



Mental Health

City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Mental ill health is very common and has significant human, social and economic impacts in our communities. Research continues to reveal the important role that the environments in which we live, work, learn and recreate, have on our mental health. The three tiers of government have a role to play in fostering inclusive environments that make people feel valued, protect them from discrimination and provide them access to basic economic necessities. Creating policies and programs that are responsive to the needs of diverse groups within our community is therefore critical in addressing the growing mental health burden.

What is mental health?

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (World Health Organisation, 2022).

- Over 2 in 5 (44 per cent, or 8.6 million) Australians aged 16-85 are estimated to have experienced a mental disorder at some time in their life, with 1 in 5 (21%, or 4.2 million) having experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).
- Mental health conditions and substance use disorders were one of the top 5 disease groups that contributed the most towards the total burden of disease in Australia in 2022 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).

What do we know about some of the key drivers of mental health?

Three key factors have been demonstrated to impact on mental health. They are: 1) social inclusion; 2) discrimination and 3) access to economic resources such as employment, income and housing.

- **Social inclusion** is widely accepted as a key driver of mental health. Consequently, indicators of social inclusion are now measured in Victorian data collection systems and are reported on regularly. A socially inclusive society is one 'where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so that they can live in dignity'. Social inclusion refers to when efforts are made to ensure that all people, irrespective of

their background, have equal access to opportunities to reach their full potential in life. This may be done through policies and actions that promote equal access to services, as well as enabling people to participate in the community and decision-making processes that affect their lives (United Nations, 2023).

- There is a strong association between social isolation and early death driven by depressive symptoms and socioeconomic factors, including education, neighbourhood disadvantage and household income (Elovainio, et al., 2017).
- **Discrimination**, in all its forms has direct impacts on mental health. Evidence linking discrimination to mental health highlights the correlation between discrimination and development of mental health problems including stress, anxiety and depression. Discrimination happens when a person, or a group of people is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or personal characteristics. Indirect discrimination happens when an unreasonable rule or policy applies to everyone but has the effect of disadvantaging some people because of a personal characteristic they share (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2023).
 - There is substantial evidence that in Victoria, **race-based discrimination** makes children susceptible to anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (VicHealth, 2014). **Aboriginal Australians** exposed to incidents of race-based discrimination were more likely to suffer from psychological distress, and the extent of the distress is worsened by more exposure (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2013).
- **Access to economic resources** is a critical factor impacting on mental health. Access to economic resources includes access to work and meaningful engagement, education, adequate housing, and adequate financial resources.
 - Mental illness can be a causal factor that contributes to someone experiencing **homelessness** and experiencing homelessness is also a risk factor for developing a mental illness (Brackertz, Wilkinson, & Davidson, 2018).

How is the mental health of the Port Phillip community?

The most up to date data relating to the mental health of Port Phillip residents is waiting on the release of the 2023 Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS), with the last full round being completed in 2017. A more recent full data collection is usually collected for Local Government Areas (LGAs) every 3 years, however this was not undertaken in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Health has approved the use of 2017 data in the interim period.

Prior to COVID-19, data indicated that Port Phillip residents overall felt similar to the Victorian average in terms of general wellbeing, life satisfaction, resilience, and levels of psychological distress. However, residents were more likely than the Victorian average to present with emergency mental-health related conditions, have a similar likelihood to seek help managing their mental health and about as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety or depression:



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- 189 hospitalisations related to self-harm, which is well above the Victorian average (Department of Health, 2018)
- 502 emergency department presentation for mental and behavioural disorders, exceeding the Victorian and Bayside Peninsula averages (Department of Health, 2019)

20.2 per cent of females and 18.9 per cent of males sought professional help with managing their mental health in the previous year, compared to the Victorian average of 21.2 per cent and 14.4 per cent respectively. 24.9 per cent of adults have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, at about the same rate as the Victorian average of 27.4 per cent (Department of Health, 2022).

Port Phillip residents report good health at a higher rate than the Victorian average, but psychological distress and mental health remain a concern:

1. 56.1 per cent of adults self-reported their health status as excellent or very good, which substantially exceeds the Victorian average of 41.6 per cent (Department of Health, 2022)
2. 58.2 per cent of residents rate their psychological distress as mild, slightly higher than the Victorian average of 53.9 per cent (Department of Health, 2022)
3. **Young people** attending schools in the City of Port Phillip are reporting mental health as a key concern (Resilient Youth Australia, 2019).

Mental health in our community

While there is limited data available that identifies how mental health differs for different diversity cohorts within our local community, evidence from across Victoria indicates significant inequities between different population groups.

- **Aboriginal people** are around three times more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress than non-Aboriginal Australians and twice as likely to attempt suicide (Department of Health, 2017).
- **People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds** consistently have higher levels, and greater numbers, of socially determined risk factors for mental health problems such as racism and social isolation (Mental Health in Multicultural Australia, 2014).
- **People from the LGBTIQ community** continue to experience poorer mental health than the population as a whole (Leonard, et al., 2012). 41.4 per cent of homosexual/bisexual people aged 16 and over met the criteria for a mental disorder in the last 12 months, compared to 20 per cent in the general population (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2020).
- **Trans and gender diverse** young people are at particular risk, with nearly three quarters reporting to the first Australian survey of trans youth that they had been diagnosed with depression or anxiety at some time. Nearly 80 per cent had self-harmed and just under fifty per cent had attempted suicide (Strauss, et al., 2017).
- According to the 2020-21 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, **younger people** had higher rates of mental disorders, with almost two in five people (39.6 per cent) aged 16-21 years having a 12-month mental disorder in the 2020-21 period. Almost half (46.6

per cent) of females aged 16-24 years and almost one third (31.2 per cent) of males aged 16-24 years had a 12-month mental disorder (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

- **Adults living in areas of most disadvantage** across Australia in 2017-18 were more than twice as likely to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress than adults living in areas of least disadvantage (18.3 per cent compared with 9 per cent respectively), a pattern that's consistent from 2014-15 findings (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Social isolation and loneliness are linked to depression and poorer cardiovascular health (Heart Foundation, n.d.). These effects are particularly pronounced amongst **homeless people** and **older Australians**.
- People suffering from other serious medical conditions are more likely to develop a mental health condition than others (DiSante, Bires, Cline, & Waterstram-Rich, 2017).

Current impacts on mental health?

The current rise in cost of living can have detrimental impacts on everyone's mental health, as they feel financial pressure in trying to make ends meet. This can extend to anyone in the community, however, it will likely disproportionately impact those of a lower socio-economic status.

Adjusting to the current 'COVID-normal' phase of the pandemic may also affect the mental health of community members, as society opens back up again. Residents may feel anxious about entering the community with the possibility of contracting COVID-19, particularly when there are 'waves' or rises in cases. This may be particularly relevant to people who are more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, such as older people or people with disability. People who choose to limit social contact and interaction because of COVID concerns may feel lonely or isolated, contributing to poor mental health.

Why is promoting positive mental health important for our community?

Higher levels of positive mental health are associated with increased learning, creativity and productivity, more pro-social behaviours, positive social relationships and improved physical health and greater life expectancy.

How are the State and Federal Governments managing mental health?

Federal and State government Health Departments focus largely on service delivery to those experiencing serious mental illness. However, other Victorian government departments make considerable contribution to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

For example, Sport and Recreation Victoria, the Department of Education and Training and Creative Victoria allocate resources to support the range of health promotion actions that have proven effective in dealing with other health issues, such as tobacco control, healthy eating and physical activity. These actions focus on reducing the drivers of stress, anxiety and depression and include communication and social marketing campaigns, programs which engage citizens in social activity, organisational and community development and research and evaluation.

Additionally, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was finalised in early 2021, which provided 65 recommendations. Addressing these by making changes is an ongoing process by the Victorian government.

What is the City of Port Phillip's role in managing mental health?

The value of supporting individuals to develop the personal skills required for mental health is recognised. However local government mental health promotion practice places particular emphasis on supporting communities and organisations to create environments that are conducive to positive mental health and wellbeing.

Over the next four years, Port Phillip can address the drivers of poor mental health by:

- Building community resilience through creating safe, respectful and equitable communities, workplaces and public environments.
- Providing opportunities for increasing residents' participation in community life.
- Supporting arts activity which connects residents to one another, and which engages them in activities through creative processes.
- Increasing focus on addressing homelessness and insecure housing across the city.
- Adopting a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination based on gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or cultural background.
- Advocating for appropriate funding to support the requirements of people with complex needs.
- Providing information and promoting services that support improved mental health and wellbeing.

Who are our partners?

As many of the factors influencing mental health lie outside the health system, partnerships with individuals and organisations in other sectors, such as those concerned with housing, employment, sport and recreation, education and income security, are identified as pivotal to effective mental health promotion.

Some of our key partners include:

- Better Health Network (formerly Star Health)
- Alfred Health
- Headspace
- First Step
- Orygen
- Southern Metropolitan Primary Care Network
- Launch Housing
- Port Phillip Community Group
- Municipal Association of Victoria



- VicHealth
- RecLink
- Victorian Multicultural Commission

What may change over the next five years?

- Those experiencing social and economic disadvantage have experienced the most significant mental health impacts of COVID-19 and are likely to continue to do so long after the pandemic ends.
- The Victorian Government has committed to improving mental health services and implementing the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and these reforms are an ongoing process. This is likely to include focus on promoting the mental health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in our communities by addressing the social and economic environments in which they reside.
- The use of digital platforms that became popular in health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. Telehealth, has become mainstream and is likely to continue.
- While this stage of the pandemic is in 'COVID-normal' with eased public health restrictions, it is hard to exactly predict the future of COVID-19. Rises in cases as well as the development of variants and subvariants could change the nature of the pandemic, which could have ramifications for the mental health of residents.
- Current economic uncertainty and rising inflation could become worse or continue to have negative impacts on residents due to increased stress. The cost of living could continue to increase, creating more hardship for people, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

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