

# HEALTH REPORT

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS YOUNG AUSTRALIANS STILL AT RISK OF DEPRESSION AS WARNING SIGNS IGNORED**

New research released today shows alarming numbers of young Australians are still at risk of depression because many around them are dismissing telltale signs as normal adolescent behaviour.

A national survey of 1200 people (695 households) has found that one in three Australians (33 percent) think severe moodiness and irritability in young people is normal. Around the same number (32 percent) think that being depressed is a normal part of growing up and 1 in 5 (26 percent) agree that most young people with depression or anxiety will simply grow out of it.

The figures are contained within the first edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report, released today. The first of these monthly reports focuses on depression and has been produced in partnership with the peak independent body, the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA).

The report's findings are a major concern given that 86 percent of those surveyed aged under 30 said they would most likely turn to family and friends if they thought they might be suffering from depression.

MHCA chief executive Dr Grace Groom says this suggests that many young people at risk of depression are going undetected because those closest to them do not understand the symptoms or the dangers, or at least do not take them seriously.

"Depression in Australia is a silent epidemic. It is estimated that one in five Australians aged 18 years and over will experience some kind of mental illness, and when it comes to depression, those in the 15-20 age group are one of the most at risk," Dr Groom said.

"Youth suicide is also the second-biggest killer of young people after car accidents but only 40 percent of those affected by depression will receive care."

Dr Groom said the survey raised concerns that many people are not aware of how to react to someone close to them living with depression.

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According to the research, 23 percent of respondents think that they should tell the depressed person about their own worries to put their own problems in perspective while one in three said they would encourage them to put on a brave face and push on. In addition, an overwhelming 91% believed that telling a depressed person to focus on the positive things in life was also a good idea.

According to Dr Groom this dismissive approach to mental health reinforces that a significant proportion of the population does not take the issue of depression seriously. "Asking a depressed person to cheer up or focus on the positive things in life is not helpful. It minimises and undermines that person's illness by suggesting it is easily overcome and not a serious condition that requires professional treatment," she added.

Reinforcing Dr Groom's point, the research also found that a quarter of men responding thought it would be helpful to take a depressed person to the pub for a few beers to help them forget their worries.

"Better strategies for helping people with depression are to listen and be supportive, include them in social events and to suggest they seek professional advice with family doctors the first point-of-contact."

So it's encouraging that the survey also found that 91 percent thought that including those with depression in social activities with other friends would be helpful.

"It's important to note that it's not all doom and gloom. Compared to previous research which examined Australians attitudes towards and knowledge of depression we have seen an improvement.," Dr Groom said.

"To some extent the public awareness campaigns are working but we still have a long way to go." Dr Groom believes the solution lies in increased community education.

"People need to be more aware when it comes to the signs of depression, the causes of depression and effective preventative strategies," she said.

The Pfizer Australia Health Report on depression is being distributed via the MHCA or is available on the web at [www.healthreport.com.au](http://www.healthreport.com.au) You can have a copy e-mailed to your inbox by sending an SMS with the word PFIZER followed by your email address to 0429 444 777.

The study was a self-completion survey involving 1,264 people aged 18 years and over in WA, QLD, VIC, SA and NSW conducted by independent consultants Stollznow Research. Participants were recruited by telephone and the surveys were completed in October and November, 2003.

**For more information or interviews, please contact:**

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NB: Interviews with case studies also available on request.