

Recognising Mental Illness and Getting Support



Learn more about the disability support services available to those requiring assistance with mental illness

About mental illness

Mental illness refers to any condition that disrupts a person's mental health.

'Mental health' and 'mental illness' are often used interchangeably, but it is important to note that mental health is not a bad thing. It is a term that refers to your overall mental and emotional wellbeing.

Mental illnesses are **a range of conditions** that negatively affect your mental health, thoughts, behaviours, and feelings. Your mind can suffer illness just like your body can get sick or injured. Mental illness also needs treatment like a physical illness does, and in some cases may require the use of home support services to ensure optimum wellbeing.

Issues with mental health are common and **experienced by most people** at some stage. Nearly half of all Australians will experience a mental health disorder in their life.

Severe mental illness can be a significant disability that prevents a person from going about daily life. That does not mean people with mental illness are weak, or need to 'toughen up'. Mental illness is common, and can affect anyone, and can be managed with the right external or home support services.

Mental illness can be caused by socioeconomic circumstances, access to basic needs, education and employment, living conditions, traumatic experiences or stressful life circumstances, or be genetically linked.

Everyone's experience of mental illness is different. You might not think of yourself as having a mental illness, but still feel like something isn't right.

Many people are not comfortable talking about their mental health because of **negative attitudes** surrounding mental illness or its causes (such as struggling with gender or sexual identity).

You might be in circumstances that affect how you or your loved ones think and feel about mental health. Doctors and mental health workers in Australia are trained to be sensitive to your needs and circumstances and can be accessed through NDIS service providers.

Signs and diagnosis

Different mental illnesses have different signs and symptoms. You should seek help if you experience any of the following

- persistent negative or obsessive thoughts, feeling bad about the future, like something bad is going to happen or that there is no hope, re-living bad moments from the past or not being able to think about them at all
- feeling like you have no control over your emotions or ability to predict them — whether it is sadness, anger, happiness or anything else
- shortness of breath, blackouts, disturbed sleep, feeling constantly wound-up or on high alert
- losing interest in your life and hobbies, lack of energy

- seeing or hearing things that other people can't
- feeling disconnected from your body or your surroundings, like time is moving slowly or standing still, feeling like the world is not real, not being able to engage with what's going on around you
- significant memory, concentration or other issues that can't be explained by existing health problems.

Your **doctor** can support you if you or someone you know are having mental health issues. The doctor might refer you to a specialist, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, paediatrician, or other mental health professional.

Assessment and diagnosis of mental illness is different for everyone. Diagnosis can involve assessments and questions about what you have been thinking and feeling, your background and childhood, your family history of mental illness or other health issues, and other tests.

The treatment and supports your doctor provides will be unique to you, and NDIS support providers can help ensure you are receiving the most appropriate assistance for your needs.

Services and support

There are many support services available for people experiencing mental illness in Australia.

If you are hurt or experiencing an emergency, call 000 immediately.

If you need to talk to someone right now, **Beyond Blue** provide over-the-phone support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and an online chat support from 12pm-1am every day.

Mental health services in Australia are provided through community and non-government organisations (NGOs), and the health system. See **who's who in mental health services in Australia**.

Non-government and community organisations provide information and support to people who are experiencing mental health issues. They are often the first stop for people who feel like they might need to talk to someone about their mental health.

Many of these services are aimed at supporting people in specific circumstances. See the 'where to get information and help' tab below to find a support organisation that suits you.

The government supports people with mental health issues mainly through the health system — such as urgent care in hospitals and mental health clinics, ongoing treatment and referrals by general practitioners, and treatment and support through registered mental health professionals.

There is government funding available for you to get mental health support.

If you have not been diagnosed with a mental illness or are thinking about talking to someone for the first time, talk to your doctor about getting a **mental health treatment plan**. There is no shame in needing to talk to someone about your health.

If you are under 65 years old and your mental illness is a permanent and significant disability, you can apply for access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS funds disability-related **supports and services**. You will need to provide evidence to support your access application — it is a good idea to talk to your doctor about collecting this evidence. Find out who to contact about the **NDIS where you live**.

Mental illness can be challenging for families and carers to manage, too. It is important carers get the help they need. Carer supports are available through **government support programs**, the NDIS for **carers of NDIS participants**, and the **Carer Gateway**.

How Claro can support you

At Claro, we provide disability and allied health services tailored to your needs. Our **disability services** range from everyday supports like help with shopping and transport, to more complex services such as overnight care and supported independent living.

As an NDIS service provider, we can also help you manage your disability supports. If you are an NDIS participant and have funding for **Support Coordination**, our experienced and knowledgeable **Support Coordinators** can work with you to connect you to the services you need.

Contact us now to talk about how we can support you to have a bright future.

Where to get information and help?

- **Head to Health** – online government service that helps you search for mental health support based on what you need
- **Beyond Blue** – immediate mental health support and referrals, information about where to get help in Australia
- **SANE Australia** – mental health support for people from all backgrounds
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – 24/7 phone service for people having suicidal thoughts, or who have been affected by suicide
- **Headspace** – mental health support and counselling for teenagers and young adults
- **Kids Help Line** – confidential support for children and parents of children with mental illness
- **Butterfly Foundation** – support for people experiencing eating disorders and body image issues



- **WellMob** — Online resources and online counselling for social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- **NACCHO** — National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in each state and territory
- **iBobbly** — a social and emotional wellbeing app for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- **Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma** — support services for refugees, migrants, and victims of torture and trauma who have come to Australia from overseas
- **ReachOut** — Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and other (LGBTIQ+) support services
- **1800 Respect** — counselling and support for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence
- **Mensline Australia** — Online and phone counselling service for men, for a range of mental and emotional health issues
- **PANDA** — Support for pregnant women and expecting families
- **Veterans and Veteran Families Counselling Service** — free counselling for veterans and families
- **Understanding the NDIS**
- **Carer Gateway**
- **Mental Health: Where to Get Help, Health Direct**
- **Mental Illness, Better Health Channel Victoria**
- **Stigma, Discrimination and Mental Illness, Better Health Channel Victoria**
- **Mental Illness Australia Snapshot, National Institute of Health and Welfare**
- **Mental Health Services in Australia; a Review, National Institute of Health and Welfare**