
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING 2020-2021

YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH



BACKGROUND

On 22 July 2022, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the first results from the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing. This was the first dedicated national population mental health and wellbeing study to be conducted since 2007. Data from 5,554 Australians aged between 16 to 85 was weighted to estimate results for the whole population. This summary document will outline some of the significant findings for both the general population and for young people.

KEY POPULATION FIGURES

- Over two in five Australians aged 16–85 years (8.6 million people or 43.7 per cent) have experienced a mental health condition at some time in their life.
- Over one in five Australians aged 16–85 (4.2 million Australians or 21.4 per cent) experienced a mental health condition in the 12 months prior to the study.
- Females (24.6 per cent) were more likely than males (18.0 per cent) to experience a mental condition in the past 12 months.
- The most common mental conditions over the past 12 months for all Australians were social phobia (7.0 per cent), PTSD (5.7 per cent), depression (4.6 per cent) and agoraphobia (4.6 per cent).

YOUNG PEOPLE

Total rate: Almost 2 in 5 (39.6 per cent) young people (aged 16–24 years) had a mental health condition in the past 12 months.

- This is the highest among all age cohorts and almost twice as high as the general population rate.

Difference by sex: 46.6 per cent of females (aged 16–24 years) had a mental health condition in the 12 months prior to the study, compared to 31.2 per cent of males the same age.

- Young females were 1.5 times more likely than their male counterparts to have experienced a mental health condition in the 12 months prior to the study. This is the second greatest gap by sex within a measured age cohort (in the 75–85 age cohort, females were 1.75 times more likely than male counterparts to experience a 12-month mental health condition).

Anxiety disorders: Young people (aged 16–24) had the highest rate of anxiety disorders in the 12 months prior to the study (31.5 per cent), which is almost twice as high as the population rate (16.8 per cent).

- The 12-month rate of anxiety in young females (41.3 per cent) almost doubled the rate in young males (21.4 per cent).

Affective disorders: Young people (aged 16–24) had the highest rate of affective disorders in the 12 months prior to the study (13.6 per cent), which is almost twice as high as the population rate (7.5 per cent).

- The 12-month rate for young females (19.0 per cent) almost doubled the rate for young males (8.8 per cent).

Substance-use disorder: Young people had the highest rates of substance use disorder in the past 12 months (9.1 per cent), which is almost three times higher than the general population (3.3 per cent).

- Young males have a 12-month rate of 13.3 per cent, compared to 7.1 per cent in young females.

Self-harm and suicidal behaviours: Younger adults (aged 16–34) have far higher rates of self-harm (18.2 per cent) and suicidal behaviours (5.2 per cent) than the general population.

- Females in this age group were approximately twice as likely as males to have self-harmed over their lifetime (24.7 compared to 12.4 per cent) and within the past 12 months (7.0 compared to 3.6 per cent).

Psychological distress: Younger adults (aged 16–34) were more likely to experience high or very high psychological distress (20.0 per cent) compared to the general population (15.4 per cent).

- Younger females were almost twice as likely (26.0 per cent) as their male counterparts (14.3 per cent) to report high or very high distress in the preceding 12 months.

Use of digital services: 8 per cent of younger adults (aged 16–34) have used digital services for their mental ill-health. This is almost twice as high as the general population rate (4.4 per cent).