

Learning about mental illness and how it is affecting your relative or friend is perhaps one of the most important and helpful things you can do for yourself and for the person you care about.

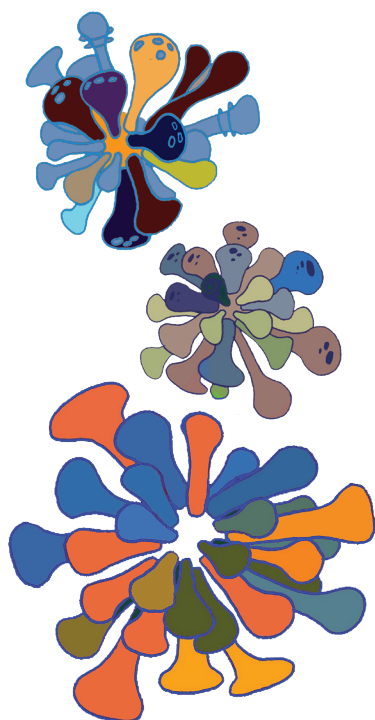
Mental illness is a term that refers to a group of illnesses affecting people's emotional and psychological state in the same way that heart disease refers to a group of diseases affecting the heart. There are different types of mental illness. They may affect someone's thinking, feelings, behaviour and/or interactions with others. Mental illness is common. One in four Australians is affected by some form of mental health problem in any one year.

Anxiety disorders and depression are the most common mental illnesses. Anxiety disorders can include phobias and obsessions. Depressive disorders often involve overwhelming feelings of sadness, worthlessness and guilt, and a loss of interest or pleasure in someone's usual activities. People with these disorders may feel restless, agitated and irritable. Their sleep and appetite may also be affected.

Psychotic disorders usually affect someone's ability to think clearly. They may become confused or have difficulty concentrating or remembering things. What they say may not make sense. Their thoughts may seem to speed up or slow down. It is also common for someone experiencing a psychotic episode to have unusual beliefs, or delusions, that they can't be talked out of even with the most logical argument. Some people experience hallucinations where they see, hear, feel, smell or taste something that isn't actually there. They may also experience changes in how they feel and in how they behave. People with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and sometimes depression experience episodes of psychosis.

The treatment of mental illness varies according to the person's symptoms, the severity of the illness and their individual preferences. Common treatment strategies include medication, and psychological therapies such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and counselling. These can be offered in an inpatient and outpatient setting. There are also a range of programs offered by non-government organisations that can assist the person in their recovery; these include vocational programs, social programs, supported housing (HASI) and the Personal Helpers and Mentors program (PHAMs).

There are many myths and misunderstandings about mental illness, so it is important to make sure you get helpful and relevant information. Doctors and mental health professionals can always provide general information about mental illness. They can provide more detailed information about your relative or friend's illness if they have your relative or friend's permission to do so. There are also many organisations that make information available on their websites. Some recommended sites are listed overleaf. While a mental health diagnosis can be a new and distressing experience, it is important to remember that the range of support and treatments available today ensure that most people who experience mental health problems make a good recovery.



Listed below are some organisations that provide information about mental illness.

Mental Health Association NSW

The Mental Health Association NSW provides the Mental Health Information Service which can be accessed by phone or via their website. They provide information about local services, mental illness and treatment.

Phone: 1300 794 991

Website: www.mentalhealth.asn.au

SANE Australia

SANE Australia is a national charity working for a better life for people affected by mental illness. The website has over 40 fact sheets in a range of languages that provide information on different mental health problems, treatments, healthy living, suicide and bereavement. They also produce a 'Family and Mental Illness' Book and DVD Kit.

Phone: 1800 18 7263

Website: www.sane.org.au

EPPIC – Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre

EPPIC is an integrated and comprehensive mental health service in Melbourne aimed at addressing the needs of people aged 15-24 with a first episode of psychosis. Fact sheets from their website are:

1. What is Psychosis?
2. Getting Help Early
3. Recovering from Psychosis
4. How Can I Help Someone with Psychosis?

Website: www.eppic.org.au/resources

BeyondBlue

Beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia. They provide a broad range of fact sheets and resources, including a free booklet for family members and carers: 'The beyondblue Guide for Carers'.

Phone: 1300 22 4636

Website: www.beyondblue.org.au

Schizophrenia Fellowship NSW

The Schizophrenia Fellowship is a non-profit, community based organisation working in the field of mental illness. They provide a range of resources including a booklet for carers: 'Turning Points: Inspirational stories of families living with schizophrenia and practical advice for carers.' They also have a range of fact sheets available through their WellWays program that have been developed specifically for families and carers.

Phone: 1800 985 944

Website: www.sfnsw.org.au

