

# Males and females kept apart

Health | Shaun Campbell

MAROONDAH Hospital is strongly denying reports that male patients are accessing its women-only psychiatric areas.

Women and Mental Health Network project officer Cheryl Sullivan said there were reports that male clients had been put in women's corridors at the hospital's adult inpatient unit when there was a lack of beds.

But Eastern Health community and mental health continuing care executive director Neth Hinton said the hospital reconfigured a female-restricted ward for a male patient on "a very rare occasion".

Ms Hinton said male patients were not permitted access to the female-only areas "under any circumstances".

"Rather than deny access we reconfigured the ward to allow the vacant bed in the women-only area to be used," Ms Hinton said.

"We activated safety procedures to ensure our women-only space remained private."

An official investigation has been launched into claims that an intellectually disabled teenager was sexually harassed at the unit (*Maroondah Leader*, October 12, 2010).

The network last week launched a campaign calling for both state major political parties to commit to a five-point plan to address several reports of assaults in mental health facilities in the past year.

Ms Sullivan said 70 per cent of women admitted to inpatient wards were vulnerable as they had experienced sexual assault.

Australian Medical Association Victoria president Harry Hemley blamed the situation on a shortage of beds across the system.

He said some of the state's most vulnerable women faced "predatory behaviour, unwelcome sexual advances, and threatened or actual assault".

Opposition health spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge announced last week that, if elected, the coalition would provide \$4 million to ensure women in acute inpatient wards were protected.



Ringwood North gym owner Nicole Deakin and manager Kristy Lee are offering free workouts to women for a month to help boost mental health. Picture: JASON EDWARDS N16MM916

## Gym offer to women

A RINGWOOD North female-only gym is opening its doors for free to raise awareness about the link between physical and mental health.

Nicole Deakin, owner of Contours in Warrandyte Rd, said women could access the gym at no cost during November. Ms Deakin said research showed exercise could help with mild mental health issues.

She said the gym wanted women to experience how working out could help. "We are committed to helping our local ladies so we are opening for free, no contracts or strings attached," Ms Deakin said. "There are many benefits for women keeping active."

"For some of our ladies it is a reason for them to get out of the house."

Last week (October 10-16) was mental health week.

SANE Australia research found 90 per cent of people with mental illness also reported a chronic physical condition, such as diabetes or heart disease.

Chief executive Barbara Hocking urged Australians to use the week as a reminder to concentrate on their physical and mental health.

"It can be tough for anyone at the best of times to get fit and maintain a healthy lifestyle," Ms Hocking said.

"But it is an even greater hurdle for people who are living with a mental illness."

Ms Hocking said many people with a mental illness were concerned about their general health.

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