



Getting Better

recovering from mental illness

Recovery is often defined as a process in which you take an active part in getting as well as you possibly can be: accepting unavoidable limitations and focusing on the many possibilities of what you can do to lead a satisfying life. Recovering and feeling better after an episode of mental illness is more likely if you know where to go and what treatment and support you are entitled to. This Factsheet gives a summary of what sort of services are available to help you do this.

Where can you go for treatment and support to help recovery?

General Practitioner

It helps to see a GP (preferably the same one) on a regular basis. This way you can get to know each other, and can discuss ongoing physical and mental health issues. The GP can monitor medication and other treatments, and can also prescribe a Mental Health Plan. This may include referral for psychological therapy to a psychiatrist, psychologist or other suitably-qualified health professional.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a doctor who has additional qualifications in helping people with mental health problems. The psychiatrist can discuss current or ongoing issues of concern, give information about mental illness and its treatment, and provide and monitor these treatments, including psychotherapy and medication. The psychiatrist can also give referrals to other support services in the community.

Community Mental Health Service

If you are receiving treatment in the public mental health system, ask about getting a case manager. Case managers can coordinate clinical and psychosocial treatments, provide information, education and support to the whole family, as well as referral to community agencies.

Hospitals

People only need in-patient care in a hospital when they are acutely unwell, and cannot be treated effectively while living at home. This is usually for a period of days or weeks only, until symptoms respond to treatment. If help is needed urgently, call your psychiatrist or case manager (or a crisis assessment team after work hours), and they can arrange for assessment and hospitalisation if necessary.

Consumer consultants

Many mental health services have consumer consultants: people with experience of mental illness themselves able to offer support and advice. They may work on a hospital psychiatric ward or be attached to a community mental health service. Your doctor or case manager can put you in touch.

What other kinds of support are available to help recovery?

Day Programs

Run by community support agencies, day programs are usually based around a range of recreational activities (such as walking, writing, meditation) or special groups (such as young peoples' group, women's group, cultural/language groups). They often run structured programs where you can learn new skills to help you get back on your feet again, while meeting others in a similar situation. Your local community mental health service or council should be able to direct you to your nearest day program.

Financial Assistance

People seriously affected by mental illnesses are usually entitled to financial assistance (such as a Disability Pension or other allowance). To find out if you are entitled, contact the Disability Support Worker at your local Centrelink.

Employment

Specialist employment agencies are available to help people affected by psychiatric and other disabilities return to work. For assessment and referral to one of these, contact the Disability Support Worker at your local Centrelink.

Accommodation

There are many different types of accommodation available which vary in the level of support provided. To find out more about accommodation options, contact your community mental health service or local council.

Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHAM)

Ask your case manager or doctor about whether there is a PHAM program in your area which can provide a Personal Helper to visit you regularly to help with daily activities and accessing local services.

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SANE Factsheet

Mutual Support Groups

Mutual Support Groups provide a place to meet with others in a similar situation or with similar illnesses, to exchange ideas and discuss common issues in a relaxed, non-judgmental environment. Your local community mental health service should be able to direct you to your nearest group.

What help is available for family and friends?

Carer Support Agencies

There are a number of organisations set up specifically to help carers, providing support, information and education. Contact the SANE Helpline on 1800 18 SANE or at www.sane.org for details.

Financial Assistance

Carers may be eligible for a Carer Allowance. To find out more, contact the Disability Support Worker at your local Centrelink.

Respite

Carers Australia and other agencies have programs for carers needing a short or longer period of respite. Contact the SANE Helpline on 1800 18 SANE or at www.sane.org for details.

How can I expect people to behave towards me?

General community

We all have a right to respect from others, whether we have a disability or not. If you feel that you are being discriminated against by anyone because you have a mental illness, contact the human rights or equal opportunity commission in your State or Territory for advice.

Health Professionals

Health professionals have the responsibility to treat people with dignity and respect in all situations. If you feel that you are not being treated respectfully, contact the manager of the mental health service or the Health Commissioner in your State or Territory.

Media

Journalists, TV and radio presenters sometimes write or say things that are inaccurate or are offensive to people with mental illness. You can help combat this by making a report to the SANE Stigmawatch program at www.sane.org as well as by complaining directly yourself – see the *SANE Guide to Reducing Stigma* for tips about this.

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:

① *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.

② *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.

③ *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 Healthy Living*

Explains the benefits of being physically healthy, gives tips on how to start becoming healthier and overcome obstacles as well as giving suggestions on finding support to help stay healthy.

⑤ *SANE Guide to Staying Alive*

Provides practical step-by-step hints and advice for consumers, carers and health professionals on dealing with suicidal thoughts and behaviour.

To order visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org or call 1800 18 SANE (7263).

www.sane.org

Visit the SANE website for information about mental illness and related issues.

www.mindfulemployer.org

Workplace training solution available to all organisations Australia-wide.

