

# Palau Horizon

Every Tuesday & Friday

Vol. 10 No. 24 ©2007 Palau Horizon

Friday • October 19 - 22, 2007

16 pages

50¢

LOCAL NEWS

FRIDAY • OCTOBER 19 - 22, 2007 Palau Horizon

9

## Palau joins new WHO network, PIMHnet

**VANUATU**—Improving mental health care in the Pacific islands is the focus of a new network being launched by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Pacific Islands Mental Health Network (PIMHnet), a joint initiative of the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and the WHO Headquarters in Geneva, was launched during the Meeting of Health Ministers for the Pacific Island Countries in Vanuatu earlier this year.

Mental health in the Pacific currently struggles to be recognized at all levels of society. The low priority given to it has resulted in understaffing, underfunding and services that are difficult to access.

"A lack of legislation in some Pacific islands countries has led to a situation where discrimination and violation of human rights for people with mental disorders are real issues," said Dr. Shigeru Omi, WHO Re-

gional Director for the Western Pacific. Mental health care means treating and supporting persons with mental illness in the best environment for their well-being."

PIMHnet seeks to bring the Pacific island countries together so they can pool resources and share information, knowledge and experiences to improve mental health services and treatment. While most countries have a health system oriented towards primary health care, mental health is often not part of those services.

"This is a great example of collaboration between countries with similar needs to address under-resourced but important health issues," said Dr Catherine Le Gallés-Camus, WHO Assistant Director-General for Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health. "We hope this model will be replicated in other parts of the world."

PALAU/P.14

### Palau...

(from page 9)

National focal points, appointed by each country's Ministry of Health, will coordinate and liaise with network members and strategic partners as well as with the network secretariat. These focal contacts will take charge of linking in-country mental health networks with PIMHnet, in an effort to maximize available resources and reduce duplication of tasks. Network countries will meet once a year to draw up annual workplans.

WHO has received funding for three years to support PIMHnet activities from the New Zealand Ministry of Health and the New Zealand Agency for International Development.

Key PIMHnet activities this year:

- to carry out a detailed assessment of the current mental health workforce situation and

needs in each country across all health system levels;

- to provide clinicians with best-practice guidelines for improving the mental health of their patients;

- to engage strategic partners who can provide expertise, resources and support to ensure the sustainability of mental health services in the region;

- to organize a training workshop on mental health policy and planning with all PIMHnet member countries; and

- to hold a workshop with Pacific island nongovernmental organizations working in the area of mental health.

Pacific islands countries and areas that have joined PIMHnet include American Samoa, Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Tokelau, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu. More countries are expected to join PIMHnet this year.