



Mental Health
Australia

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AND MENTAL HEALTH



Many government inquiries and research reports have detailed over decades the detrimental impact of stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental ill health.

As stated in the [Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health](#), "Stigma refers to negative attitudes that lead to the exclusion of others on the basis of a particular characteristic." It can take several forms including self-stigma (people are socialised into believing they are devalued), social stigma (where community members judge certain traits to be contrary to community norms) and structural stigma (where institutional rules, policies and practices restrict opportunities).

Discrimination on the other hand is "the behaviour people experience as a result of [stigmatising] attitudes..."

In the absence of national data collection, [Sane Australia's Our Turn to Speak survey](#) and [National Stigma Report Card](#) offer one of the most comprehensive studies of stigma and discrimination in Australia. The 2020 National Stigma Report Card reported that experience of discrimination for people with complex mental health issues was not only widespread but also frequent.

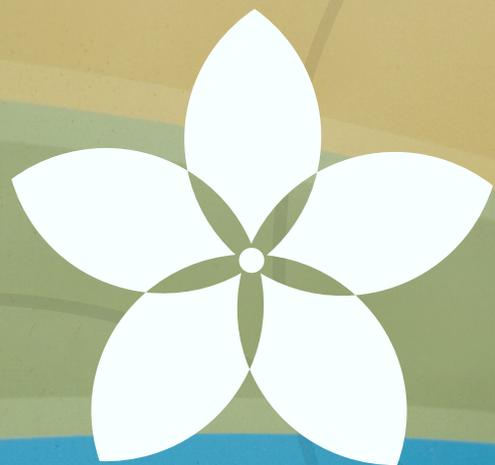
Stigma and discrimination are experienced across a wide array of life domains. The same survey reported experiencing stigma and discrimination across all 12 life domains measured including relationships, employment, healthcare services, social media, mental healthcare services, mass media, welfare and social services, education and training, financial and insurance services, housing and homelessness services, cultural, faith or spiritual practices and communities, sports, community groups and volunteering, public spaces and recreation, legal and justice services.

In addition, the 2020 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health Final Report acknowledged stigma and discrimination as a common experience for people with mental ill health and provided recommendations about how to address this.

In short, although there is a lack of nationally collated recent data, there are strong indications that mental ill health related stigma and discrimination is prevalent in the Australian community.

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The intersectionality of stigma and discrimination

The mental health of all Australians will be improved by measures that eliminate stigma and discrimination and promote social inclusion for the entire population.

Some people experience stigma related both to mental ill-health and to other aspects of their lives. For example, people with mental ill-health and who belong to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTIQ+ and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia can be exposed to multiple forms of stigma and discrimination and this can have a significant impact on their mental health. However, to date, there are few mental ill-health related anti stigma initiatives which are directly tailored for these communities.

Thanks to Mental Health Australia's [Embrace Project](#) we know that when providing mental health services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities a range of additional risk and protective factors need to be taken into consideration. The factors that are particularly important are migration and acculturation, racial discrimination and equity, language acquisition, and refugee experiences. These factors are inter-related and can exacerbate the likelihood of a mental illness or conversely protect against the development of a mental illness.

Thanks to the [LGBTIQ+ Health Australia](#) we know that Australians live healthy and happy lives, however research has shown that a disproportionate number experience poorer mental health outcomes and have higher risk of suicidal behaviours than their peers. These health outcomes are directly related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse on the basis of being LGBTIQ+.

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WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO?

The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health recommended the following to address stigma, cultural and social barriers:

Effective stigma reduction requires an ongoing commitment over a long time period in order to ensure that reductions in stigma persist. As a priority reform to address stigma toward mental illness, the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) should develop and drive the implementation of a renewed national long-term stigma reduction strategy that: targets stigma reduction messages for different audiences (such as health professionals); focuses on the experiences of people with those mental illnesses that are poorly understood by the community; addresses different aspects of stigma including perceptions of danger and unpredictability; and identifies and draws on a small number of national ambassadors for mental health.

The National Mental Health Commission is currently developing the National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy recommended by the by the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health. Mental Health Australia provided advice to the National Mental Health Commission on development of this Strategy. The National Mental Health Commission should heed this advice and Governments should commit to implement the strategy in full.

Privileging the rights of any group of the population over another has the potential to cause broader harm by embedding stigmatising attitudes in the nation's statutes that may cause harm to the whole population.

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LOOKING FOR MORE DETAIL OR RESOURCES?

January 2022 - Submissions on revised Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 and related Bills

[Submissions on revised Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 and related Bills | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

February 2020 - Mental Health Australia Submission to the second exposure drafts of the Religious Discrimination Bills

[Submission to the second exposure drafts of the Religious Discrimination Bills | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

November 2021 - Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health

[Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health](#)

November 2021 - Mental Health Australia's Advice to the National Mental Health Commission on the National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy

<https://mhaustralia.org/submission/Stigma-and-Discrimination-Reduction-Strategy>

October 2019 - Mental Health Australia - Submission to Religious Freedom Bills

[Submission to Religious Freedom Bills | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

October 2019 - Mental Health Australia Marriage Equality Statement

[Marriage Equality Statement | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTIQ+ People

[The 2021 update - LGBTIQ+ Health Australia](#)

Reporting Discrimination - Beyond Blue

Discrimination drags us all down. If you have experienced discrimination, violence or abuse, report it.

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-lgbti-people/report-discrimination>

Mental Health Australia would like to thank its member organisations and key stakeholders for contributing to this extensive body of work on how stigma and discrimination impacts the mental health of all Australians. If you are a member of Mental Health Australia and would like to add to these resources, please contact info@mhaustralia.org

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