



Mental Health problems in our Communities

Mental health and mental illnesses is a major reason why people should go to their doctors, local hospitals, or local health clinic. Unfortunately people in our communities with a mental illness do not look for professional help and this can lead to sometimes taking years before they are properly diagnosed and treated correctly.

So once again we must remember the differences:

'Mental Health Problem' – is a broad term which describes conditions that may not be severe enough to be called a mental illness.

'Mental Illness' – Is a term used to describe major persistent changes in a person's thinking & feelings which disrupts the persons ability to carry out normal daily routines

It is really good to remember that many people feel sad, worried or sick at different times, and sometimes these feelings can become so big they can develop into a mental illness. So remember it is normal to worry, however for example, if a young person stays out all night and they have not told you where they are their parent or carer will obviously worry. This is very understandable, however worry can also become an illness when it is long lasting, severe and starts to interfere with the person's day to day routine.

What are some common mental illnesses?

Anxiety Disorders – Anxiety is a normal feeling of fear, tension or worry. It can result in physical feelings, like chest pain and dizziness. Everybody experiences anxiety at some time, however if this anxiety gets out of control it can become an anxiety disorder. There are several different anxiety disorders including acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobias and panic disorders just to name a few.

Substance Use Disorders – Substances include alcohol, yandi, amphetamines (speed, ecstasy, ice), inhalants (petrol, glue), as well as a number of other drugs and substances. Substance

misuse does not mean just using alcohol and drugs. However, substance misuse often leads to substance use disorders. This occurs when people become hooked on alcohol and / or other drugs, and they are using at a level which becomes damaging to their health.

Depressive Disorders – Depressive disorder is an illness that involves feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and can last for at least 2 weeks or longer. We must remember that this is not just feeling down when something terrible happens, depression is when sadness goes on for a long time once again as mentioned for at least 2 weeks or longer.

Further information on these common illnesses and some less common illnesses can be found on later fact sheets in the series.

We must also take into consideration there is all too often extra suffering caused by attitudes of rejection and stigma towards people with mental illnesses. As well as the burden on the person with the illness there is also a cost to the family and the whole community when someone has a mental illness. That is why it is so important to demystify what a mental illness is.

Where can I go for help?

Sometimes we face events in our lives that we are unable to handle ourselves or with help of family and friends and sometimes there are situations in our lives that might be too much for us to cope with. In these cases, there are options out there for you to take.

Some of these options can include:

- Counselling (Someone to yarn too)
- Behavioural and Lifestyle changes (Health Choices)
- See a doctor who might give you medication that can help

If you just want to have a yarn or if you would like to find out more information contact any of your local Community Mental Health or other services listed below.

The Aboriginal Social & Emotional Wellbeing Fact Sheet Series was designed by the Aboriginal Social & Emotional Wellbeing workers David Freeman & Brenda Freeman based at Campbelltown Community Mental Health Service February 2009.

The information provided was adapted from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Training Manual and the SANE Australia website. www.sane.org