

MENTAL ILLNESS FACTS AND FIGURES FACTSHEET



What is mental illness?

Mental illness includes a wide range of conditions that affect how we feel and think. Most of these are first experienced in the late teens or early twenties, but for some people they may occur later in life.

Like many physical illnesses, mental illnesses are thought to arise from the interaction of genetic vulnerability and stresses in life. Mental illnesses vary in how long they affect people: sometimes a single episode, sometimes a lifelong condition. They also vary in severity: sometimes transitory, sometimes causing psychosocial disability requiring long-term support.

How common is mental illness?

Anyone can develop a mental illness and no one is immune to mental health problems. Around half the population (45%) will experience a mental health issue at some stage of their life. According to the latest Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey 2014-15, there were 4 million Australians (17.5%) who reported having a mental or behavioural condition during this period. Anxiety related conditions were most frequently reported (2.6 million people or 11.2% of the population) followed by mood (affective) disorders, which includes depression (2.1 million people or 9.3%). Around one in twenty Australians (5.1%) reported having both an anxiety-related condition and a mood (affective) disorder.

More women (13.5%) than men (9.9%) experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress in 2014-15, with women aged 18-24 reporting the highest rate of any age group or sex. It's estimated that 560,000 or 14% of children and adolescents aged 4-17 experienced mental health disorders in 2012-13.

The Global Burden of Disease, Injuries and Risk Factors Study 2013 estimated that mental and behavioural disorders were responsible for 13% of the total burden of disease in Australasia, placing it third as a broad disease group after cancer and musculoskeletal disease.

How many people are disabled by mental illness?

Government figures indicate that just over 750,000 Australians reported having a psychological disability in 2012, as compared with 600,000 Australians in 2009. Two-thirds of all people with a psychological disability also reported

having a physical disability. People with psychological disability reported lower participation rates in education and employment compared with people with no disability. People with psychotic illness also frequently experience poor physical health and comorbidities, for example the People Living with Psychotic Illness 2010 study reported 21% of survey participants had diabetes, compared with 6% of the general population.

Does mental illness run in families?

Most people with a mental illness do not have family members with the same mental illness. For some mental illnesses there does not seem to be a link at all. For others, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, a predisposition to the illness may be inherited – but even then, it is only one of several factors. The causes are not fully understood.

Are some people more likely to have a mental illness?

While anyone can become mentally unwell, a person's mental health is at least partially determined by various social, economic, and physical environments occurring at different stages of life. Risk factors for many mental disorders are heavily associated with social inequalities. For example, research indicates being homeless, unemployed or financially disadvantaged negatively impacts on mental health. People with a disability and Indigenous Australians are more likely to experience psychological distress than the rest of the population. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, have lower rates of voluntary mental health care than when compared with the general population, but they are over-represented in the group of people who are treated involuntarily or admitted for acute inpatient care (source?)

Where you live can also have an impact. The 2014-15 *National Health Survey* found adults living in areas of most disadvantage across Australia, were more than twice as likely to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress than adults living in areas of least disadvantage.

Does mental illness impact on physical health?

The 2014-15 National Health Survey found 15.8% of all Australians (3.6 million people) reported co-existing long-term mental and behavioural and physical health conditions. This included more than 13.3% of the population who had at least one mental and behavioural condition, and two or more physical health conditions. People with a mental and behavioural condition were almost twice as likely than those without a mental and behavioural condition to report having diabetes (8.1% compared with 4.5%). In addition, people with co-existing mental and physical health conditions were more likely to be unemployed, have a lower level of educational attainment, and be living in a lone-person household compared with those with physical health conditions only.

People with long term mental illness experience far higher rates of physical health issues including kidney, liver, heart and lung diseases than the wider population. Recent research indicates people with a severe mental illness are dying an average of 25 years earlier than the general population, with 70% of these premature deaths due to preventable or modifiable medical conditions.

How does mental illness impact on people's work?

Employing a person affected by mental illness can benefit both the individual and the employer. Often the person is the best person for the job. A 2012 survey found almost three in four of Australian small to medium businesses who employed people affected by mental illness found the experience positive or very positive. Of the organisations that reported a positive experience in employing people with a mental illness, 32% said they were good for the company and increased awareness of mental illness.

However, in 2014-15 three in five Australians aged 15-64 years with a mental or behavioural condition were employed, compared with around four in five people of the same age without a mental or behavioural condition.

What are the chances of recovering from mental illness?

Many people with mental illness recover and are able to lead fulfilling lives in the community – when they receive appropriate ongoing treatment and support. However, only about half of those affected actually receive treatment. According to a 2015 study prepared for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, mental health services are accessed by very remote areas at only 20% the rate of those in the city.

The majority of people who develop anxiety disorders and depression improve over time with appropriate treatment and support. About 80% of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder also improve with ongoing treatment and support. The long-term outcome for schizophrenia can be better than many assume, especially where access to good treatment is consistent. About 20% of people diagnosed have an episode or two, then never experience symptoms again. About 60% improve over time and with support can live independently. For about 20%, symptoms are more persistent, treatments are less effective, and greater support services are needed.

What are the costs associated with mental illness in Australia?

Over \$8 billion, or \$344 per person, was spent on mental health-related services in Australia during 2013-14. It is estimated that 13% of all General Practitioner (GP) visits in 2013-14 were mental health-related. Over the five years to 2013-14, the rate of GP mental health services subsidised by the Medicare Benefits Schedule have increased by an annual average of 8%. (Health 2015 & 020216 release, AIHW)

SANE Australia has a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. Go to www.sane.org

For more information

Sign up for StigmaWatch and make a difference.
www.sane.org

Hume Partners in Recovery
www.humepir.org.au

Loddon Mallee Murray Partners in Recovery
www.pir.net.au

Murray PHN
www.murrayphn.org.au

beyondblue
www.beyondblue.org.au

Black Dog Institute
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
See Me
www.seemescotland.org

Stop Stigma Sacramento
www.stopstigmatasacramento.org

Make the Pledge
www.time-to-change.org.uk

Heads Up
www.headsup.org.au

'A National Framework for recovery-orientated mental health services'
www.health.gov.au