



# Media Release

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9 August 2017

## Council leads the way in encouraging conversation

Council is branding its waste collection trucks with messaging to stimulate discussion about mental health in an Australian first.

Four Council trucks will be badged with the 'R U OK?' message to prompt meaningful conversations amongst the community.

"Asking a person how they are is understood to be a simple and incredibly effective way of establishing a connection with someone who may otherwise be feeling alone and disengaged," said Mayor Lara Symkowiak.

"One of the leading causes of suicide is when people feel like they don't belong and we want to make sure everyone is included, accepted and involved in the community," Cr Symkowiak said.

According to the Hunter Institute of Mental Health, over a five year period from 2011 to 2015, the average number of suicide deaths in Australia per year was 2,687. In 2015, men over the age of 85 were the highest rate of suicide, with women between 45 and 49 years the highest rate of suicide.

"While the question is quite small, its impact can be lifesaving. It is really important to listen to the answer and make it a starting point for more chats in the future," she said.

R U OK? offers advice and tips on preparing to approach someone. Some of these are: -

- Make sure you are in a good headspace to genuinely listen
- Choose a suitable and appropriate time to talk
- Recognise that you don't have to solve someone's problems.

The messaging on the trucks will include the contact number for Lifeline and will be unveiled on R U OK? Day on 14 September 2017.

*R U OK? is a not-for-profit organisation which raises awareness about the importance of mental health and encourages people to have meaningful conversations, particularly with someone who might be going through a tough time.*

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