Strong support from families and carers can help Kooris with a mental illness to improve their physical as well as their social and emotional wellbeing.

Kooris with a mental illness….

May also have a physical illness

- People with a mental illness, and particularly Kooris, can be really unwell with conditions like heart disease, diabetes and cancer.
- They might also be overweight and unfit because they don’t get enough exercise or they smoke.
- And sometimes the medication they take for their mental illness can make them unwell.

Have a right to good physical health care, just like everybody else

- Just because your family member or friend has a mental illness doesn’t mean they shouldn’t get the care they need for any physical illness.
- Helping your family member or friend get good physical health care can help them improve their social and emotional wellbeing.

Need to see a doctor regularly

- Seeing a doctor regularly is important for Kooris with a mental illness – your family member or friend should try and see the same doctor each time if they can, so the doctor gets to know them and their health issues.

A doctor will need to give your family member or friend with a mental illness a regular physical check-up so any illnesses can be treated as early as possible.

Encourage your family member or friend to share their doctor’s name and phone number with their mental health service so they can work together to help them to improve their overall health.

Mental health services in NSW….

Need to make sure Kooris receive physical and emotional health care

- Mental health services must now work with the people who use their service, including Kooris, to improve their physical health.
- Services will also make sure that these people get the physical health care they need.
- You can also ask any mental health service or Aboriginal Medical Service for a copy of the brochure Physical Health Care – What to expect from your Mental Health Service – for Aboriginal People.
What can I do to help my family member or friend with a mental illness to improve their physical health?

As a family member, carer or friend of someone who has a mental illness and uses a mental health service, you can make a real difference to their physical health by:

- Encouraging them to have a regular physical checkup,
- Offering to make health appointments for them, and attending with them if they want this,
- Helping them to get to and from health appointments,
- Suggesting you keep a list of their health appointments and reminding them when they need to attend,
- Making time to listen to them about their health issues and suggesting what steps they could take to improve their health,
- Providing them with information about health and nutrition issues or healthy lifestyle choices, such as giving up smoking,
- Helping them to keep talking and visiting others – being lonely can affect how quickly they recover from a physical illness.

How will the mental health service my friend or family member uses help them to improve their physical health?

Mental health services have an important responsibility to make sure that the people who use or are involved with their service receive good quality health care by:

- Supporting them to have a physical checkup at least once every 12 months,
- Giving them information about how to improve their physical health, such as by doing some exercise or giving up smoking,
- Putting them in contact with a doctor that they can see regularly and get to know,
- Helping them make and get to health appointments,
- Carefully considering how any treatment they receive for their mental illness will affect their physical health,
- Looking at their social and emotional needs as well as their physical health needs when developing their care plans,
- Listening to them and respecting the important role they play in their own care team.

Need more information?

- See your doctor
- Talk to your local mental health service
- Contact your local Aboriginal Medical Service