

# Supporting Mental Health



## Introduction

**Mental health and wellbeing is recognised as being fundamental to our general health and essential for the optimal functioning of individuals, families, communities and society as a whole (The Melbourne Charter, 2008). As people go through life, they all face challenges to their resilience, mental health and wellbeing.**

While the majority of people with mental health issues live productive and satisfying lives in our community, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has estimated that 1 in 40 Australians live with a disabling psychiatric condition that profoundly limits them in performing even the basic tasks of daily living (AIHW, 2011).

As a provider of aged care and family and community services across Victoria and Tasmania, Baptcare believes long-term investment in building individual, family and community resilience will promote improved mental health, and that the high personal, family and community cost of mental illness in Australia makes it an important national issue. Baptcare is also committed to early intervention programs that provide support for individuals and families impacted by mental illness.

## History and background

The 2013-2014 national household survey Young Minds Matter relating to the mental health and wellbeing of Australian children and adolescents found that almost 1 in 7 (14%) of children and adolescents aged 4–17 were assessed as having mental health disorders in the previous 12 months which is equivalent to 560,000 children and adolescents. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was the most common mental disorder (over 7% of all children and adolescents or 298,000), followed by anxiety disorders (nearly 7% or 278,000), major depressive disorder (3% or 112,000) and conduct disorder (2% or 83,600) (Johnson et al, 2017).

The 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing of adults aged 16–85 years estimated that almost half (45%) of Australians in this age range will experience a mental disorder at some time in their life (an estimated 9 million people in 2015). It was also estimated that 1 in 5 (20%) of the population had experienced a common mental disorder in the previous 12 months (an estimated 4 million people in 2015).

Of these, anxiety disorders (such as social phobia) were the most prevalent, afflicting 1 in 7 (14%) of the population, followed by affective disorders (such as depression) (6%) and substance use disorders (such as alcohol dependence) (5%). The prevalence of dementia in Australia is expected to increase from around 413,000 people in 2017 to about 1,101,000 in 2056 (AIHW, 2012).

The proportion of older Australians in the population is increasing, as is life expectancy. There will continue to be a strong association between ageing and health issues, including physical conditions, mental illness and dementia (AIHW, 2014; MHC, 2011). The mental health of older people may also be affected by losing the ability to live independently, experiencing bereavement (particularly with the death of a life partner), and a drop in income following retirement from the labour force (Rickwood, 2005; WHO, 2013). These factors may lead to social isolation and/or loneliness, loss of independence and increased psychological distress (WHO, 2013).

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### *Current context and situation*

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Currently, there are a range of groups that are missing out on access to appropriate mental health services. This is especially true for children, youth and families with complex needs. They often experience inadequate levels of support and long waiting lists in Australia's overburdened mental health system (Centre for Community Child Health, 2011). A range of agencies in Victoria and Tasmania, have identified the lack of acute care beds dedicated to children and youth as a major problem. As a result, about half of the children and young people that require admission to acute care due to severe episodes of mental illness or complex disorders could not get timely admission. Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people aged 14 to 24 years (ABS, 2003). The Victorian Mental Health Network found that overburdened and unresponsive mental health services were regarded by families as major risk factor (Leggatt and Cavill, 2010). Families identified problems with treatment periods that were too brief and ineffective, premature discharge from hospital and a lack of post-discharge follow-up support and on-going risk assessment (Leggatt and Cavill, 2010).

As with youth, vulnerable people across all age groups often do not have easy access to mental health services. These included people with disabilities, children, families, carers in foster and kinship care, people in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas in both Victoria and Tasmania. Paucity of public transport outside the major cities also limits access to support services for these groups. Lack of outreach services and home visits, and lack of services that work at times and locations suitable to these vulnerable groups of people – all lead to more people falling through the safety net (Baptcare, 2015). Mental health issues disrupt family functioning, including a family's ability to interact, communicate, make decisions, solve problems, maintain relationships with each other, and increases the risk of family conflict, disorganisation, breakdown and family violence. In these households, family members have a higher risk of developing mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression and increased risk of suicide (Burns, 2008)

Substance abuse creates additional problems for parenting and child safety. Parental intoxication may lead to inconsistencies in disciplining children, hostility, physical and verbal abuse, neglect of a child's physical and emotional needs, exposure to unsafe environments and people. Substance abuse can also lead to compounding problems of unemployment, financial hardship, poor housing and social isolation. Trauma in childhood due to physical, sexual, emotional and family abuse has been found to lead to greater risk of mental illness, while a significant proportion of children who have a parent with mental illness are themselves at risk of developing a mental illness (Baptcare, 2015; Marriott et al, 2014).

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, there is a strong association between ageing, health issues, mental illness and dementia (AIHW, 2014; MHC, 2011). The mental health of older people may also be affected by losing the ability to live independently, experiencing bereavement (particularly with death of life partner), and a drop in income (Rickwood, 2005; WHO, 2013). These factors may lead to social isolation and/or loneliness, loss of independence and increased psychological distress (WHO, 2013).

## *Baptcare's Mission & Christian Witness*

As the aged care and community services agency of the Baptist Union of Victoria, our mission and values arise out of a Christian philosophy of the intrinsic value and inherent equality of all people as God's creations (Genesis 1:26). Our Mission of "Partnering for fullness of life with people of all ages, cultures, beliefs and circumstances" upholds and reinforces this Christian heritage.

Our focus is on working with people of all circumstances so that they can achieve "fullness of life" in whatever way is meaningful to them and enable them to face and overcome life's challenges.

This belief in the intrinsic value of personhood and identity means that all people are to be treated with respect. If there is to be any bias shown, then the example of Jesus' ministry on earth shows a bias towards the poor, the disadvantaged, and those who are especially vulnerable in society. Jesus routinely went out of his way to ensure that those without a voice or a place in their community were reinstated with dignity. Baptcare's response to Jesus' mission is to create communities where every person is cherished.



## *A better future / what needs to change*

The promotion of good mental health and wellbeing is vital to the effective functioning of the lives of children, youth, families, people with disabilities, older people and communities. Resilient individuals are those who cope with difficulties and seem to thrive despite adverse circumstances that threaten their wellbeing. They exhibit some common attitudes; they value and see their life as important; they operate on the belief that they can effectively influence events in their life, they tend to see change as normal and as an opportunity rather than a threat, and they have an optimistic approach to life (Noble and McGrath, 2008a; Robitschek and Kashubeck, 1999).

Baptcare's support for children, youth, families, people with disabilities, older people and communities that are struggling with the impact of mental illness is undertaken in the context of its work in Family and Community Services, Aged care, Community and Church Engagement, Pastoral Care, Disability and Sanctuary programs. We are committed to equity of outcomes for all people and this motivates us to provide support to the most vulnerable and marginalised. Baptcare recognises the importance of families, carers and the network of significant others around an individual. We believe that support to, and strong connections between parents, carers, siblings, other relatives and communities are a vital source of identity and wellbeing for children and older people, including those with dementia.

Through the above programs, Baptcare is committed to concerted action to building resilient children, youth and families. It is also committed to building deep capability in dementia and age care and the provision of quality care to older people both at home and in the community to ensure they lead a life free of mental illness.

## Policy position

- 1 Baptcare recognises the Melbourne Charter's definition of mental health, i.e. a state of physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing in which each person is able to realise their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, and make a unique contribution to their community.
- 2 Baptcare is committed to early intervention strategies to support individuals and families impacted by mental health issues and the impact of trauma.
- 3 Baptcare is committed to building deep capability in residential aged care, dementia care and home care to fulfil the needs of older people and people with dementia in line with their choices and preferences and mitigate the negative consequences of mental illness and dementia.
- 4 That as a matter of urgency, Baptcare urges the Commonwealth and Victorian State Governments to commit significant funds to ensure immediate access to rehabilitation and other mental health support programs to children, youth, families and older people experiencing significant mental health difficulties.
- 5 Baptcare supports campaigns to improve the mental health literacy of Australians in order to increase their understanding of mental health, combat stigma, and promote strategies to support people experiencing discrimination as a result of mental illness.

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Baptcare is a customer focused, faith centred and purpose driven organisation working across Victoria and Tasmania, providing residential and community care for older people and support to children, families, and people with disability, financially disadvantaged people and people seeking asylum.