5. Mental health

- More than half (54%) reported having experienced symptoms of depression and 60% had symptoms of anxiety in the last year.
- At some time, 67% had contemplated suicide and 49% had attempted suicide.

Mental health care in the last 12 months

- At least one psychiatric admission .............................................. 35%
- Called a psychiatric emergency service ..................................... 17%
- Attended outpatient clinics and community services .............. 86%
- Attended a rehabilitation/day therapy program .................. 37%
- Had a case manager .................................................................. 69%
- Received at least one home visit ........................................... 52%
- Received support from a non-government agency for your mental health ................................................................. 30%

Most of you reported taking prescribed medication for your mental health.

- The majority (85%) reported that the medication you were using for your mental health gave you relief from symptoms. However, many (77%) reported experiencing side effects.

“Take your medication and you can get back on track.”

6. Housing

Not having somewhere stable and secure to live is stressful. It affects your ability to care for children, look for and keep work, as well as maintain mental and physical health.

“Stable housing is very important to maintaining good mental health.”

- Over half (51%) were very satisfied with your current housing.
- One in three of you were currently living alone but 41% said you would prefer to be living with someone.
- Many fear becoming homeless and for some of you this is a reality. One in eight people had been homeless for some time in the past year.

7. Stigma and discrimination

“There needs to be more awareness of mental illness and public education to reduce stigma.”

- Almost half (47%) the women and a third (32%) of the men said you had experienced stigma or discrimination in the past year as a result of your mental illness.
- Nearly one quarter (23%) said that fear of stigma or discrimination had stopped you from doing things.
- Many commented that there is a need for better understanding of mental illness in the workplace, schools and general community.

Outcome

You are an optimistic group. Regardless of the difficulties you are facing, three out of four of you believe your circumstances will improve over the next year.

“I wish I didn’t have it but I do so I just have to deal with it. There is no magic wand that will make it go away.”

Like all Australians, people living with psychotic illness have the same needs for good nutrition, housing, employment and income. However, because of your mental illness, you face additional challenges. When we asked you about your challenges for the coming year, surprisingly, concerns regarding treatment and control of mental illness, while important to you, were not your top issues. You ranked financial issues, loneliness and unemployment as your most important challenges.

“Acceptance is the hardest thing—most people live in denial. Once you accept this, things become easier.”

Further information

This is the largest and most comprehensive assessment of people living with psychotic illness undertaken in Australia. Information collected provides a solid foundation to guide policy development and service provision.

The full report People Living with Psychotic Illness 2010, is available at www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth

SANE Australia have been actively involved in SHIP. Their response to this survey People Living with Psychotic Illness. The SANE response, is available online at www.sane.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The comments in quotations were selected from the many hundreds we received from participants in response to our final question ‘Are there any final comments you would like to make about living with a mental illness?’

Where people are currently living Where people prefer to live

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<tr>
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<th>Where people are currently living</th>
<th>Where people prefer to live</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Public rental</td>
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<td>4 Own home</td>
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<td>5 Supported accommodation</td>
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“It would be great if people had a choice about where and with whom they live.”

Australian National Survey of High Impact Psychosis (SHIP)

People living with psychotic illness 2010

Summary of findings

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

Supported by SANE Australia
Who took part?
We interviewed 1,825 people aged between 18 and 64 years across five states of Australia. You had all been in contact with government or non-government services providing you with mental health support between April 2009 and March 2010.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR GIVING YOUR TIME AND SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES.

Your information has been combined with that from the other people interviewed. What you have told us helps us better understand the challenges that people with mental health problems face on a daily basis. It provides a picture of what life is like for you, the services you use and your needs. Some of this information is summarised in this brochure.

Aged 35-64 years.........................................................58%
Men.............................................................................60%
Born in Australia..........................................................82%
Married or living in a de facto relationship...............17%
Women with children 18 years or under living with them...24%
Currently living in public or private rented housing.......49%
In paid employment in the last 12 months...............33%
Taking medication for your mental health...................92%

How many people with psychosis are using mental health services?
Almost 64,000 Australians aged 18 to 64 years have a psychotic illness and are in contact with public specialised mental health services each year. Two thirds (65%) experienced their first episode of mental illness before the age of 25.

Challenges
You were asked to name the top three challenges that you face in the coming year. The six top ranked challenges were the same for men and women, and younger and older people. However younger people (18-34 years) ranked lack of employment first.

1. Financial issues.
2. Loneliness.
3. Employment
4. Poor physical health/physical health problems.
5. Uncontrolled symptoms of mental illness.
7. Stigma/discrimination.

“Having a mental illness is a constant struggle and challenge.”

1. Finances
People with psychosis have levels of income well below the national average.
• The main source of income for most of you (85%) was a Government payment.
• 73% were receiving the disability support pension.
• 86% had a health care card.

Many of you had experienced a shortage of money in the last year and had sought financial help.
• One quarter could not pay bills, pawned or sold something, or went without meals because of a shortage of money.
• One third said you had received help to sort out money problems or to budget.

“Employment and financial freedom is important.”

2. Loneliness
Mental illness can have an impact on relationships.
• 69% felt mental illness made it hard to maintain a close relationship.
• 22% felt socially isolated and lonely.
• 14% had no-one to rely on for help.
• 15% had no one to confide in.
• 47% needed and would like to have more friends.

“It is lonely living with a mental illness.”

Socialising %
Had no friends 13
Had not attended
– organised social activities 69
– recreational programs 69

Family and friends play a major role supporting people with mental illness.
• One quarter felt family/friends were the ones who spent the most time providing you with help for your mental health care.
• Family and friends had also helped you to look for work, provided financial help, helped with household responsibilities and helped you find a place to live.
• 65% had contact with a family member almost everyday.

“Having a supportive family and friends can help you through.”

3. Employment
A paid job not only provides a source of income, it also contributes to your sense of self-worth and feeling of having a valued role in society. Employment rates among people with psychosis are low.
• One in three (33%) of you had had some paid work in the past year.

“One understanding employer can make a big difference in maintaining employment and self esteem.”

Most of you with any employment are working part-time.
• One quarter would prefer to be working more hours.
  • The average number of hours worked per week was 23.
  • Men were working more hours than women (26 compared to 20).
  • One quarter (27%) had been looking for employment.
  • Fewer than one quarter (20%) had received help to find work.
  • Public employment services were the most common source of assistance (43%).

4. Physical health
Looking after your physical health is important. We know it can be an extra challenge if you have a mental illness.
• Most people (88%) had visited a GP in the last year, and almost everyone (97%) had had at least one physical examination (blood pressure, weight, physical, dental, xray, blood test, hearing, or eyes) in the last year.

Many people with mental illness have poor physical health. Contributing to this are lifestyle risk factors such as smoking, diet, lack of exercise, as well as medication side effects.
• 73% of you were overweight or obese compared to 55% of people in the general population.
• 37% reported weight gain as a side effect of your medication.
• The average weight gained over the previous 6 months was 8 kg.
• The majority of you (96%) reported being inactive or having very low levels of activity. The most common barriers to being physically active were lack of motivation, tiredness, pain and discomfort.

“Physical activity has been important for me.”

Despite public anti-smoking campaigns, levels of smoking were very high.
• 66% were currently smoking.
• Three quarters had tried to stop at some time. Almost one third had tried to stop in the last 12 months.

“Living a healthy lifestyle has helped me.”