

Who accesses mental health support?

Cohort	Approx no	Type of care/support	Funding
People who do not currently meet criteria for a mental illness diagnosis but have some mental health need	5.4m	Prevention and early intervention through primary health care (mainly GPs), digital mental health and self-help services.	This layer of service responsibility mainly sits with the Commonwealth.
People with mild mental illnesses	2.1m	Predominantly receive care in the primary mental health care system, with the bulk of services currently being provided through general practice and the Medicare Better Access initiative.	This layer of service responsibility rests with the Commonwealth.
People with moderate mental illness	1.1m	Predominantly receive care in the primary mental health care system, with the bulk of services currently being provided through general practice and the Medicare Better Access initiative.	This layer of service responsibility rests with the Commonwealth.
People with severe mental illness	715,000	Hospital based care, community-based support including support from non-government organisations and GPs.	The responsibility for clinical services is shared between the Commonwealth and states as well as private hospitals. The National Disability Insurance Scheme provides support to eligible individuals experiencing the most significant disability associated with severe mental illness.

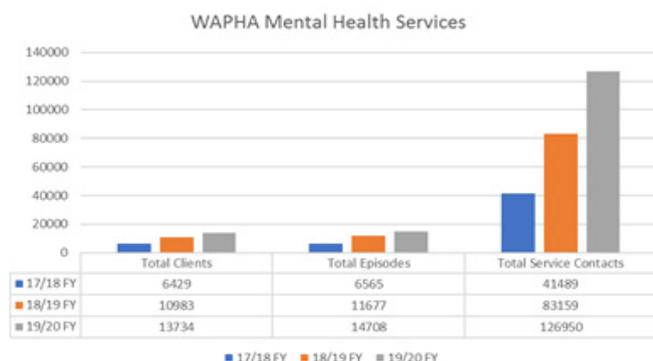
Table 1: The spectrum of mental health need in Australia¹

One in five Australian adults (aged 16 to 85 years) experience a mental illness each year and almost half will experience mental illness in their lifetime². The table above outlines the spectrum of mental health need in Australia, grouped by cohort. The table indicates the type of care required for each cohort, and where the funding responsibility sits for these services.

There are approximately 5.4 million people in Australia who have some need of mental health support, but do not meet criteria for a mental illness diagnosis. These individuals form the highest prevalence group of people experiencing mental ill-health in Australia. The funding responsibility for care for these individuals sits predominantly with the Commonwealth Government.

1. Australian Government, National Guidance - Initial Assessment and Referral for Mental Healthcare- Version 1.02, 30 August 2019, p14-18

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007: Summary of Results, ABS cat. no. 4326.0, Canberra, ABS. 2008.



This group includes people who have had a previous illness and are at risk of relapse without ongoing care, as well as those who have early symptoms and are at risk of developing a diagnosable illness.

People who experience severe mental illness form a relatively smaller group, however this group requires a much greater level of funding and support.

Between 2013-2017, 10% of mental health patients in Western Australia utilised 90% of the hospital care provided and almost half of both emergency department and specialist community treatment services³.

9.7% of the Western Australian population accessed Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services in 2018–19⁴.

In 2017-18, 2.5 million people across Australia, received Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, with GPs providing the greatest proportion of these services.

During the same period, 435,000 people across Australia received State Government funded community mental health care services^{5,2}.

Improving access to mental health services

Improving access to primary care services for individuals experiencing mental health issues, is a key focus of WA Primary Health Alliance's (WAPHA) commissioned activity. WAPHA undertakes annual location specific needs assessments with local communities across Western Australia to inform commissioning priorities and identify barriers to access.

WAPHA commissioned activities continue to demonstrate a year-on-year increase in access to primary mental health care for individuals in Western Australia, with considerable increases in the number of clients, service contacts and episodes of care provided in 2019-20 compared to 2017-18 and 2018-19.

3 Office of the Auditor General Western Australia. *Access to State-Managed Adult Mental Health Services*. Perth. 2019.

4 Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing. *Mental health services – in brief 2019*. Cat. no. HSE 228. Canberra. 2019.

5 Australian Government, *National Guidance - Initial Assessment and Referral for Mental Healthcare- Version 1.02*, 30 August 2019, p14-18.



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This is one of a series of factsheets regarding mental health and primary health care, developed by WAPHA. Further factsheets and other resources can be found at www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-framework. The information in this factsheet is current at December 2020.