

HEALTH REPORT

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PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS TWICE AS LIKELY TO DEVELOP DEPRESSION

Half of all Australians living with a chronic health condition have thought about seeking help for depression or anxiety with nine in ten visiting a GP, new national research figures revealed today. This rate of mental illness is two times greater than for the general population.

The research, conducted for SANE Australia and published in the Pfizer Australia Health Report, reported that one-in-four Australians are living with chronic conditions like arthritis, back pain, heart disease and diabetes.

Only 38 percent of those surveyed recognise that depression and anxiety need to be treated as separate conditions to the chronic physical health condition.

Barbara Hocking Executive Director of SANE Australia says people living with a chronic condition are more vulnerable to depression and anxiety. It is important for those affected therefore to understand that this is not an inevitable part of their chronic illness and that it can and should be treated effectively.

"Getting treatment for depression is doubly valuable, as there is strong evidence that when this happens, management of the underlying chronic health condition is also improved. Suffering in silence doesn't help either the depression, anxiety or the underlying condition," Ms Hocking said.

"Around 1 in 5 Australians will experience a major depressive illness during their lifetime and this incidence increases enormously in those with a chronic health condition. It is important that people with these conditions seek treatment for depression and anxiety," Ms Hocking said, "with the most effective treatment often being psychological therapy now available through Medicare."

According to the research, carers said they were affected by depression as well. A quarter of carers admit to feelings of isolation with 27 percent feeling 'overwhelmed' by the condition.

The risk of depression is greatest however for those who have a chronic health condition and care for someone else at the same time. Thirty-four percent of this group rate their quality of life as fair or poor and a massive 61 percent say they thought about seeking help for depression, with 96 percent of them seeing a GP for treatment.



"SANE Australia today launched a new project - Mental health for People with Chronic Illness. The project will develop a series of guides about prevention and management of mental illness in association with a chronic condition. These will be produced with, and available from, the major chronic health condition organisations," Barbara Hocking commented.

SANE Australia has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to assist with educating the public about the links between chronic health conditions and depression and anxiety to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. 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.

Findings are based on responses from 1,499 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in 2006 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. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au

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