

SANE

FACTSHEET

THE FACTS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Everyone's got an opinion about mental health issues, but knowing the facts can help reduce stigma and discrimination for the people affected. Here are the facts you need to tell the truth from the myth, and start busting stigma.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE REAL

Our knowledge of mental health issues is incomplete, but we can say one thing for certain: it's real. As real as cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

ANYONE CAN DEVELOP A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

There is no immunity to mental health issues. Not everyone develops a mental health issue during their lives, but anyone could.

AT LEAST 45% OF US WILL EXPERIENCE A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE DURING OUR LIVES

And that's just anxiety disorders, affective disorders such as depression and bipolar, and substance addictions in people aged 16-85. Add in young people, schizophrenia, eating disorders, personality disorders and more and the figure is likely far higher.

AT LEAST 20% OF ADULTS ARE AFFECTED BY MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES EVERY YEAR

Anxiety disorders are the most common, followed by depression. Other Australians are also affected by personality disorders, eating disorders, psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia, and more. Some people have more than one diagnosis, and some people go undiagnosed or untreated.

4 MILLION AUSTRALIANS ARE AFFECTED BY COMPLEX MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

At least 800,000 Australians live with complex mental health issues (CMI), but an experience like CMI affects the lives of many people around the person with lived experience. For each person with CMI, it's likely that five other people — families, friends, partners, colleagues and more — are affected. That makes four million Australians affected.

SANE Australia considers that the language of 'severity' applies a narrow biomedical conception of mental health that can be stigmatising for people with lived experience. Recognising the broad range of social determinants of mental health, SANE Australia adopted

the language of 'complex mental health issues' to capture experiences of complex mental health issues, trauma, distress, and co-occurring issues such as intellectual disability, autism, and alcohol and other drug challenges.

SOME AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED THAN OTHERS

Indigenous Australians experience much higher rates of psychological distress than the general population, and lower access to mental health services.

LGBTIQA+ people experience very high rates of depression and psychological distress and are the most at-risk group in Australia for suicide.

Mental health issues are not more common in rural and remote areas than in cities, but rates of self-harm and suicide are higher and there are fewer mental health professionals in regional and remote areas in comparison with major cities.

One in seven children aged 4-17 have experienced a mental health issue and over a quarter of Australians aged 16-24 are experiencing a mental health issues at any given time. Many people who live with mental health issues first experience symptoms during childhood or adolescence.

Related: [mental health issues in younger people](#)

However, it's important to note that identifying with one or more of these groups doesn't mean you will experience a mental health issue.

Related: [Is someone you know unwell?](#)

THE CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE COMPLEX

There isn't one simple, obvious thing, like a virus or bacteria, that causes mental health issues, and that makes the causes hard to work out.

For some mental health diagnoses, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, it's possible to inherit a predisposition — a greater likelihood that you'll develop the disorder. For others there seems to be no genetic link at all.

But even then it doesn't mean you'll get sick. Your likelihood of developing a mental health issues is influenced by a complex combination of genetic, neurological, developmental, environmental, socio-economic, cultural, life experience and other factors.

THERE'S NO LINK BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CREATIVITY

Experiencing mental health issues doesn't make you more creative, and being creative doesn't make you more likely to experience a mental health issue. Likewise, getting treatment for mental health issues doesn't reduce your creativity, although the side-effects of some medicines can affect you.

[Read the Huffington posts article on Creativity and Mental Illness: Is There a link?](#)

RESOURCES

- For support, SANE's free counselling service is available [on 1800 187 263 or online](#) Monday to Friday, 10am-10pm AEST/AEDT.
- To connect with a supportive and safe online community, [visit our anonymous Forums](#).

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