What were the aims?
1. To estimate the number of people being treated for psychosis;
2. To describe the profile of people with a psychotic illness including personal, social and living circumstances, their mental and physical health;
3. To determine the use of services by people with psychotic illness; and
4. To assess the impact of psychotic illness and identify factors related to better outcomes and recovery.

Who participated?
• The survey took place in seven catchment sites across five Australian states, covering an area of around 62,000 square kilometres and a population of some 1.5 million people aged 18-64 years, approximately 10% of the Australian population in this age group.
• Over 10,000 people in contact with public specialised mental health services and NGOs funded to support people with a mental illness in March 2010 were screened for psychosis.
• 1,825 people were randomly selected, gave consent and were interviewed.
• 96% of interviewed participants gave consent for their GP to be contacted. Questionnaires were sent to these GPs to provide further information.
• Information was returned by GPs for half (49%) of the participants who gave consent.

This brochure summarises the findings from the 1,825 participants and 484 GPs across Australia who voluntarily took part in this survey. It is the largest and most comprehensive assessment of people living with psychotic illness undertaken in Australia. Information in this brochure is of particular relevance to staff who work with people with psychosis in general practice.

Further information is available:
3. SANe Australia has been actively involved in SHIP. Their response to this survey ‘People Living with Psychotic Illness. A SANe response’ www.sane.org

How many people with psychosis are using mental health services?

An estimated 44,000 people aged 18-64 years with a psychotic illness were receiving treatment in March 2010 for their mental illness from public specialised mental health services.

Figure 1: Age profile of people with psychotic illness in contact with public specialised mental health services in the census month

Characteristics of SHIP participants

Sociodemographics
Aged 35-64 years .......................................................58%
Males .................................................................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 any paid employment in the last 12 months ..........33%

Mental health
Diagnosed with schizophrenia/schizoaffective disorder..63%
Lifetime history of suicide attempt ...........................49%
Psychiatric admission in previous 12 months .......35%

Used services provided by an NGO funded to support people with a mental illness in past year ........30%

Physical health
Current smoker .........................................................66%
Body mass index in the overweight or obese range ......73%
Levels of physical activity inactive or very low ..........33%
Experienced chronic back, neck or other pain........32%
Reported heart or circulatory conditions .................27%
Reported having diabetes .........................................20%
Met the criteria for metabolic syndrome ................50%
Met Framingham criteria for absolute risk of a cardiovascular event within five years ..................31%

Conclusions
People living with a psychotic illness are an optimistic group. Regardless of the difficulties they are facing, three out of four believe their circumstances will improve over the next year. Like all Australians, people living with psychotic illness have the same needs for housing, good nutrition, employment and income. However, because of their mental illness, they face additional challenges.

‘Having a mental illness is a constant struggle and challenge.’ (Participant)

General practitioners play a key role in providing health care to people living with mental illness in the community, not only treating their physical conditions, but also providing mental health services. For a number of people interviewed, their GP was the person who provided them with the most information on their mental illness (8%) and spent the most time helping with their mental health problems (7%).

The majority of GPs indicated they wanted to be involved in providing mental health care to their patients. However, GPs require clear management plans, improved communication and regular support and feedback from mental health services if they are to be partners in providing mental health care to people living with psychosis.

“We need better communication and feedback from psychiatrists and mental health teams.” (GP)

We thank participating GPs for their invaluable support and assistance.

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?’ and from GPs in response to “What do you think would help you to better manage patients with a psychotic disorder in your practice?”


Further information is available:
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How many people with psychosis are using mental health services?

An estimated 44,000 people aged 18-64 years with a psychotic illness were receiving treatment in March 2010 for their mental illness from public specialised mental health services.
A summary of the findings from the 1,825 participants interviewed:

- Most participants (88%) had seen a GP in the 12 months prior to interview.
- This is slightly higher than the proportion in the general population (79%).

- The average number of visits in the preceding year, if any, was nine. This compares to a general population average of five visits a year.
- 76% had visited a GP at least once in the three months prior to interview.
- Most women (92%) and participants aged 35-64 years (92%) had seen a GP. The percentages were 86% for men and 85% for younger people (18-34 years).

**People who had visited a GP**

- Saw the same GP at all visits .....65%
- Saw several GPs but attended the one practice ..........84%
- Saw a GP who bulk billed .93%
- Could get an urgent appointment on the same day .....59%
- Could get a regular appointment within 7 days ..........91%
- Had consulted a GP with a physical health issue .....86%
- Had consulted a GP with a mental health issue .....56%

**People who had NOT visited a GP**

- The main reasons given for not seeing a GP were:
  1. I’m never sick (54%)
  2. I never think about it (26%)

- Cost and difficulty getting an appointment were noted by 3% of people.

- “Having a good GP has been really helpful.” (Participant)

**Physical health**

People with a psychotic illness have poorer physical health than the general population and are more likely to experience chronic physical conditions. Rates for all reported conditions except cancer were higher compared to the general population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Population data</th>
<th>Psychosis survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart or coronary condition</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe headaches/migraines</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVA</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney disease</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use of other health services**

Health service use in the 12 months prior to interview for any reason was high:

- 17% had used the internet to access information about mental health.

**Order health service use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any reason %</th>
<th>Mental Health %</th>
<th>Physical Health %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inpatient admission</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency department</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpatient/community clinic</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBT/Counselling</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>Medication</td>
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<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHALLENGES**

The top three challenges that the participant faced in the coming year. The GP perspective was remarkably similar to that of participants.

- **Most common reasons for seeing a GP were for a prescription (93%) or blood test (33%), either of which may have been physical or mental health related.**
- **Management of patients with psychosis**
  - The majority of GPs (67%) said they treated their patient in collaboration with a mental health team. 10% reported they treated their patient exclusively and 3% did not answer.
  - 78% of GPs indicated that they want to be involved in the mental health care of their patient.
  - 10% felt they did not have enough time to deal with mental health problems, while a further 33% felt they had enough time only sometimes.
  - 28% said their patient had a GP mental health care plan. Women were more likely than men to have a plan (34% compared to 23% respectively).
  - 43% had encountered adverse effects of long term antipsychotic treatment in their patient. Weight gain, dyslipidemia/hyperlipidemia and drowsiness were the most common.
  - 32% had treated their patients for a metabolic, cardiovascular or kidney problem in the last 12 months, 28% said their patient had a GP mental health care plan.
  - 5% indicated that in the last 12 months they had received adequate correspondence from mental health services regarding their patient’s treatment or diagnosis.

**WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE CARE OF PEOPLE WITH PSYCHOSIS IN GENERAL PRACTICE**

- **Frequent consultations (12+)**
- **No consultations**
- **Frequency of GP consultations**

- **WHAT PARTICIPANTS TOLD US**

- **WHAT GENERAL PRACTITIONERS TOLD US**

- **Management difficulties**
  - GPs were asked to name the top three difficulties they faced managing people with psychosis within their practice.

- **Top difficulties identified by GPs in managing patients with psychosis**
  - No difficulties 44%
  - Time constraints 22%
  - Non compliance with planned treatment 22%
  - Non attendance at scheduled appointments 21%
  - Lack of feedback from mental health services 20%
  - Difficulty accessing specialists 15%

- **“A big barrier to effectively managing the physical health needs of patients with psychotic illness is that they might not attend or so do erratically.”** (GP)

- **GP consultations**
  - The most common reasons for seeing a GP were for a prescription (93%) or blood test (33%), either of which may have been physical or mental health related.

- **CHALLENGES**

- Both GPs and the participant were asked to name the top three challenges that the participant faced in the coming year. The GP perspective was remarkably similar to that of participants.

- The top three ranked challenges were:
  - Social isolation
  - Lack of employment
  - Financial issues
  - Uncontrolled symptoms of mental illness
  - Poor physical health

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