

Some people experience more than one Mental Illness at a time (e.g. having both depression and anxiety). It is thought that only about half of the people who develop a Mental Illness get help and treatment.

Sometimes people with a Mental Illness will need to have treatment in a hospital and an even smaller number of those will be against their will. The general principal is however to have people treated in the community in which they live.

One of the biggest hurdles facing people with a Mental Illness are the negative stereotypes based on misconceptions and myths about Mental Illness. These in turn can lead to increased feelings of shame, isolation and discrimination. All of which affect recovery.

Positive attitudes towards people who have a Mental Illness from friends, family and the community will go a long way to reducing this shame.

Selected NSW Police Officers have received specialised training in mental health issues. These officers can be recognised by their MHIT badge as seen below.



Where to get help

In an emergency contact your local police or call **000**

NSW Mental Health Line – 24 hour service
1800 011511

Lifeline 131114

Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council
of NSW (AH&MRC) (02) 9212 4777

Headspace – Kids Helpline 1800 551800

Kids Matter 1800 543767

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

Sane Australia - RU OK? 1800 187 263

Schizophrenia Fellowship 1800 985 944

Mental Health Association 1300 794 991

Mental Health

Working Together To Build A Safer Community



NSW Police Force



What is mental illness?

Mental illness is a general term describing a group of illnesses that affect the brain. It is thought that nearly half the Australian population will develop a mental illness at sometime over the course of their life and 1 in 5 adults in any given year will be affected.

Mental Illness affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves and may affect the way the person interacts with other people.

Mental illness is diagnosed according to standard criteria. Some of the more frequently experienced forms include Depression, Anxiety and Eating Disorders but some of the less common Mental Illness include Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder.

Schizophrenia and Bipolar may have symptoms of psychosis which means that the sufferer will at times lose touch with reality and may experience delusions (having a false belief) and Hallucinations where the person may hear things, see, taste touch or smell things that aren't really there.

Some Aboriginal people may see and hear deceased relatives. This may be culturally appropriate for that person.

What are some common mental illnesses?

Anxiety Disorders – Anxiety is a normal feeling of fear, tension or worry which may result in a number of uncomfortable physical feelings. If you feel unwell, see your doctor.

Everybody experiences anxiety at some time, however if this anxiety gets out of control it can become an anxiety disorder. There are several different anxiety disorders including social anxiety, phobias and panic disorders just to name a few.

Depressive Disorders – Depressive disorder is an illness that involves feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and can last for at least 2 weeks or longer. We must remember that this is not just feeling down when something bad happens, depression is when sadness goes on for a long time once again as mentioned for at least 2 weeks or longer.

Substance Use Disorders – Substances include alcohol, yarrandi, amphetamines (speed, ecstasy, ice), inhalants (petrol, glue), as well as a number of other drugs and substances. Substance misuse does not mean just using alcohol and drugs. However, substance misuse often leads to substance use disorders. This occurs when people become hooked on alcohol and / or other drugs, and they are using at a level which becomes damaging to their health.

'Mental Health Problem' – is a broad term which describes conditions that may not be severe enough to be called a mental illness.

'Mental Illness' – Is a term used to describe major persistent changes in a person's thinking & feelings which disrupts the person's ability to carry out normal daily routines.

One of the most frequently experienced forms of Mental Illness is Depression. It can range from relatively mild, to extremely severe forms where the person becomes so disabled that they can no longer enjoy any activity and may lose their ability to function or look after themselves. In extremely severe forms the person may possibly not even be able to get out of bed.

Similarly Anxiety Disorders can also affect people in different ways but all have fear and anxiety as a central feature. Some people experience extreme anxiety known as panic attacks. This may lead to avoidance behaviour of feared situations in an effort to prevent future panic.

Some people have symptoms of Mental Illness on one occasion only and fully recover however some people have recurring episodes throughout their life.

