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For Mental Health Awareness and Fundraising, Australian Motorcyclists Hit the American Road

Coast-to-Coast Ride to Benefit Mental Health First Aid

WASHINGTON – September, 2015 – Sixty-five Australian motorcyclists, in a nation over 15,000 miles from home, depart Sunday, Sept. 13 on a U.S. cross-country odyssey to raise awareness and funds for depression and suicide prevention.

The group, known as “Black Dog Ride,” departs from New York City on a 21-day, 19-city, 4,350-mile goodwill tour that will end in Los Angeles on October 3. The mission is to make more Americans aware of depression and suicide prevention, and raise \$200,000 to train people in [Mental Health First Aid](#) for first responders and military members.

Mental Health First Aid was created in Australia in 2001 and brought to the U.S. in 2008. The program teaches everyone – from ordinary citizens to professionals like police officers, teachers and soldiers – how to identify common mental health problems, like depression and PTSD, and how to support people who may be struggling. Mental Health First Aid USA has trained more than 450,000 people to date.

Over the course of their journey, the Black Dog Riders will make their way through the mid-Atlantic, down into the rolling Appalachians, head west through Texas and into the heart of the Southwest, up into the scenic Rockies, cruise toward the bright lights of Las Vegas, then end their voyage as they reach the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles.

“We’re excited to do in the United States what we’ve been doing to raise awareness about depression and suicide in Australia for more than five years.” said Steve Andrews, founder of Black Dog Ride. *“With 1 in 5 Americans suffering from a mental illness, like the depression that took the lives of my mother and my best friend’s wife, I know Americans care enough to help raise the \$100,000 needed to bolster the efforts of Mental Health First Aid USA.”*

Steve Andrews founded Black Dog Ride in Australia in 2009 following those two sudden and very personal deaths. Since then, Black Dog Ride has raised more than \$2 million for mental health and suicide prevention services and education programs, like Mental Health First Aid, in Australia. Donations to the U.S. ride, which is targeted to help first responders and military members, can be made online: <http://bit.ly/BlackDogRideUSA>.

“Because of first responders’ interactions with the public, Mental Health First Aid offers important tools to help them recognize and respond appropriately to individuals experiencing mental health and addiction problems. Members of the armed services often experience mental health problems, like depression, anxiety and PTSD, and we know they will

benefit from training that provides information about how to recognize problems and encourage people to seek help,” said Betsy Schwartz, vice president of public education and special initiatives at the [National Council for Behavioral Health](#). “We applaud Black Dog Riders for their support of Mental Health First Aid and are grateful that they chose this program – and the veterans and first responders it will serve – as their beneficiary.”

Mental Health First Aid is an eight-hour course that gives people the tools to identify when someone may be struggling with a mental health or substance use problem and help them access appropriate support and resources, if necessary.

“Mental Health First Aid increases peoples’ noticing skills and encourages them to reach out to those who may not be comfortable asking for help,” said Schwartz. “That is powerful. The simple act of reaching out can save lives.”

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To learn more about Mental Health First Aid USA, visit www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

To learn more about Black Dog Ride, visit www.blackdogride.com.au

*The **National Council for Behavioral Health** is the unifying voice of America’s community mental health and addictions treatment organizations. Together with 2,300 member organizations, it serves more than eight million adults and children living with mental illnesses and addiction disorders. The organization is committed to ensuring all Americans have access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery and full participation in community life. The National Council, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Missouri Department of Mental Health pioneered [Mental Health First Aid](#) in the U.S. and have trained 450,000 individuals to connect youth and adults in need to mental health and addictions care in their communities. To learn more about the National Council, visit www.TheNationalCouncil.org.*