

HEALTH REPORT

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POLL EXPOSES AUSTRALIANS TRUE FEELINGS ABOUT SCHIZOPHRENIA

Australians have revealed their true feelings about schizophrenia and shown that it still remains a misunderstood disease, according to new national research figures released today.

A key finding of this month's Pfizer Australia Health Report is that 80 percent of Australians feel that people with schizophrenia can or want to work.

However, when it comes to the crunch, only 50 percent of Australians feel they should work in a place of employment like their own.

The national research was conducted by the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia and researched-based medicines company, Pfizer Australia.

Close to one-in-five Australians surveyed did not know the causes of schizophrenia and one-in-three thought psychological problems were a major factor, indicating a high level of misunderstanding about the illness.

Margaret Springgay, Executive Director of the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia says these findings reflect that Australians are not being honest about their real feelings towards schizophrenia.

"The research highlights that there is a massive contradiction between what people think in theory and the reality of how they would feel in a situation that affects them personally.

"Although most Australians acknowledge that people with schizophrenia can work, the findings prove the enormous lack of understanding in the community when it comes to them actually accepting people with schizophrenia into their workplace.

"This was also reflected when asked about raising children. Half of all Australians believe people with schizophrenia could make good parents, but when push comes to shove, only one in four would want them looking after other people's children," said Springgay.



Another finding from the Pfizer Australia Health Report reveals that people expect the family to be responsible for looking after people with schizophrenia rather than the community as a whole.

"With such high expectations on families there is little call on government to better support people with schizophrenia in the community which is what MIFA does day in, day out."

The survey also shows that nearly all Australians are confused about what constitutes schizophrenia, which may explain their concerns about the disease.

Half of those surveyed incorrectly define schizophrenia as "having a split personality".

While one-in-four describe people with schizophrenia as "dangerous and crazy".

According to the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia, these attitudes could not be further from the truth.

Margaret Springgay explains that advancements in medication are continually improving the outlook for people with schizophrenia.

"We've got to send the message that with medication and community support, people with schizophrenia can live successful and full lives.

"Our next challenge is to improve attitudes and reduce the fear, stigma and prejudice that is too often applied to this illness," Springgay said.

To assist with educating the public about schizophrenia, the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on Australian perceptions of schizophrenia are based on responses from 1,370 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in December 2005 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

Pfizer Australia is the nation's leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. It discovers, develops, manufactures and markets innovative medical treatments for both humans and animals. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au.

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