

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.

Clearly, mental health is an issue affecting many Australians. Each year, approximately one in every five Australians will experience a mental illness. Mental illnesses are the third leading cause of disability burden in Australia, accounting for an estimated 27% of the total years lost due to disability. Prevalence of mental illness decreases with age, with prevalence greatest among 18-24 year olds. Women are more likely than men to seek help for anxiety disorders (18% compared with 11%) and mood disorders (7.1% compared with 5.3%). Women are also more likely than men to use services for mental health problems. 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.

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 of mental illness in the previous 12 months.

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 find it difficult 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 lost productivity and reduced labour force participation.

Mental Health Week raises community awareness about mental health issues and is held in October each year to coincide with World Mental Health Day on 10 October. The 2016 Mental Health Week is being held from 8 to 15 October. The 2016 theme is **Act-Belong-Commit** with a focus on suicide prevention, *'Together we can save lives'*.



The aim of Mental Health Week is to:

- Promote social and emotional wellbeing to the community
- Encourage people to maximise their health potential
- Enhance the coping capacity of communities, families, individuals and increasing mental health recovery.

Mental Health Week 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) for example, 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. These include home delivery and medication management services such as Dose Administration Aids. Visit your local pharmacy and find out how they can help.

Pharmacies can also provide advice on ways to maintain your mental health, 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.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au/selfcare, then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.