

# Mental Health Literacy

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## Research Summary

Mental disorders often have their first onset during youth. However, with the common mental disorders (depression, anxiety, substance misuse), most young people do not receive appropriate help. For the more severe psychotic disorders, help is generally received eventually, but there may be long delays. Lack of help-seeking at this age has long-term consequences throughout life, affecting educational and social outcomes and increasing the risk of recurrence. There are many factors responsible for this lack of help-seeking, including availability or accessibility of services, but poor mental health literacy and stigma are major contributors.

Because of their high risk for a first-onset mental disorder, young people need to have knowledge to take appropriate action. However, this is a stage of life where appropriate knowledge and experience may be lacking. For adolescents in particular, the knowledge of key supporters such as parents and teachers plays a critical role. The mental health literacy research program seeks to carry out research in three areas that can guide national action and serve as an international model of best practice: (1) monitoring what young people and their supporters know, (2) determining what they need to know, and (3) developing and evaluating methods to improve knowledge.

## Current Projects

### National Survey of Mental Health Literacy in Youth and Their Parents

This project aims to describe what Australian young people and their parents believe about a range of mental health problems and to compare these beliefs with those of mental health professionals. A national telephone survey has been completed with 3746 young people aged 12-25 years and 2005 parents. The survey covered knowledge and attitudes in relation to four disorders: depression, depression with alcohol misuse, social phobia and psychosis. To allow comparison of public beliefs with those of health professionals, postal surveys have been completed with 470 GPs, 591 psychiatrists, 736 psychologists and 522 mental health nurses. Seven papers have been published or are in press. These cover: young people's and parents' beliefs about first aid strategies, beliefs about interventions, beliefs about the harmfulness of substance use for mental health, young people's help-seeking intentions, the impact of beyondblue on mental health literacy, and health professionals' recognition of co-occurring substance use problems in young people.

<http://www.orygen.org.au/contentPage.asp?pageCode=RAMHEATHLIT>