

Mental health awareness

The Health Column

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Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which individuals cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their community. Mental illness, on the other hand, describes a number of diagnosable disorders that can significantly interfere with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities.

In 2013, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released the latest figures on mental health. These figures showed some worrying trends.

ABS data show that females aged 16–85 years have a higher rate of mental health disorders (22 per cent) than males (18 per cent). A higher rate of anxiety disorders is the main contributor to the higher overall rate for females, who are almost twice as likely as males to report post-traumatic stress disorder.

Males were more likely to have had a mental disorder at some stage in their lifetime than females (48 per cent compared to 43 per cent). This was due to a higher proportion that had a substance use disorder.

In 2007, 45 per cent of Australians aged 16–85 years reported that they would have met the criteria for a diagnosis of a mental disorder at some point in their life. One in five (3.2 million) Australians had experienced symptoms in the previous 12 months.

Clearly, mental health is an issue affecting many Australians. An individual's ability to relate to their family, friends, workmates and the broader community can be affected by their mental health. Mental illness can cause significant distress and disability, leading to isolation of, and discrimination against, those affected.

People with a mental health disorder may also not be able to fully participate in the labour force. This has an individual impact in terms of the person's income, social participation and self-esteem, but also a wider economic impact. The annual cost of mental illness in Australia has been estimated at \$20 billion, which includes the cost of loss of productivity and labour force participation.



Image by Joana Croft | freeimages.com

Next week is Mental Health Week, which runs until 12 October. During this time, activities and events are being held to: promote emotional wellbeing in the community; encourage people to maximise their health potential; enhance the coping capacity of communities, families, individuals, and; increase mental health recovery.

This year the focus is on living with schizophrenia, which is a common cause of hospital admissions involving specialised psychiatric care.

Mental Health Week also encourages people to seek help, or for family and friends to encourage people to seek help, when necessary. There are many highly trained professionals who specialise in mental health. General practitioners (GPs) are able to treat and refer patients as appropriate.

Your local pharmacy can help too. One of the key aspects to managing mental illness is medicine management. Pharmacists are medicines experts and can assist you with understanding how your medicines work and any possible side effects. Pharmacies also offer services which can help people living with mental illness maintain their independence. For example, home delivery and medication management services such as Dose Administration Aids. Visit your local pharmacy during Mental Health Week and find out how they can help.

Pharmacies can also provide advice on ways to stay healthy mentally, and cope with stress. There is a series of mental health information cards available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information program. These cards cover a number of topics such as *Anxiety*, *Depression* and *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*.

There are also useful Fact Cards covering a range of related topics such as *Relaxation Techniques* and *Sleeping Problems*, all with helpful tips.

Phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772 for the location of your nearest Self Care pharmacy, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.