

People living with psychotic illness 2010

Report on the second Australian national survey

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Acknowledgements

of Health and Ageing)

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FOREWORD

Almost half of all Australians will experience mental illness at some point in their lives. For those that experience psychotic illnesses and their families and carers the impacts are often particularly severe.

These illnesses usually have their onset in late adolescence and early adulthood, during a period in which most young people are completing their education, first entering the workforce and establishing new social networks. The isolation experienced due to the symptoms of their illness is often compounded as they are more likely to experience financial hardship, unemployment, homelessness and periods of hospitalisation.

The results of the first national psychosis survey undertaken in 1997-98 painted a bleak picture of the lives of people living with psychotic illness. Since that time there have been major reforms in the way mental health services are run and increasing investment by all levels of government.

Spending on mental health services delivered by the states and territories (the main providers of care to people with psychotic illness) has increased by 90 per cent in real terms, and mental health related expenditure by the Australian Government has increased by 107 per cent over the same period.

Services have shifted from being provided in stand alone hospitals to being provided in the community. This has been supported by a 70 per cent increase in community based staffing compared to when the first survey was undertaken. Over this period we have also seen a sufficiently expanded role for non government organisations in service provision – with funding to the sector nearly doubling.

There have also been major changes in the way general practitioners are funded through Medicare to provide mental health services and the availability of psychological services with the introduction of the Better Access initiative in November 2006. At the same time there has been a shift in the medications used in the management of delusions and hallucinations. Three quarters of people with psychotic illness now take 'atypical antipsychotics', which have fewer neurological side affects.

The 2010 survey provides evidence of these reforms and the way in which they've markedly improved the lives of people experiencing psychotic illnesses. The survey shows decreases in hospital admissions for mental health reasons and marked increases in the use of community rehabilitation and day programs. Fewer people with psychotic illness are now experiencing homelessness, more are in supported accommodation and many more are being supported to live in their own homes or rented accommodation.

While the survey results are promising, they also point to the ongoing challenge we face to do better for Australians affected by mental illness.

Psychotic illness remains a debilitating illness. The survey shows that people with psychotic illness still have substantially poorer physical health than the general population, and remain at considerably greater risk of higher levels of obesity, smoking, alcohol and drug use.

The results reinforce the importance of the Australian Government's investments in early psychosis services, in partnership with the states and territories, and the new 'Partners in Recovery' initiative to coordinate and provide flexibly funded services and supports for people with severely debilitating, persistent mental illness and complex needs. The Government is investing \$549 million over 5 years in this Partners in Recovery initiative because we recognise that people living with a severe mental illness not only need more support but better coordination of existing support services.

The survey results highlight the reasons that all levels of government need to continue to invest in providing the range of services people need. The Government is committed to ongoing reform of the mental health system. The establishment of a National Mental Health Commission and development of the Ten Year Roadmap for Mental Health Reform will give mental health greater national prominence, set out what Australia's mental health system should look like in ten years and provide increased accountability to ensure we reach our goal.

I would like to the thank the staff of the services that participated in the survey, the survey coordinators and particularly the team at The University of Western Australia who once again led this important work. More importantly, I would like to thank all the people who took the time to participate in the study and share the details of their lives with us. The information you have provided forms an important foundation that will guide how these new initiatives are implemented and the services that are provided into the future.

The Hon Mark Butler MP

MMM

Minister for Mental Health and Ageing

3 November 2011

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