



Mental Health
Australia
Media release

Reform needed to address high rates of mental ill-health: National study results

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The national independent peak for the mental health sector cites the findings of a national study of mental health and wellbeing in Australia released today as further evidence of the urgent need for system reform.

Mental Health Australia CEO, Dr Leanne Beagley welcomed the new data saying, “The results are a stark reminder of how common mental ill-health is, and how imperative it is to reform our mental health system to meet the mental health needs of Australians.”

“Released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics – the first update in nearly 15 years – the findings reveal 44% of Australian adults – 8.6 million people – have experienced a mental health condition at some point in their life, with one in five people (21%) experiencing a mental health condition in any given year” said Dr Beagley.

“Further, this *National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing* found that in 2020-21:

- 15% of Australians reported experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress – with females (19%) more likely to experience this than males (12%)
- one in five people (20%) aged 16-34 years experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress – more than twice the rate of those aged 65-85 years
- one in six Australians (17%) aged 16-85 years had experienced suicidal thoughts or behaviours in their life
- 3.4 million Australians saw a health professional for their mental health
- of people experiencing a mental health condition who saw a health professional, nearly 30% reported not have their need for counselling fully met, and 26% not having their need for information fully met.”



“These results indicate that unfortunately the rates of mental ill-health have not seen enough change since the last survey undertaken in 2007, which found 45% of Australian adults experienced a mental health condition in their lifetime and 20% in any given year,” said Dr Beagley.

“Our sector is witness to countless stories of people who have found their way through the impacts of distress and mental-ill health to recovery and greater wellbeing. Incredible people and organisations have been working tirelessly to deliver effective mental health support and treatment. Yet at a national level, the numbers of people experiencing mental ill-health doesn’t seem to be improving.”

“We need to think differently about mental health support in this country. The **Productivity Commission inquiry into Mental Health** called for generational reform to create a person-centred mental health system. While some of the wheels have been put in motion to bring about this change (for example, through the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement), the findings from this study show just how much more work is required.”

“Mental Health Australia continues to advocate for:

- formal structures for lived experience leadership
- a 25 per cent suicide reduction target by 2025
- increased government leadership and accountability
- co-design of a community focused mental health system
- addressing urgent gaps in the mental health and suicide prevention workforces.

“To reduce the experience of mental ill-health and lives lost to suicide, we need whole of government approaches to tackle the social determinants of health.”

“More promisingly, this research also found that 61% of Australians took actions to help manage their mental health over the last year, such as increasing their physical activity, and 94% said their ability to get support from family and friends when they needed it was good.”

“The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ *National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing* provides up-to-date data that is essential for planning and prioritising delivery of mental health and suicide prevention services,” said Dr Beagley.

“As the independent national peak body for the mental health sector, Mental Health Australia will continue working with its members, governments, partners and the community to ensure all Australians can access mental health treatment and support where and when they need it. Fundamental reform is required to shift the trend, and improve Australian’s mental health and wellbeing.”

(For further information about the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing see the [ABS webpage](#))

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