
Rural and regional mental health services

Summary

- Get access to local and community mental health services by speaking with your local doctor.
 - You can get subsidised treatment through the Access to Allied Psychological Services program.
 - You can also access a range of services through the Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas (MHSRRA) program.
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Living in rural or regional Victoria has many benefits but it can sometimes make it harder to get the mental health services you need. As a general rule, the more remote your location, the more difficult it is for public and private health practitioners to service your area. This means that you need to be proactive when dealing with your mental health.

Regional mental health needs

If you live in the country you may face different challenges from people in city areas, including

- the increased threat of drought or flooding and the stress this can bring to farming communities
- isolation
- greater levels of youth unemployment.

Public mental health services in regional Victoria are often some distance away or more costly than they are in the city. Also, the culture of independence, which helps people get by in lean times, can make them feel as though they should be able to manage their problems on their own. For these reasons, many people end up ignoring mental health issues instead of asking for help.

Getting help for mental illness

Sometimes it can be hard to ask for help or tell others how you feel. You might feel embarrassed or worried that someone will judge you. At other times, you might not know where to start.

There are a lot of different ways of getting support for mental health issues and, to make it worthwhile, it is important you choose a method that works for you.

Find **information about mental health services and programs**.

Talk to someone

When things are becoming overwhelming, take a step back and think about whether it might help to talk to someone. Talk to your friends and family about what you are going through. Listen to their concerns and be honest about where you are at.

If you are having thoughts of suicide or want to harm yourself, call Lifeline now on 13 11 14.

Mental health helplines are a great option if you are struggling but you do not feel comfortable talking to your loved ones about it. Find someone to talk to through one of the following helplines:

- **Lifeline** – call 13 11 14 for this Australia-wide crisis support and suicide prevention service
 - **Suicide Call Back Service** – call 1300 659 467 for this free service for people having suicidal thoughts or for family or friends affected by suicide.
 - **SuicideLine** – call 1300 651 251 for free and anonymous support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week across Victoria.
 - **Kids Help Line** – call 1800 55 1800 for free counselling and advice for young people between the ages of five and 25.
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- **Beyondblue** – call 1300 22 4636 for telephone support, information and resources for people dealing with depression or anxiety, or visit their website.
- **Poisons Information** – call 131 126 for advice about poisonings, bites and medicine overdoses.

Visit your doctor

Your local doctor is often the best place to ask for help. Explain how you are feeling. They will be able to advise you on where to find more community mental health treatment and support, and they can also refer you to a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist if necessary.

If you think you will have difficulty paying, ask your doctor about Medicare subsidised treatment through the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS). ATAPS allows doctors to refer patients to psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses, occupational therapists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers. The scheme allows for six sessions each year, with an option for more after a review by your doctor.

Look for mental health resources online

Make use of the many mental health resources and information available online. Organisations like beyondblue, Lifeline, Headspace and Suicide Call Back Service have articles, online forums, and downloadable fact sheets and tool kits about mental health and mental illness.

Always use mental health resources that your doctor or healthcare professional has referred you to, or a website that you trust.

Some helpful mental health websites include:

Lifeline

Suicide Call Back Service

Kids Help Line

beyondblue.

Where to get help

- Your doctor (GP)
- Lifeline, call 13 11 14
- beyondblue, call 1300 22 4636
- Kids Help Line, call 1800 55 1800
- Your local community centre

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