

Mental Health problems in our communities

Aboriginal Health involves the physical, social, emotional, mental, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of not only the individual but the whole community.

All of us experience good and bad feelings in our life and sometimes the stress and trauma that we experience can also impact greatly on our mental wellbeing.

Sometimes people can experience mental illness as a result of the stress and trauma. Mental illness is common. It is important to understand what some of these common mental health problems are and where to seek help in order to make both individuals and our communities healthier and stronger.

Common mental illnesses

Anxiety disorders – Anxiety is a normal feeling of fear, tension or worry. It can result in physical feelings, like chest pain, dizziness or feeling very tired. Everybody experiences anxiety at some time but when feelings of anxiety get out of control and start to interfere with your everyday life it can become an anxiety disorder.

Substance use disorders – Substances include alcohol, yandi, amphetamines (speed, ecstasy, ice), inhalants (petrol, glue), as well as a number of other drugs and substances. Using alcohol and drugs does not mean you have a substance use disorder. When people become hooked on alcohol and /or other drugs, and they are using at a level which becomes damaging to their health, they may have a substance use disorder.

Depressive disorders – Depressive disorders are illnesses that involve feelings of sadness or hopelessness and difficulties with everyday activities that last for at least two 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.

Psychosis – Psychosis is a way to describe a variety of mental illnesses that happen when a person loses some contact with reality. Psychosis will cause changes in thinking, emotions and behaviour. This may change the way a person lives their life including relationships, work and even looking after themselves. It's important to remember that some spiritual experiences of Aboriginal people may include seeing and hearing things that other people cannot. Sometimes, though, these experiences may be a symptom of psychosis. The main psychotic illnesses are schizophrenia, and drug -induced psychosis.

Mood disorders – Some people experience fluctuations in mood. Some people will experience elevated mood where they will not sleep much, take risks they may not normally take, and be overactive or overtalkative. Sometimes this can then be followed by a period of depression.

We must remember good mental health is also achieved by having stability in our environment and looking after our physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. If you feel like you need some support to improve your mental health there are many places you can go to seek help, such as:

- Your local GP
- Your local Community Health Centre
- Aboriginal Medical Centres
- Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au
- Sydney Local Health District Aboriginal Mental Health Unit 9515 9000