Urgent treatment for mental illness

Summary

- If you are in immediate danger, call triple zero (000) for emergency services.
- Telephone helplines such as Lifeline (call 13 11 14) offer immediate mental health support and counselling 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Contact NURSE-ON-CALL (call 1300 60 60 24) or your Area Mental Health Service for mental health advice, information and referrals.
- If you have friends or family members who live with mental illness, it is a good idea to prepare yourself to help them when they are experiencing symptoms of acute illness. Call Mental Health First Aid on (03) 9079 0208 to find out about available courses.
- If you or someone you are with has self-harmed and requires medical attention, get treatment from your doctor or your local hospital’s emergency department.

It can be hard to know what to do and where to get help when faced with an unexpected mental health crisis. There are many mental health conditions that, when untreated, can lead to crisis – from panic attacks and psychotic episodes to aggressive or suicidal behaviour.

There are many different ways to find urgent help:

- call triple zero (000) for an ambulance
- go directly to a hospital emergency department
- call your local community mental health service and ask for the Acute Community Intervention Service (ACIS) to come to your home (or where the person is having a mental health crisis)
- contact a 24-hour telephone helpline such as Lifeline (call 13 11 14)
- seek help through crisis support websites.

Getting urgent help for mental illness

If you or someone you are helping is in immediate danger, call triple zero (000) for emergency services. If you are on a mobile phone, 112 is another emergency number that will connect you directly to emergency services.

Getting help from crisis support and telephone counselling services

If you need immediate help, there are many telephone helplines that offer mental health support and counselling 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Helplines are a great resource if you or someone you are supporting is struggling with mental health issues. Sometimes, just by talking things through, things can become clearer and easier to manage.

Find someone to talk to through one of the following mental health helplines:

- **Lifeline** – call 13 11 14 for this free, 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 for young people between the ages of five and 25
- **Mensline Australia** – call 1300 78 99 78 to access this free telephone support service for men with family and relationship issues
- **beyondblue** – call 1300 22 4636 for support for issues relating to anxiety and depression

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Talking with someone experiencing a mental health crisis

When someone is acutely unwell with mental illness they could be feeling suicidal, experiencing severe anxiety, reacting to a life problem, having a psychotic episode – or a combination of all of these symptoms.

There are some simple strategies that will help you connect with the person in distress:

- introduce yourself calmly and clearly
- explain why you are there
- be polite and non-threatening but also be honest and direct
- listen to what they are saying in a non-judgmental way
- avoid confrontation
- ask them what they see as the main problem
- do not attempt physical contact, except to prevent serious assault or suicide attempts
- encourage them to talk to a mental healthcare professional
- follow up any traumatic experience with counselling for yourself.

Suicide

If you are with someone who is acutely unwell and is also talking about suicide, it is important to:

- stay calm
- stay with them, or keep them on the phone and find out where they are
- phone Lifeline (13 11 14) to speak with a counsellor for immediate advice and support
- call triple zero (000) immediately (if they are hurt, ask for an ambulance first).

Self-harm

Self-harm is when you deliberately injure yourself in an attempt to cope with strong feelings such as anger, despair or self-hatred. People who self-harm may inflict physical injuries in a variety of ways such as cutting, burning or biting themselves.

If you are self-harming, it means that there are issues that you need to talk to someone about. It is a good idea to talk to your doctor about how you are feeling and work with them to come up with a way of managing your emotions. Your doctor may direct you to a specialist if they decide you need further help.

There are plenty of strategies that can help, including:

- telling a friend
- calling a helpline
- distracting yourself by doing something, such as dancing energetically to loud music
- trying a safe activity that can give you a release, like hitting a punching bag or a cushion
- breathing deeply, doing mindfulness exercises or taking a bath.

If you or someone you are with has self-harmed and requires medical attention, get treatment from your doctor or your local hospital’s emergency department.

For more information about self-harm, see our [Self-harm factsheet](#).

Mental Health First Aid

If someone you know is in distress with acute mental illness, there are some things you can do to help before medical professionals arrive.

**Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** provides specialised training for helping people in distress with mental health issues. MHFA can help you to recognise signs and symptoms quickly, respond to crisis situations, communicate better with distressed people, and find the right professional help.
Public mental health services in Victoria

Victoria has mental health services in most large public hospitals, located across the state. If you are not in immediate danger but you need help, call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24 or contact Approved Mental Health Services (AMHS) triage. Visit the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services website to find AMHS in your area.

AMHS or NURSE-ON-CALL may contact the Acute Community Intervention Service (ACIS) if they decide specialised help is needed. ACIS provides advice, diagnosis and treatment for people experiencing acute symptoms of mental illness. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and includes telephone advice and triage, emergency department care and short- to medium-term treatment at home.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Your doctor (GP)
- Your local hospital
- Lifeline, call 13 11 14
- Kids Help Line, call 1800 55 1800
- beyondblue, call 1300 22 4636
- NURSE-ON-CALL, call 1300 60 60 24

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:
Better Health Channel - (need new cp)