



Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY



**Promoting mental health for
individuals, families and communities**

CRISIS CARE COMMITMENT

Red Cross is committed to an inclusive society where all people are valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs are met. We work to overcome social exclusion by providing bridges back into the community. We promote inclusion through our initiatives and programs, and advocate for people on the margins of Australian society.



Mental health in Australia

Around 4.5 million adult Australians (nearly 20% of the population) experience mental illness each year. What's more, over 45% of the adult population will have a mental illness at some point in their lives.

Mental health issues affect all of us, either directly or as a family member, carer, friend or workmate of a person with a mental illness.

The impact of mental health issues on both health and wellbeing can be severe. People with mental illness generally have poorer physical health, are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs and to have higher rates of suicide. They are also more likely than the rest of the population to experience homelessness, be imprisoned, have their children placed in out-of-home care or be unemployed.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there is greater prevalence of mental health issues compared to the general population. Research indicates

that 27% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high or very high levels of psychological distress; twice the rate of the non-Indigenous population. Additionally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are hospitalised at twice the rate of non-Indigenous people for instances of self-harm.

What Red Cross does

Red Cross works from a socially inclusive approach to remove the stigma around mental health issues and to promote the participation of people with a mental illness in the community.

We recognise that mental health is a state of wellbeing. It is not just the absence of illness, but also the ability to maintain relationships, cope with stress, contribute to the community and enjoy life.

We work in collaboration with government, other service providers and communities to improve the mental health of Australians.

In this brochure, the term 'mental illness' is used to describe a clinically diagnosable disorder that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social responsibilities. 'Mental health issues' refers to the problematic psychological state of a person such that they are not coping with the normal stresses of life. The term 'social and emotional wellbeing' is used to recognise the holistic and whole of life view of health within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures.

Mental health is a state of emotional and social wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

- World Health Organisation

Case study

The Roma Men's Network (RomNet) in Central Queensland developed around a group of older men experiencing social isolation. RomNet improves social connection and community access for men living alone in poor housing, on low incomes and with no family support or few social connections. Many of the men moved to Roma after employment in mining or stock-work and have poorly treated health conditions or a disability, often compounded by a lack of self care and high rates of alcohol use.

Red Cross provides support through a local peer coordinator (selected by the men themselves), access to transport and facilities, along with activities aimed at improving health and wellbeing.

Friendships between the men have grown with at least 70 men participating on a monthly basis as well as new groups being formed in surrounding towns.

RomNet's original coordinator, Don Roberts, said, 'The best outcome is to see someone previously isolated from the community find their place again'.



Red Cross initiatives and programs aim to:

- build personal, family and community resilience, address the risk factors for mental health issues and help protect against the onset and effects of mental health issues. We emphasise education and peer support, and promote social connection
- use recovery and support models that foster the independence of people with mental health issues and enhance people's capacity to achieve their personal goals and participate in the community
- focus on improving the social and emotional health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Promoting health and wellbeing for young people



The **save-a-mate (SAM)** program is run by young people for young people. It aims to promote health and wellbeing through education and support on youth health issues, particularly those related to alcohol and other drug use and mental health. SAM training courses teach participants how to prevent, recognise and respond to emergencies resulting from alcohol and other drug use. SAM operates at festivals, schools, youth groups and in prisons.

This program is currently provided in the ACT, NSW, Qld, SA, Tas, Vic and WA.

SAM Our Way is an early intervention and prevention program for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and remote locations around Australia. The program uses community development principles to support locally designed activities around health promotion related to both mental

health issues and substance use. It aims to involve young people in the decision making process, strengthening community networks to improve their social and emotional wellbeing.



This program is currently provided in NT, Qld, SA and WA.

Talk OUT Loud works with young people to increase their understanding of mental health issues and to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. Participants are encouraged to look after their own mental health and to seek help when needed. The program also aims to increase young people's understanding of the relationship between mental health and substance use and helps participants to support friends with these issues. Based on a peer education and support model, this workshop-based program focuses on young people aged 14 to 25 and operates at schools, juvenile justice facilities and youth centres.

This program is currently provided in NSW, Qld, SA, Tas and Vic.

'Thank you for the valuable workshop. Mental illness is prominent in my family and it was a very valuable experience for me to be able to learn more about mental illness so that I can support my family.'

- Talk OUT Loud participant



‘Having a MATE has given me the confidence to go out into the community and has stopped me from isolating myself. My friendship with my MATE has gone a long way towards keeping me out of hospital.’

- MATES participant (Tasmania)



Building bridges back into the community

The **Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs)** assists

people on their journey of recovery from mental illness.

It supports people to develop skills, build confidence, access services and participate in the community. PHaMs is for people aged 16 years or older whose ability to manage their daily activities and to live independently is severely affected by mental illness.

Red Cross also provides PHaMs in remote communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with mental illness. In these communities, the program promotes spiritual, cultural, mental and physical healing, building strong relationships, increased community participation and community strength and resilience. PHaMs is an Australian Government funded initiative.

This program is currently provided in NT, Qld, SA and WA.



Personal Helpers
& Mentors Program

An Australian Government Initiative

MATES assists people who are experiencing social isolation to expand their social networks, with a focus on people with mental health issues. Trained volunteers are matched with participants to spend quality time with them on a regular basis. MATES builds supportive relationships and social connectedness for participants and contributes to improving self-esteem and social confidence. Opportunities to link into existing community networks are also encouraged.

This program is currently provided in ACT, SA and Tas.

Bridges engages people who are socially isolated from friends, family and social networks to reconnect with their community or to form new connections. Support is provided through matching trained volunteers with individuals, through peer support, group activities and building community networks. By strengthening social connections, Bridges supports the wellbeing and mental health of participants.

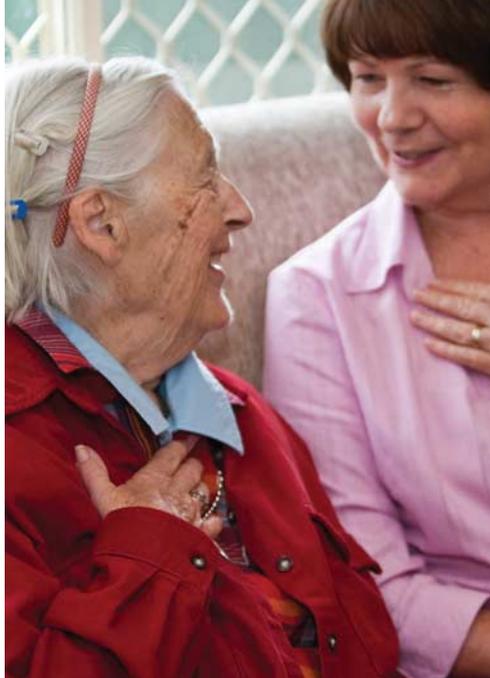
This program is currently provided in Qld.

The **Housing Support Mental Health Service** supports people with a mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, residing in specialist mental health inpatient units or being discharged from mental health treatment programs, to access and maintain long term stable accommodation. People are assisted to develop the necessary skills to maintain suitable accommodation and to link with services that address a range of needs, including employment, health, financial management and social integration. Home based and outreach support is provided to ensure that people are supported with their long term needs.

This program is currently provided in WA.

The **Practical Support Program** helps women who have mental health problems and who are facing the challenges of looking after an infant. The program is tailored to meet the individual needs and goals of the mother to enhance parenting skills, improve self confidence, link to community supports and develop social networks.

This program is currently provided in WA.



The **Carer Respite** program support carers of people with a mental illness, by providing support when carers need a break. The program provides a single contact point for information and arranges in-home respite care through support workers, enabling carers to take a break away from home, along with residential respite care.

This program is currently provided in WA.

Case study

Anthony was referred to the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs) by a local mental health worker. Diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia, Anthony has severe speech difficulties and mobility problems.

Anthony has also experienced social isolation as a result of his mental illness. When he first joined PHaMs, Anthony was reluctant to leave the house, even to pay bills or to go shopping. His PHaMs caseworker encouraged him to make the trip together, which he was eventually able to do.

Anthony began to phone the PHaMs office daily for a chat. His confidence grew each week as he was able to talk through the issues he was dealing with. Anthony recently celebrated his 50th birthday and he invited his caseworker and other PHaMs staff members. On the day, ten people attended and Anthony was genuinely thrilled. A few days later Anthony visited the local shopping centre on his own for the first time. 'I have come a long way, haven't I?' he recently said.

Anthony has achieved a great deal in a short amount of time and, although he continues to face challenges, his overall health and wellbeing have improved through greater social connection with his community.

Red Cross works with the most disadvantaged people, in their most vulnerable times and in the most disadvantaged places.

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