The reader must consider the following:

- Is the research biased in its design?
- Does the method test the hypothesis?
- Are important factors missing?
- How do the results compare to the predictions and to what is currently known?
- If there are inconsistencies, why? Were the predictions wrong, the methods weak?
- If the results are as expected, what are the implications for the short-term, for the long-term?
People with physical illness expect to receive ‘best standards practice’ for their care. This means the most effective and reliable assessment, procedure or treatment for their particular symptoms and circumstances.

People living with a mental illness also have a right to expect ‘best standards practice’ assessments, procedures and treatments. In ‘best standards practice’, a particular assessment, procedure or treatment is selected because it is known to work best (effectively) and to work most consistently (reliably) in the particular circumstances.

Evidence from mental health research is used to determine which assessment, procedure or treatment is effective and reliable under which circumstances. This is called Evidence-based Practice.

**Mental health research: The TIPS approach**

Many types of research are needed to bring about mental wellbeing.

Different kinds of research provide different answers. Some offer immediate benefits, while others add to the pool of knowledge that will eventually provide long term solutions for people with mental illness.

**Mental Health Treatments Research**

Examples:
- Basic laboratory studies to understand how different chemicals work in the body
- Randomised controlled trials to test the effectiveness of new treatments on unwell populations
- The assessment of psychological treatments on both healthy and unwell people
- Interviewing people on treatment side effects and their quality of life
- Studies investigating ways of maintaining positive treatment outcomes.

**Mental Health Interventions Research**

Examples:
- Identifying those at higher risk of mental illness and monitoring them for changes in thinking, behaviour or emotion which may indicate that they are becoming unwell
- Determining the most appropriate intervention following a traumatic event to prevent memories from interfering with daily life and producing long-term negative effects
- Developing first aid approaches to mental health so that families, friends and work colleagues can help someone who may be developing a mental disorder.

**Mental Health Prevention Research**

Examples:
- Investigating whether lifestyle changes such as increased exercise and the use of relaxation techniques may help people avoid mental health problems
- Identifying the risk factors for developing a mental illness
- Finding the genes involved, leading to preventative measures for people at risk.

**Mental Health Services Research**

Examples:
- Evaluating mental health services to see which are most effective for particular groups such as youth, recent immigrants and indigenous people
- Quality assurance audits to ensure mental health services perform well
- Surveys, interviews and long term follow-up studies to determine the most effective way of treating people in the community to prevent hospitalisation and any deterioration of their mental health.

**Responsible conduct of mental health Research**

**What makes mental health research ethical?**

- Independent review of the research
- The informed consent of the participants
- Freedom of participants to withdraw
- Maintenance of data confidentiality
- Favourable balance of risks and benefits
- Good science.

Who benefits from mental health research?

Everyone! A better understanding of mental illness and well-being, through research, helps to limit the adverse effects of such illness on individuals affected, families, friends, community services and society at large.

Who is responsible for the ethical standards of mental health research?

Individual researchers are responsible for:
- The design and conduct of their own research
- Communicating their findings to others
- Ensuring that their studies conform to professional regulations, such as the Australian Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics, or the code of practice for the use and care of animals for scientific purposes.

Institutions in which research takes place are responsible for:
- Ensuring research in their institution complies with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research
- Putting in place procedures to review the ethical standards of research carried out in their institution.

National bodies governing research practice are responsible for:
- Determining jointly national standards of practice. These standards are described in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.
- The National Health and Medical Research Council
- The Australian Research Council
- The Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee.