

# MENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

## A range of definitions of Mental Health/Illness

### National Mental Health Plan 2003-2008

Mental health is a complex domain where diverse views exist and where terms are used in different ways, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings ... Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness ... Mental health problems and mental illness refer to the range of cognitive, emotional and behavioural disorders that interfere with the lives and productivity of people.

### COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006 – 2011

Mental illness is a term used to describe a number of diagnosable disorders that significantly interfere with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. These include depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

### Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The *National Health Priority Areas Report on Mental Health* defined mental health as 'the capacity of individuals and groups to interact with one another and the environment, in ways that promote subjective wellbeing, optimal development and the use of cognitive, affective and relational abilities'. A diverse range of social, environmental, biological and psychological factors can impact on an individual's mental health. In turn, people can develop symptoms and behaviours that are distressing to themselves or others, and interfere with their social functioning and capacity to negotiate daily life. These symptoms and behaviours may require treatment or rehabilitation, even hospitalisation.

### MINDFRAME

Mental health problems and mental disorders refer to the spectrum of cognitive, emotional and behavioural disorders that interfere with the lives and productivity of people.

A mental disorder is a diagnosable illness that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. Mental disorders are of different types and degrees of severity and some of the major mental disorders perceived to be public health issues are depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, psychosis and dementia. The term mental illness is sometimes used instead of mental disorder.

A mental health problem also interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities, but to a lesser extent than a mental disorder. Mental health problems are more common mental complaints and include the mental ill health temporarily experienced as a reaction to life stressors. Mental health problems are less severe and of shorter duration than mental disorders, but may develop into mental disorders. The distinction between mental health problems and mental disorders is not well defined and is made on the basis of the severity and duration of the symptoms.

### London Health Observatory

The term 'mental health problem' can be used to describe the full range of mental health issues, from common experiences such as 'feeling depressed' to more severe clinical symptoms such as 'clinical depression' and enduring problems such as schizophrenia ... 'Mental health problem' has been used to refer to 'mental illness' i.e. diagnosed and/or clinical levels of mental health problems.

### World Health Day 2001 Resource Booklet (produced by the American Association for Mental Health)

Mental illness is a term that refers collectively to all mental disorders. Mental disorders are health related conditions that are characterised by alterations in thinking, mood, or behaviour (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.

## **State/Territory Definitions (from their Mental Health Acts):**

### New South Wales

Current Legislation: Mental Health Act 2007

Primary Category: Mental Illness

Definition of Primary Category: Mental illness means a condition that seriously impairs, either temporarily or permanently, the mental functioning of a person and is characterised by the presence in the person of any one or more of the following symptoms: delusions, hallucinations, serious disorder of thought form, a severe disturbance of mood, sustained or repeated irrational behaviour indicating the presence of any one or more of the symptoms referred to. A person is mentally ill if the person is suffering from mental illness and owing to that illness, there are reasonable grounds for believing that care, treatment or control of the person is necessary: for the person's own protection from serious harm, or for the protection of others from serious harm. In considering whether a person is a mentally ill person, the continuing condition of the person, including any likely deterioration in the person's condition and the likely effects of any such deterioration, are to be taken into account.

### Victoria

Current Legislation: Mental Health Act 1986

Primary Category: Mental Illness

Definition of Primary Category: A medical condition characterised by a significant disturbance of thought, mood, perception or memory.

### Queensland

Current Legislation: Mental Health Act 2000 – subordinate legislation mental health regulation 2002.

Primary Category: Mental illness

Definition of Primary Category: A condition characterised by a clinically significant disturbance of thought, mood, perception or memory.

### South Australia

Current Legislation: Mental Health Act 1993 – draft copy of 2007 bill has now been released for public consultation.

Primary Category: Mental illness

Definition of Primary Category: Any illness or disorder of the mind.

### Western Australia

Current Legislation: Mental Health Act 1996

Primary Category: Mental Illness

Definition of Primary Category: If the person suffers from a disturbance of thought, mood, volition, perception, orientation or memory that impairs judgment or behaviour to a significant extent.

### Tasmania

Current Legislation: Mental Health Act 1996

Primary Category: Mental illness

Definition of Primary Category: Resulting in a serious distortion of perception or thought, serious impairment or disturbance of the capacity for rational thought, serious mood disorder, involuntary behaviour or serious impairment of the capacity to control behaviour.

### Australian Capital Territory

Current Legislation: Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994

Primary Category: Mental dysfunction

Definition of Primary Category: A disturbance or defect, to a substantially disabling degree, or perceptual interpretation, comprehension, reasoning, learning, judgment, memory, motivation or emotion.

### Northern Territory

Current Legislation: Mental Health and Related Services Act 1998

Primary Category: Mental illness

Definition of Primary Category: A condition that seriously impairs mental functioning in one or more areas of thought, mood, volition, perception and characterised by the presence of at least one of the following symptoms: delusions, hallucinations, serious disorders of the stream of thought, serious disorders of thought form, serious disturbances of mood, or by sustained or repeated irrational behaviour that may be taken to indicate the presence of at least one of the symptoms referred to.