

COVID-19

Looking after the mental health of the most vulnerable people

On Thursday 26 March 2020, Associate Professor John Allan provided the following advice:

- Having a mental illness can make it more challenging to stay physically healthy.
- There is also substantial evidence that there are higher rates of physical illness among people with serious mental illness.
- People with mental ill health can be more vulnerable to COVID-19 because of physical comorbidities and social disadvantage and puts them at added risk in the community, and when attending medical and other appointments in shared spaces.
- It has also been shown that people with severe mental illness are less likely to receive high quality medical care than those without severe mental illness.
- There are clear health disparities showing that people with mental illness are a marginalised, stigmatised and, in many cases, discriminated-against population.
- People living with persistent mental health problems often face inadequate preventive screening for avoidable disorders or diseases, experience a greater burden of ill health and have significantly reduced life expectancy.
- They also more frequently suffer from delayed diagnosis and treatment which in the case of highly infectious diseases like COVID-19 could be of serious consequence.
- We should also recognise that self-isolation, quarantine orders and other restrictions to everyday practices may have a range of personal and community impacts.
- These can be immensely difficult for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, people living in hostels and boarding houses, and especially people experiencing homelessness many of whom may have existing fears around involuntary hospitalisation and imprisonment.
- There are also impacts on the accessibility of both mental and physical health services, whereby people with mental illness may not be able to acquire initial appointments or attend their regular appointments.
- The Government's initial measures to extend telehealth in response to COVID-19 – telehealth is an important mechanism to facilitate ongoing access and availability of quality health care.
- For others though, including those who have difficulty looking after themselves, have little money or no access to the home computer many of us take for granted, extra provision through targeted services and community services will be required.
- People with severe mental illness have the same rights and expectations for good health, wellbeing and quality of life as the general population, and this is especially pertinent during this public emergency.
- For all the latest government information and guidance on COVID-19, please visit www.health.qld.gov.au.

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Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch

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