



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 the embodiment of social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Mental health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just (VicHealth, 2005).

- While most Australians experience good mental health most of the time, around half of all Australians experience mental health problems during their lifetime, and 4.8 million are living with mental ill health.
- Mental illness is one of Australia's top three leading causes of disease burden (after cancer and cardiovascular disease) and it is the largest contributor to the disability burden in Victoria.

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 exclusion is 'the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of the person into the community' and can lead to people experiencing social isolation (Cappo, 2002).



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- 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 underpinned development of a Beyond Blue public health campaign, which highlighted 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 (AHRC, 2015).
 - There is substantial evidence that in Victoria, **race-based discrimination** makes children susceptible to anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Priest et al. 2013). **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?

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:

- 189 hospitalisations related to self-harm, which is well above the Victorian average (Department of Health and Human Services, 2018)
- 502 emergency department presentation for mental and behavioural disorders, exceeding the Victorian and Bayside Peninsula averages (Department of Health and Human Services, 2019)
- 20.2 per cent of females and 18.9 per cent of males sought professional health 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 (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017)
- 24.9 per cent of adults have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, at about the same



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rate as the Victorian average of 27.4 per cent (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017)

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 and Human Services, 2017)
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 and Human Services, 2017)
3. **Young people** attending schools in the City of Port Phillip are reporting mental health as a key concern (Resilient Youth Australia, 2019).

How is the mental health of some groups in our community?

While there is limited data available that identifies how mental health differs for different groups 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 and Human Services, 2017).
- **People from 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).
- **LGBTIQ community members** 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).
- 26 per cent of **young** Australians experience a mental illness every year (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). One in eight young Victorians report feeling lonely and one in four are unable to find social support when they need it.
- **Trans-identifying** 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).
- **People living with greater socioeconomic disadvantage** are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological stress (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). 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).



How has COVID-19 affected mental health?

During 2020 1 in 6 Victorians experienced high psychological distress and lower levels of life satisfaction. This impact was heightened for Victorians in inner metro areas and for young people (VicHealth, 2020).

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.

Whilst data indicates that the mental health of Port Phillip residents is comparative to those residing in other municipalities, it is clear that a proportion of the Port Phillip community experience mental health impacts inherent in the social and economic environment in which they reside. It is also clear that as a result of COVID-19, these impacts have grown and will continue to do so.

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, Arts Victoria and the Diversity and the Social Inclusion Unit 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.

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.



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- Increasing focus on addressing homelessness and insecure housing across the City.
- Adopting a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination based on gender, age, level of ability, sexual preference or cultural background.
- Advocating for appropriate funding to support the needs 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:

- 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

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 (final report due February 2021). 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.
- There is likely to be continued use of digital platforms, developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, to supplement traditional programs and services. i.e., Telehealth.



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