

How many people experience mental illness? *Around 20% of adults are affected by some form of mental disorder every year.*

Anxiety disorders affect around 14% of the adult population every year. Depression affects around 6% of the adult population every year. The remainder are affected by substance abuse disorders, psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia, personality disorders, and other conditions. Many people have more than one diagnosis.

How many people are disabled by mental illness? *Around 3% of adults are psychiatrically disabled by the effects of mental illness.*

Some people are so severely affected by mental illness that they become psychiatrically disabled. Schizophrenia can be a particularly disabling condition for some: this is a persistent form of mental illness that affects approximately 1% of Australians at some stage in their lives.

Does mental illness run in families? *Most people with a mental illness do not have family members with the illness.*

For some mental disorders there does not seem to be a link at all. For others, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, a predisposition to the illness may be inherited – but even then, it is only one of several factors. The causes are not fully understood. It is likely that such mental disorders involve a biochemical imbalance and can be triggered by such things as stressful life events, drug abuse, hormonal changes or physical illness.

Is mental illness life-threatening? *Mental illness itself is not life-threatening.*

However, up to 15% of those seriously affected by mental illness eventually die by suicide (compared to an approximate figure of 1% for the whole population). Effective, ongoing treatment is essential to minimise the risk of suicide.

What are the chances of recovering from mental illness? *Most people with mental illness recover well and are able to lead fulfilling lives in the community – when they receive appropriate ongoing treatment and support.*

However, only about half of those affected actually receive treatment. The majority of people who develop anxiety disorders and depression improve over time with appropriate treatment and support. About 80% of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder also improve with ongoing treatment and support. The long-term outcome for schizophrenia can be better than many assume, especially where access to good treatment is consistent. About 20% of those diagnosed have an episode or two, then never experience symptoms again. About 60% improve over time and, with support, can live independently. For about 20%, symptoms are more persistent, treatments are less effective, and greater support services are needed.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have.

SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness.

For more information about this topic see:

🕒 [SANE Guide for Consumers](#)

Provides practical suggestions on ways you can look after yourself, explains what words like ‘diagnosis’ and ‘treatment’ actually mean and describes how treatment and medication can help you.

🕒 [SANE Guide for Families](#)

Explains how to better handle common issues associated with being a carer such as developing a positive attitude, looking after yourself and getting the help you are entitled to.

🕒 [SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments](#)

Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.

Use the Order Form which came with this Factsheet or visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org.