



THUMBS UP: Terry Mitropoulos is overwhelmed by the encouragement he has received during his 768-kilometre journey from Adelaide to Melbourne, supporting Black Dog Institute and YMCA Open Doors.

## Mitropoulos' miracle marathon

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By Colin MacGillivray

Wimmera residents with a close eye on the Western Highway during the past week might have seen something unique – a walking miracle.

By all rights Terry Mitropoulos should be dead, or at the very least in a wheelchair.

Instead, the Melbourne man is in the midst of a mammoth 768-kilometre walk from Adelaide to Melbourne to raise money for mental health charities.

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While the prospect of walking an average of about 20 kilometres a day for 42 days might seem daunting to most, Mr Mitropoulos is no stranger to adversity.

Nine years ago, the father of two was diagnosed with a brain tumour and underwent 13 brain surgeries, eventually requiring a mechanical valve and two shunts to regulate his brain fluid.

While in hospital he contracted an antibiotic-resistant 'superbug' and was on 72 different medications to help fight the infection.

Given a five percent chance of living, Mr Mitropoulos turned to an experimental drug from overseas.

It halted the infection but damaged his central nervous system; he suffered a stroke, was rendered paraplegic and could not see or hear.

Mr Mitropoulos said he emerged from the experience physically and emotionally shattered.

"I had very little life left," he said.

"I was in hospital for four years, I was wheelchair-bound, I was a vegetable in bed, and I was told I would never walk again.

"It's really hard to interpret what I experienced, but I knew there was more in me."

Mr Mitropoulos was determined to regain some semblance of his old life.

He assembled a team of physio, remedial and occupational therapists, a personal trainer and even an acupuncturist to help him do what doctors said was impossible – walk again.

"The team I put together were people who knew what they were doing and, more importantly, believed in me," he said.

"They said, 'this guy really wants to better himself, let's help him'.

"They helped me overcome the impossible and make it possible.

"When you're working together, anything is possible."

The idea of working together to overcome all odds resonates strongly with Mr Mitropoulos.

After struggling with his mental health during his ordeal in hospital, he was inspired to help others with their own mental health battles.

This year he decided to undertake his huge walk in support of the Black Dog Institute and the YMCA Open Doors program, with a target of raising \$200,000.

"I know the mental health problems are growing. Having lived with it myself, I'm an example of that," he said.

"It's not about how you overcome it; it's about how you live with it.

"I thought, 'let's walk from Adelaide to Melbourne and really show everyone that when we are working together, look what we can achieve'.

Mr Mitropoulos' journey, known as 'Walk and Shine' started in Adelaide on August 17.

He crossed the border into Victoria on Tuesday last week and has stopped in Kaniva, Nhill, Gerang, Wail, Horsham and Dadswells Bridge so far on his way through the Wimmera.

In the next four days he will continue on to Deep Lead, Stawell and Ararat.

Mr Mitropoulos said the encouragement and support he had received from people along the way was staggering.

"It's remarkable the support that I've had," he said.

"I am finding it a little bit overwhelming, in a good way.

"People who are driving by have stopped and pulled over and introduced themselves."

Mr Mitropoulos said he had never done a walk of this magnitude before but was feeling good and thoroughly enjoying the experience.

"The reason I'm having fun is because of the support crew I have," he said.

"We sing and we listen to music down the highway and share our jokes and stories with each other.

"Having that, it allows you to remove your thoughts from only walking.

"You really haven't got time to think about what you're doing other than entertaining yourself and others.

"This literally would not have been possible without them."

Mr Mitropoulos admitted he was unsure how he would feel when he reached Melbourne, which he plans to do on September 27.

But regardless of what happens, he said he would continue to enjoy life and try to help others do the same by supporting mental health charities.

"This for me is the beginning of something new that I'm going to fulfil year in and year out – making sure that support is out there for people with mental health issues.

"There are people out there who we can provide some sort of service for that they require.

"It's absolutely extraordinary knowing that we as a whole are able to have an impact in someone's life.

"I don't think there's anything much more rewarding than knowing we have had that impact on others."

To support Mr Mitropoulos' Walk and Shine campaign, people can donate via website [www.gofundme.com/f/walkandshine](http://www.gofundme.com/f/walkandshine).

People can also find more information on the walk by visiting [www.walkandshine.org.au](http://www.walkandshine.org.au).

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