



## Senator David Pocock

Former rugby star David Pocock made waves in 2022 as the ACT's first independent Senator.

Having migrated from Zimbabwe with his family as a teenager, David had a stellar rugby career with the Wallabies and the Brumbies.

He also has a Masters in Sustainable Agriculture, is involved in multiple small businesses and has co-founded numerous not-for-profit community initiatives in Australia and overseas, including with his wife Emma.

David has used his position to call out inequalities, raise awareness and propagate change on unfair and unjust social and cultural issues. One of the issues he is passionate about is mental health.

“Too often, people experience mental health struggles and feel they have no one to reach out to. This has been worsened during the pandemic, with feelings of disconnection and loneliness being amplified by the isolation and uncertainty we’ve all experienced.”

He is particularly concerned about men’s mental health, with data clearly showing that men reach out less when struggling and experience significant stigma in talking about mental health.

“Someone I really respect and admire, author James Hollis says, ‘fear of our own depths is the enemy.’ In talking about our fears, we can begin to explore these depths. None of us have it all together, and that’s nothing to be ashamed of: it’s what makes us human. In making ourselves vulnerable and talking about it, I believe we show true strength.”

David wants to help change the way we perceive the mental health sector.

“So often, we talk about mental health only in a clinical context. And while access to mental health services is vital, we must also work on prevention and community-based care. Addressing the root causes and ensuring we build communities of support will leave us a lot better off in the long run.”

To achieve this, David thinks we need to “start by looking at mental health more holistically, by looking at whether people in our community are safe, nourished, physically healthy and socially connected.” This includes examining the drivers of mental health concerns, such as housing stress, homelessness and financial strain.

“I hope we can start to look beyond the health system when talking about mental health and start to address the issues in our society that improve people’s lives more holistically.”

It’s probably not a surprise that exercise is an important element of David’s activities to maintain his own mental wellbeing. He also makes sure he gets enough sleep and gets out to his local park or bushland to spend time in nature.

And he acknowledges that mental wellbeing is a group effort. “Over the years, I have had different mentors and therapeutic support—from a performance coach during my rugby days to a therapist in the years since I’ve retired. Having the right network of support can be key to maintaining mental health.”

