

## Mental health problems - early care helps

If emotional or behavioral problems are significantly disrupting your life, it's important that you seek professional assistance early.

### **It is important to get advice as soon as you can**

The term 'mental health problem' describes a broad range of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Feelings listed below affect most people at some stage in their lives:

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Loss of energy or motivation.

People experiencing these feelings may get through the crisis without needing professional help. However, it is sometimes difficult for people to overcome emotional or behavioral difficulties, and this may affect their ability to care for themselves or their dependents, to socialise, to work or to study. In these instances, it may be important to seek advice from a professional. Almost all mental health problems can be treated or at least lessened in their severity and - as with many physical health problems - it is better to receive treatment early.

### **See your doctor or community health centre for help**

If you need help, you should usually contact your local doctor or community health centre in the first instance. General practitioners have a key role in managing mental health problems. They can provide assessment and treatment for many common problems, such as depression and anxiety, and can give formal referrals to psychiatrists and other mental health practitioners if needed.

Another option is to discuss your problems with a trained counsellor. Counselling may be available at your local community health centre. The yellow pages telephone book lists private practitioners (under 'C' for counselling) who provide counselling on a fee for service basis.

### **Specialist mental health services are available for people with serious mental illness**

Public specialist mental health services are available to assess and treat people with serious mental illness, including those experiencing a psychiatric crisis. People who have a serious mental illness or disorder will usually have a significant disturbance in thought, mood, or behaviour. Specialist psychiatric assessment is required to diagnose a serious mental illness/disorder. However, the following symptoms may indicate that something serious is going on:

- Bizarre or unusual thinking.
- Hallucinations.
- Significant changes of mood, such as pronounced depression, pronounced anxiety, or pronounced elevation in mood.
- Restless, agitated and disorganised behaviour, or marked decrease in activity.
- Significant impairment of social and/or occupational functioning.
- Significant impairment in self-care.
- Suicidal thoughts or acts of self-harm.
- Destructive or high risk behaviour.
- Confusion and disorientation.

Specialist mental health services can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can locate the service applicable to your area at [www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth) (click on the 'accessing services' tab).

Professional staff at the specialist mental health service will ask you about the problem, including questions about why you have contacted the service and whether you have used public mental health services before. This information will help staff decide which service is most useful to you.

### **A case manager will oversee your treatment**

If you are assessed as needing specialist mental health treatment, then a case manager will be assigned to you. A case manager is a mental health professional who will coordinate the services provided to you. The case manager could be a psychiatric nurse, a social worker, an occupational therapist, a psychologist, a doctor or a psychiatrist.

### **A range of services is available**

Services available to children and adolescents include:

- Community based assessment and treatment
- Inpatient care.
- Services available to adults include:
- Continuing clinical care
- Crisis assessment and treatment
- Mobile support and treatment
- Acute inpatient care
- Residential rehabilitation
- Non-residential rehabilitation
- Secure extended inpatient care
- Residential and non-residential disability support.

Services available to aged persons include:

- Assessment and treatment
- Acute inpatient care
- Extended inpatient care.

### **Where to get help**

- Your local doctor.
- The community health centre in your area.
- A private counsellor.
- The specialist mental health service applicable to the area where you live.

### **Things to remember**

- There is a range of services available to assist you with emotional and mental health difficulties, if you need help it's important that you seek advice early.
- You should usually discuss your problem with your doctor or community health centre professional, who may refer you a specialist mental health service.
- Specialist mental health services can be contacted directly by members of the public in urgent and crisis situations.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Health - Victoria's Mental Health Services

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