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- Stigma, discrimination and mental illness

Stigma, discrimination and mental illness

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Summary

- Stigma is when someone *sees* you in a negative way because of your mental illness. Discrimination is when someone *treats* you in a negative way because of your mental illness.
- Social stigma and discrimination can make mental health problems worse and stop a person from getting the help they need.
- Avoid stigmatising people with mental illness by seeing the person first and not labelling them by their mental illness.
- You can help challenge stigma by speaking up when you hear people around you make negative or wrong comments about mental illness.

Stigma is when someone sees you in a negative way because of a particular characteristic or attribute (such as skin colour, cultural background, a disability or a mental illness). When someone treats you in a negative way because of your mental illness, this is discrimination.

Stigma happens when a person defines someone by their illness rather than who they are as an individual. For example, they might be labelled 'psychotic' rather than 'a person experiencing psychosis'.

For people with mental health issues, the social stigma and discrimination they experience can make their problems worse, making it harder to recover. It may cause the person to avoid getting the help they need because of the fear of being stigmatised.

The harmful effects of stigma

Some of the effects of stigma include:

- feelings of shame, hopelessness and isolation
- reluctance to ask for help or to get treatment
- lack of understanding by family, friends or others
- fewer opportunities for employment or social interaction
- bullying, physical violence or harassment
- self-doubt – the belief that you will never overcome your illness or be able to achieve what you want in life.

Dealing with stigma

Here are some ways you can deal with stigma:

Get the mental health treatment you need. Try not to let the fear of being labelled with a mental illness stop you from getting help.

Do not believe it. Sometimes, if you hear or experience something often enough, you start to believe it yourself. Try not to let other people's ignorance influence the way you feel about yourself. Mental illness is not a sign of weakness and is rarely something you can deal with on your own. Talking about your mental health issues with healthcare professionals will help you on your road to recovery or management.

Do not hide away. Many people with mental illness want to isolate themselves from the world. Reaching out to people you trust – family, friends, coaches or religious leaders – can mean you get the support you need.

Connect with others. Joining a mental health support group – either online or in person – can help you deal with feelings of isolation and make you realise that you are not alone in your feelings and experiences.

You are not your illness. Do not define yourself by your illness as other people might. Instead of saying 'I'm schizophrenic', say 'I have schizophrenia'. There is power in language.

It's not personal. Remember that other people's judgements often come from a lack of understanding rather than anything else. These judgments are made before they get to know you, so do not believe that their views have anything to do with you personally.

Discrimination - your rights

Australia has legislation against discrimination and agrees with international conventions that protect the rights of people with mental illness.

- The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission promotes equal opportunity and can help you address unlawful discrimination.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission is a Commonwealth Government agency that promotes human rights and deals with compliance and discrimination.
- At the international level, the United Nations General Assembly has 'Principles for the protection of persons with mental illness and the improvement of mental health care'. The World Health Organization also has information on mental health and human rights.

Challenging stigma associated with mental illness

Everyone has a role to play in creating a mentally healthy community – one that is inclusive, rejects discrimination and supports recovery. Ways to help include:

- learning the facts about mental illness and sharing them with family, friends, work colleagues and classmates
- getting to know people with personal experiences of mental illness so you learn to see them for the person they are rather than their illness.
- not judging, label or discriminate when you meet people with mental illness. Treat all people with respect and dignity.
- avoiding using language that puts the illness first and the person second. Say 'a person with bipolar disorder' rather than 'that person is bipolar'.
- saying something when you hear people around you making stereotypical or inaccurate comments about mental illness.

- sharing your own experience of mental illness (if you have experienced it). This will help dispel myths and encourage others to do the same. Mental illness is not something shameful that needs to be hidden.

[References](#)

- [Mental health: Overcoming the stigma of mental illness, Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Sane Australia: Reducing stigma](#)

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Mental health services topics

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- [Mental health services explained](#)
- [Getting help](#)
- [Diagnosis, referral and treatment of mental illness](#)
- [Specialist services](#)
- [Hospitals, clinics and residential care](#)
- [Helping someone else](#)
- [Living with mental illness](#)
- [Rights, responsibilities and mental health law](#)

Mental health services explained

- [Mental health services and programs explained](#)

[If you think that you or someone you know has a mental health issue, there are a number of ways that you can seek advice, information and referral for general and mental health issues in Victoria...](#)

- [Mental health services - case managers](#)

[A case manager looks after your interests while you are a client of public \(government\) mental health services...](#)

- [Referrals and access to mental health services](#)

[If you are experiencing unusual or disturbing thoughts, feelings or behaviour, there are mental health services to help you...](#)

- [Stigma, discrimination and mental illness](#)

[Stigma is when someone sees you in a negative way because of a particular characteristic or attribute, such as mental illness. When someone treats you in a negative way because of your mental illness...](#)

- [Who's who in mental health services](#)

[There are a range of mental healthcare and welfare professionals who can help you or someone you care for...](#)

Getting help

- [Getting help for a mental illness](#)

[If you are feeling unwell, overwhelmed, depressed, anxious or suicidal, it is important to know that there is help out there. Mental health support services are available throughout Victoria, 24 hours...](#)

- [Getting help for someone with a mental illness](#)

[The sooner a person with a mental illness receives treatment, the better the outcome is likely to be...](#)

- [Counselling, online and phone support for mental illness](#)

[There are many free mental health hotlines and mental health online support services available across Victoria which provide crisis support, information, resources, counselling and therapy to people...](#)

- [Talking to health professionals about mental health issues](#)

[Talking with a doctor or healthcare professional about your mental health issues will help you to feel comfortable and get the most appropriate treatment for your needs...](#)

Diagnosis, referral and treatment of mental illness

- [Assessments and evaluations for mental illness treatment](#)

[Your local doctor can conduct an initial mental health assessment and may refer you to a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist depending on your needs...](#)

- [Early signs and intervention with mental illness](#)

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[Getting help early can reduce the severity of symptoms and the impact on people's daily lives...](#)

- [Mental health treatment planning](#)

[Thinking about and documenting how you would like your treatment and recovery from mental illness to work can help you become more involved in your healthcare...](#)

- [Referrals and access to mental health services](#)

[If you are experiencing unusual or disturbing thoughts, feelings or behaviour, there are mental health services to help you...](#)

- [Types of mental health issues and illnesses](#)

[Mental illness is a general term for a group of illnesses that may impact on a person's thoughts, perceptions, feelings and behaviours. Mental illness can make it difficult for someone to cope with...](#)

Specialist services

- [Children, young people and mental health services](#)

[Growing up is not easy and at each stage of development, from pre-primary right through to the teen years, there are challenges that will test a child's emotional and mental health...](#)

- [Hospitals, clinics and residential options for mental illness](#)

[There are a range of mental health services, some provided by government and some that are run by private or community providers...](#)

- [Rural and regional mental health services](#)

[Public mental health services in rural and regional Victoria are often some distance away or more costly than they are in the city...](#)

- [Urgent treatment for mental illness](#)

[Telephone helplines such as Lifeline \(call 13 11 14\) offer immediate mental health support and counselling 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you are in immediate danger, call triple zero \(000\) for...](#)

- [Veterans, war and mental health services](#)

[The Australian Government scheme 'At Ease' offers support, counselling and other resources to help war veterans and Australian Defence Force personnel living with depression, anxiety and other kinds...](#)

Hospitals, clinics and residential care

- [Compulsory mental health patients](#)

[When you are a compulsory mental health patient in the Victorian mental health system, you have certain patient rights that determine how you can be treated...](#)

- [Hospitals, clinics and residential options for mental illness](#)

[There are a range of mental health services, some provided by government and some that are run by private or community providers...](#)

- [Moving between hospital and home](#)

[The type of illness and the severity of your condition will determine the kind of setting where you can access treatment...](#)

Helping someone else

- [Caring for someone with mental illness](#)

[Being a carer for someone with a mental illness can be emotionally and physically demanding, but it can also be a rewarding experience...](#)

- [Colleagues, employees and mental health in the workplace](#)

[If you are concerned that a fellow worker has a mental health issue, communicate with them to see if you can help or speak to someone more senior who can provide assistance...](#)

- [Getting help for someone with a mental illness](#)

[The sooner a person with a mental illness receives treatment, the better the outcome is likely to be...](#)

- [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\) course](#)

[Learn about the early warning signs of mental illness, how to communicate well, and where to find professional mental health services in your local community...](#)

Living with mental illness

- [Housing and accommodation support for people with mental illness](#)

[Like any other chronic condition, mental illness might affect your ability to manage aspects of everyday life such as finding accommodation or housing and](#)

[maintaining a place to live, but there are...](#)

- [Managing mental health medications](#)

[Medications can be important in the management of mental health issues, whether for a short time or for ongoing stabilization of symptoms...](#)

- [Mental illness statistics](#)

[Almost half of all Australians will be affected by mental illness at some time in their life...](#)

Rights, responsibilities and mental health law

- [Carer rights and recognition](#)

[Respect, consideration, recognition and support are some of the principles that guide how government departments, local councils and government-funded services work with carers and people who are...](#)

- [Making a complaint about a mental health service](#)

[If you are dissatisfied with a mental health treatment or service, you have the right to make a complaint and have your concerns addressed...](#)

- [Mental health laws and your rights](#)

[The Mental Health Act 2014 is the law governing compulsory mental health treatment in Victoria...](#)

Related Information

- [Carers, caring and respite care services](#)

[Learn more about the wide range of services and support available to carers in Victoria...](#)

- [Who's who in mental health services](#)

[There are a range of mental healthcare and welfare professionals who can help you or someone you care for...](#)

- [Mental health services and programs explained](#)

[If you think that you or someone you know has a mental health issue, there are a number of ways that you can seek advice, information and referral for general and mental health issues in Victoria...](#)

- [Chief Psychiatrist talks about major trauma](#)

[The Chief Psychiatrist provides clinical leadership and promotes improvement in the quality and safety of mental health services...](#)

- [Rural and regional mental health services](#)

[Public mental health services in rural and regional Victoria are often some distance away or more costly than they are in the city...](#)

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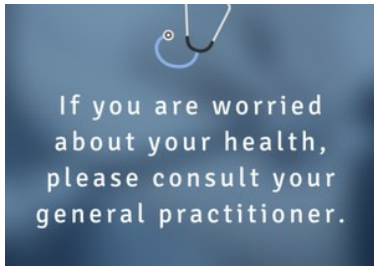


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[General practitioner \(GP\) services](#)

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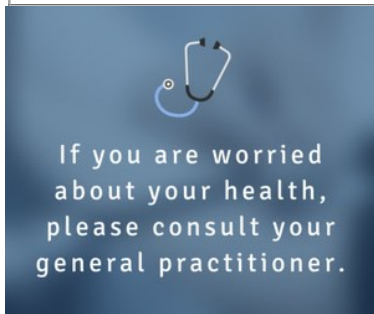
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