

# Report of the New South Wales Chief Health Officer

## Mental health Introduction

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### Introduction

Mental ill health is one of the leading causes of non-fatal burden of disease and injury in Australia. Mental problems are also associated with higher rates of health risk factors, poorer physical health, and higher rates of deaths from many causes including suicide (AIHW, 2008). Mental ill health was estimated to account for 13% of the disease burden in Australia in 2003, with anxiety and depression, alcohol abuse and personality disorders accounting for almost three-quarters of this burden. Only 7% of the burden from mental disorders is due to mortality, most of which is accounted for by fatal outcomes associated with substance abuse (Begg et al., 2007).

Mental health disorders relate to behaviours and conditions which interfere with social functioning and capacity to negotiate daily life. Across Australia deaths due to mental and behavioural disorders were identified as the underlying cause of 5,156 registered deaths, representing 3.9% of all registered deaths in 2006. This was an increase of 1,789 (53%) when compared with 2005. The prevalence of mental health and behavioural disorders as an underlying cause has increased significantly since 1997, with an increase of 2,271 (79%) deaths (ABS, 2008).

In 2006, 18,943 deaths were due to, or associated with, mental and behavioural disorders. In 2006, more than twice as many females died due to mental and behavioural disorders than males, with 64% of deaths (3,296) being of females. The median age at death was higher for females at 88.6 years, compared with 84.0 years for males. Most deaths were due to dementia (89%) with a ratio of 48.1 males per 100 female deaths, which has remained relatively steady since 1997. The median age at death for persons (87.9 years) was higher than the median age for mental and behavioural disorders (80.3 years) as a whole (ABS 2008).

This chapter uses data from the NSW Population Health Survey at the NSW Department of Health, to describe the burden of psychological distress in the community. It provides information on the effect of these disorders on the ability of people to work, study and manage their day-to-day activities.

The chapter also provides information from the latest available NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey conducted in 2005 (formerly a NSW part of the Australian Secondary Schools' Alcohol and Drugs Surveys) on psychological distress among young people. Updated information on the prescribing of stimulants for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children is also provided. The chapter also presents updated information on trends in suicide and intentional self-harm.

Mental health initiatives in NSW are focussed on promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies, alongside clinical care. By using epidemiological information and evidence of effective mental health care it is possible to identify who needs mental health services in NSW and what mental health interventions are appropriate for each age group (NSW Health, 2003).

NSW has a range of early intervention, prevention and promotion initiatives in place to cover the age spectrum. These include: Integrated Perinatal and infant care focusing on the pre-natal and antenatal periods; supportive programs for children whose parents have mental illness; the NSW School-Link initiative to improve the understanding, recognition, treatment and prevention of mental health problems in children and adolescents; the Early Psychosis Program for young people with first onset psychosis; and the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) for people with mental illness to support people with mental health problems to access safe, stable and affordable housing to support them to live successfully in the community.

NSW has recently adopted the NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Well Being Policy 2006-2010, which is a framework to guide NSW Health and NSW Area Mental Health Services (AMHSs) in the provision of culturally sensitive and appropriate mental health and social and emotional well being services to the Aboriginal community of NSW.

There are also a number of other specific initiatives which contribute to suicide prevention, including a whole of government suicide prevention strategy. 'New South Wales: A New Direction for Mental Health' is a five-year plan to provide improved access to a greater range of mental health services in NSW. The plan, which was published in June 2006, aims to balance hospital focused care with community care.

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