

# Facts and figures about mental illness

## How many people experience mental illness?

*Around 20% of adults are affected by some form of mental disorder every year.*

Anxiety disorders affect around 14% of the adult population every year. Depression affects around 6% of the adult population every year. The remainder are affected by substance abuse disorders, psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia, personality disorders, and other conditions. Many people have more than one diagnosis.

## How many people are disabled by mental illness?

*Around 3% of adults experience psychosocial disability caused by the effects of mental illness*

Some people are so severely affected by mental illness that it affects their ability to participate fully in society. Schizophrenia can be a particularly disabling condition for some: this is a persistent form of mental illness that affects approximately 1% of Australians at some stage in their lives.

## Does mental illness run in families?

*Most people with a mental illness do not have family members with the illness.*

For some mental disorders 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. It is likely that such mental disorders involve a biochemical imbalance and can be triggered by such things as stressful life events, drug abuse, hormonal changes or physical illness.

## Is mental illness life-threatening?

*Mental illness itself is not life-threatening.*

However, up to 15% of people seriously affected by mental illness eventually die by suicide (compared to an approximate figure of 1% for the whole population). Effective, ongoing treatment is essential to minimise the risk of suicide.

## What are the chances of recovering from mental illness?

*Most people with mental illness recover well 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. 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 those 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 figures?

- ① Nearly half (45%) of the population will experience a mental disorder at some stage in their lives.
- ① Almost one in five Australians (20%) will experience a mental illness in a 12-month period.
- ① During a one-year period, anxiety disorders will affect 14% of the population and depression will affect 6%.
- ① Depression is one of the most common conditions in young people and increases during adolescence.
- ① At least one third of young people have had an episode of mental illness by the time they are 25 years old.

- ④ Research indicates that people receiving treatment for a mental illness are no more violent or dangerous than the general population.
- ④ People living with a mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence, especially self-harm.
- ④ Mental illnesses are not purely 'psychological' and can have many physical features.
- ④ Anyone can develop a mental illness and no one is immune to mental health problems.
- ④ Most people with mental illness recover well and are able to lead fulfilling lives in the community when they receive appropriate ongoing treatment and support.
- ④ Women were more likely than men to use services for mental health problems. Approximately two-thirds of people with a mental illness do not receive treatment in a 12-month period.
- ④ It is estimated that up to 85% of homeless people have a mental illness.

### How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. For more information about this topic see:

- ④ [\*SANE Guide to Reducing Stigma\*](#)  
Describes what stigma means, explains the harm that stigma in the media does, and offers ideas on what you can do about it.
- ④ [\*SANE Guide for Families\*](#)  
Explains how to better handle common issues associated with being a carer such as developing a positive attitude, looking after yourself and getting the help you are entitled to.
- ④ [\*SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments\*](#)  
Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.

Use the Order Form which came with this Factsheet or visit the SANE Bookshop at [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org).