

High-prevalence mental health disorders cost society billions

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New research puts a price on high-prevalence mental health conditions.

Deakin University research has put a price on high-prevalence mental [health](#) conditions in Australia, with an estimated \$12.8 billion attributed to depression, anxiety and substance-use, in terms of related health and other societal costs each year.

This financial cost is in addition to the incalculable personal costs suffered by individuals experiencing these conditions and their families.

The study, funded by the Medibank Better Health Foundation, analysed data from the most recent National Survey of Health and Wellbeing, which found 18.5 per cent of Australians suffered from these three most common [mental health conditions](#) within the previous 12 months.

Senior researcher Associate Professor Cathy Mihalopoulos, from Deakin Health Economics in the Centre for Population Health Research, said the study estimated costs associated with the use of healthcare resources, productivity loss, income tax loss, and welfare benefits.

"Mental and behavioural health disorders are the third biggest disease burden in Australia after cancer and cardiovascular diseases," she said.

The total cost to society was broken down into \$974 million in [health care costs](#) and \$11.8 billion in total productivity loss. Additional costs to governments included \$1.23 billion in forgone income taxes and \$12.9 billion in welfare benefits.

"Only 40 per cent of people included in this study with a diagnosis of depression, anxiety or substance use reported accessing any healthcare services for their mental health," Associate Professor Mihalopoulos said.

"This may indicate an unmet need for more [mental](#)

[health services](#) or could indicate that there are barriers to people seeking care for [mental health issues](#), such as stigma.

"However, the survey used to conduct these analyses was conducted in 2007, prior to important national mental health reforms. This highlights the need for a third national survey."

Chair of the Medibank Better Health Foundation Dr Linda Swan said the research revealed the importance of improving access to mental health support in Australia.

"Mental health has been a key health focus in Australia in recent years, but to learn the impact is at least \$12.8 billion is a call to do more.

"The broad-ranging effects for those living with depression, anxiety and substance-use can be devastating and we encourage more Australians to seek help from their GP if they don't know where to start," Dr Swan said.

"It's also important for those who think a friend or family member is struggling, to reach out and then listen. Social support can be critical to help deliver the best health outcomes."

Associate Professor Mihalopoulos said that when it came to the use of healthcare services, visits to doctors such as general practitioners were the most commonly used service.

"About a third of the people in the survey reported consulting a healthcare professional for [mental health problems](#)," she said.

"Nearly 23 per cent of the group also reported the use of medication relevant to their mental health and, from the individual's perspective, medications accounted for a third of the overall out-of-pocket [costs](#), with the balance attributed to consultation services."

Dr Mihalopoulos said the total productivity loss was made up of time that employed people lost from work, as well as lost earnings due to higher rates of unemployment for people with a mental health diagnosis.

"According to the survey, about 148,000 people in this group are not in work," she said.

"Seventy per cent of this group (below the age of 65) indicated they were employed, but more than a quarter reported a loss of working days due to their mental illness, with an average of 38 days lost per year."

Dr Mihalopoulos said a key take-away message from the report was the great economic burden associated with anxiety disorders.

"While depressive disorders have received considerable attention both in the scientific and popular media, we hear far less about the impact of those suffering from anxiety," she said.

"Our study has demonstrated that the economic burden of such disorders is in fact considerable and improved [mental health](#) support could make a big difference for individuals and society in general."

The report, "Cost of high prevalence mental disorders in Australia," was recently published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*.

More information: Yu-Chen Lee et al. Cost of high prevalence mental disorders: Findings from the 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (2017). DOI: [10.1177/0004867417710730](https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867417710730)

Provided by Deakin University

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