

## October 2007: NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK 7th - 10th OCTOBER 2007

### what are mental illnesses?

Mental Illness is a general term for a group of illnesses, in the same way that heart disease refers to a group of illnesses affecting the heart. These illnesses, which include depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety and personality disorders; affect the way a person thinks, feels and acts.

**Mental illness is one of the leading causes of non-fatal burden of disease and injury in Australia.** One in five Australians will experience a mental illness at some stage of their lives. Mental illness is estimated to account for 13% of the disease burden in Australia, with anxiety and depression, alcohol abuse and personality disorders accounting for almost three-quarters of this burden.

### what are causes of mental illnesses?

The **exact cause is unknown**, but what is known is that the illness is not a character fault, weakness or something inherently wrong with the person. **It is an illness.**

Common factors thought to contribute or trigger a mental illness include:

- **Changes in brain structure or chemistry** – affecting the function of the brain and therefore feelings, thought processes and behaviours.
- **Environmental factors** – relationships, family life, trauma, abuse and other stressful life events.
- **Biological factors** – Mental illness can be a part of your genetic makeup.
- **Substance or drug abuse** can alter the brain's chemistry making a person vulnerable to mental illness.
- **Negative thought patterns** can worsen a person's risk of mental illness.

#### Mental Health Recovery with Treatment

Condition	Recovery Success Rate
Bipolar disorder	80%
Major depression, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder	70%
Schizophrenia	60%
Asthma, diabetes	70-80%
Cardiovascular disease	60-70%
Heart disease	41-52%

### what are early warning signs?

*These differ from person to person, but most common signs are when a person's behaviour changes suddenly or gradually. If these changes are noticed for more than a two week period and you remain concerned, seek advice from your Doctor or mental health professional.*

### treatment and recovery...

*Unlike other health issues 2/3 people with a mental illness do not receive any treatment in a 12 month period. **With appropriate care people will recover. Mental illnesses can be treated.***

*To build and maintain your mental health, there are many things you can do!*

1. **Share thoughts and feelings with friends, family or a counsellor.** Talking can help solve problems and relieve stress and anxiety.
2. **Eat nutritious food, get adequate sleep and exercise regularly.** These can trigger a chain of healing affects - especially when we feel anxious or under stress.
3. **Learn to Relax.** There are many relaxation techniques and resources available to suit personalities and lifestyles; e.g., hobbies, reading, meditation.
4. **Commit.** Look to the future and have a go — take a challenge, get involved, volunteer.

**If you are experiencing any of the listed early warning signs please SEEK HELP. There are many people to turn to - your family doctor, a community group, psychiatrist, nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers and counsellors. It is important you know - you are *not* alone.**