

**Mental health services in Australia
2005–06**

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MENTAL HEALTH SERIES

Number 10

Mental health services in Australia 2005–06

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

Cat. no. HSE 56

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This publication is part of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Mental health series. A complete list of the Institute's publications is available from the Institute's website <www.aihw.gov.au>.

ISSN 1443-6795

ISBN 978 1 74024 797 9

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2008. Mental health services in Australia 2005–06. Mental health series no. 10. Cat no. HSE 56. Canberra: AIHW.

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Published by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Printed by Union Offset Printers

Foreword

Mental health services in Australia 2005–06, the tenth in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Mental health series, provides a detailed overview of Australia's mental health services in 2005–06. It brings together a diverse range of data on the services used by Australian mental health consumers, and provides information on patient demographics and comparisons of service use between state and territories.

For the first time, the report includes data from the Institute's new National Mental Health Establishments Database, providing detailed information on specialised mental health expenditure, beds and staffing. The Institute acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Government and the states and territories in commissioning this new data collection and their perseverance in populating and subsequently validating the 2005–06 data it contains. It is anticipated that, as the database matures, it will enable more timely and precise reporting on mental health expenditure nationally. Also included for the first time are comprehensive data on mental health-related expenditure by the Australian Government and information on the number of patients dispensed with subsidised mental health-related prescriptions under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The report also includes mental health data from other Institute databases: the National Hospital Morbidity Database, the National Community Mental Health Care Database and the National Residential Mental Health Care Database. Mental health-related data are also provided on emergency department occasions of service, pharmaceuticals, Medicare services and mental health-related services funded under the Commonwealth, State/Territory Disability Agreement and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

Interested readers are invited to visit the Institute's website where a suite of supplementary statistical information on mental health services, not included in the hard-copy form of the report, is available.

Ensuring that all Australians have access to appropriate levels of mental health care services when they need them, is a continuing focus at both levels of government in Australia. The Institute is committed to providing a national overview of mental health services via this annual report and will work with the Australian Government, state and territory governments and other stakeholders to better support their mental health reform information needs.

Penny Allbon
Director
July 2008

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Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the valued cooperation and effort of the data providers in the health authorities of the states and territories. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) would like to express its appreciation for their timely supply of the data and their assistance with data validation. The AIHW also wishes to thank the members of the Mental Health Standing Committee's Mental Health Information Strategy Subcommittee, who provided input and advice on the report's structure and content. In addition, the AIHW would like to acknowledge the funding, assistance and data provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and their consultants Buckingham and Associates Pty Ltd and Strategic Data Pty Ltd.

Within the AIHW, the key contributors to this report were Lyle Baker, Kirrily Pollock, Michelle Shek and Jason Thomson with assistance from Gary Hanson, Chaye Hosie and Jenny Hargreaves.

Summary

Mental health is an issue that affects many Australians either directly or indirectly in their daily lives. It is estimated that one in five Australians will experience a mental illness at some time in their lives and 11% of respondents to the 2004–05 National Health Survey reported that they had a long-term mental or behavioural problem (ABS 2006). Through the National Mental Health Strategy and the Council of Australian Governments National Action Plan on Mental Health, the Australian and state and territory governments are working to improve both the range and quality of mental health care and ensure that all Australians have access to appropriate levels of mental health care services when they need them.

This report aims to provide detailed information on the range of mental health-related services currently provided in Australia, as well as the resources associated with those services. The latest year for which information is presented in this report is, for the most part, 2005–06 but, where possible, more recent data (2006–07) are presented.

Ambulatory mental health care

Ambulatory mental health care services are provided by general practitioners (GPs), psychiatrists, hospital emergency departments, outpatient services and community mental health services. They are services that do not involve overnight admission to a hospital or mental health residential facility.

GPs are often the first health professionals to be consulted about mental health concerns. Estimates from the BEACH survey of GPs suggest that in 2006–07, one in ten encounters with GPs involved the management of a mental health-related problem, equivalent to an estimated 10.7 million GP encounters nationwide. The estimated number of mental health related GP encounters showed an average annual increase of 3% between 2002–03 and 2006–07. Depression (34%) was the most common problem managed in 2006–07, followed by anxiety (16%) and sleep disturbance (14%).

Community mental health services and hospital-based outpatient care services across Australia also provide a range of services to mental health consumers. They provided just over 5.6 million mental health service contacts in 2005–06.

In 2006–07, nearly 2 million Medicare-funded psychiatrist services were provided to 272,000 patients. This was an average annual decrease of 1% from the 2.1 million psychiatrist services provided in 2001–02. Psychiatrist services were accessed at a rate of 96 services per 1,000 population. This figure varied substantially when split into area of residence; from a high of 113 services per 1,000 in major cities, down to 19 services per 1,000 population in very remote regions.

In 2006–07, 669,000 Medicare-funded allied health services (for psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists) were provided to 165,000 patients. Most of these services were provided after 1 November 2006 when new psychologist and allied health items became available through the Medicare Benefits Schedule. Access for allied health services was similar in major cities and inner regional areas (33 and 34 services per 1,000 population, respectively). Rates were lower in outer regional and remote areas (25 and 22 services per 1,000 population, respectively), while rates in very remote areas were substantially lower, at 5 services per 1,000 population.