

Mental Health - Understanding the Basics

Why is it important?

Almost half (45%) of Australians will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives. Knowing the basics of mental health is important as it helps to break down the common myths that only worsen the stigma and discrimination felt by the millions and millions of everyday people – just like us – who experience mental health issues.

Increased knowledge about mental health and awareness about how common mental illness is also encourages people to have the confidence to speak up if they're struggling. With the right information, every single one of us able to best support and care for our friends, family and colleagues that may at different times be struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

By understanding the basics of mental health, we are also in a better position to catch minor problems early – for ourselves and others – and prevent them from becoming more serious. Just like our physical health, prevention is always better than a cure.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

People with good mental health can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and make a contribution to their community. Just like our physical health, our mental health is important and needs taking care of too.

What is Mental Illness?

What is a mental illness and how common are they in Australia?

A mental illness is a diagnosable condition that negatively affects a person's thinking, emotions and behaviour, which results in an impairment to daily functioning.

In Australia, mental illnesses are common, with an estimated 1 in 5 people experiencing a common disorder in the previous 12 months. Anxiety disorders are the most common, followed by depressive disorders and substance use disorders.

Most people with mental health problems can get better. Treatment and recovery are ongoing processes that happen over time.

The first step is getting help!

For more info on how to get help, see the Mindstar factsheet: How to access a mental health professional