difficult that must be” Ms Enter said.

“So, Paralympics Australia had a huge task on their hands to create programs and strategies to ensure the mental health of the Paralympians and staff through this time, especially in quarantine.

“I can say that they definitely rose to the occasion as the quarantine program was gold standard.”

Raindrum Psychologist Tracey Gamble was also part of the quarantine support program.

“We know that the psychological impacts of quarantine can have a significant impact on an individual’s wellbeing,” Ms Gamble said. “Quarantine disrupts our usual routines and impacts our social connectedness, both of which we know are essential factors for our health and wellbeing.

“Paralympics Australia's program of support during the athletes and support staff quarantine period was a fantastic, proactive initiative offering athletes the opportunity to engage with leaders in the field to gain new insights, strategies to support resilience, personal development and engaging activities to keep them moving and doing.”

Dr Tonya Coren, Clinical Director Raindrum said “Conceptualising and curating the delivery of thoughtful health and wellbeing solutions through the combination of medical, allied health and experiential therapies lies at the heart of the Raindrum experience.”

“Despite countless COVID-related challenges, our Olympic and Paralympic athletes have once again captured our hearts, minds and have inspired a country during a difficult time during the pandemic. We applaud Paralympics Australia for balancing the needs of their athletes and support staff in the lead up to and aftermath of their Tokyo campaign.

“Our team are humbled to have been able to play a small role in support of Australia’s Paralympians in partnership with Paralympics Australia.” Dr Coren said today.

ENDS

For further information on Raindrum, contact Suzanne Tobin on 0438 776 624